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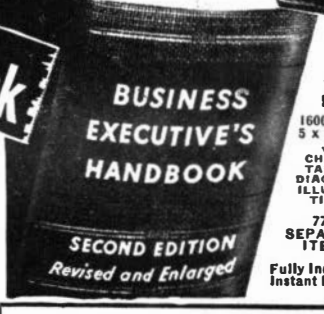

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THE TRIPLE CROSS

by JOE BARRY

HE came to in a hospital, recovering from a bullet-crease. He learned he was Rush Henry, a private dick—and a fast man with a gun, a buck or a gal. It was all a little hard to believe. But, when he walked out into the street and the guns began to bang and the fists went smack and the knives flickered, he saw it didn't make any difference what he thought. He was up to his neck in a bucket of blood and, if he wanted to go on being anybody, his only chance was to make like Rush Henry, a private dick—but fast!

(Starting on Page Two)

And these three thrilling short stories

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THE TRIPLE CROSS

By JOE BARRY

AS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY

MYSTERY HOUSE

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

THE STREET WAS QUIET AND tree-lined with the branches of the trees almost meeting in an arch against the deeply blue evening sky. Down the street, a block away, was a solitary figure approaching him. He quickened his step, for this was the first living thing he had seen in many blocks, how many he couldn't remember. As he came forward he noticed that the figure came more quickly, too. There was something vaguely familiar in the approaching figure. He stopped to peer carefully down the street. The figure stopped, too. He took off his hat and scratched his damp forehead. Mirrorlike the figure removed its hat and scratched likewise. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead and he put one foot forward letting his weight move ahead one step, then another. The figure came closer by one step, then another. Slowly they came almost face to face. Comprehension came to him.

"Why, I know you," he said in a voice he didn't recognize, "I know you—you're—"

He woke up then and found a word on his lips. "Me," he said. "You're me."

He looked around the room, at the white walls and the slatted sunlight knifing through venetian blinds. He looked at the white bedspread that cut across his chest just below his arms. A nurse came into the room.

"Oh, you're awake," she said with a nurse's professional cheeriness. "Good. Now maybe we can get you to eat. You need some solid food. Those cops are here again."

"Cops?" He toyed with the word as though it were from a foreign tongue. A familiar trap shut in his mind. At least it felt familiar. Don't tell them anything, a little voice said inside him. The nurse echoed the voice.

"You don't have to tell them anything. You're the injured party. You ask them questions. Ask them who shot you and why they haven't caught him yet."

"I was shot?" His brow wrinkled slowly. Everything he did seemed in slow motion.

"You certainly were. The bullet caught you right over the temple. If it had been an inch to the left you'd never have known what hit you."

"I was shot." It was a statement this time. He accepted the fact that someone had pulled a trigger and a bullet had hit him in the head.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"General Hospital," she said.

"Yes, a hospital, of course. But, what town is this?"

"You don't even know that?"

He started to shake his head but a wave of pain stopped him. "No," he said very softly, so as not to disturb his head.

"Why, this is Des Moines, Iowa."

"Des Moines?" he almost whispered. "I've never been there."

The nurse clucked her tongue sympathetically. "But you are there," she said.

"I know, but I've never been there be-

fore." How did I know that, he wondered. Then he said very quietly, "I don't even know my name."

His eyes closed with the effort of thinking. The nurse stood over him and felt his pulse.

"Almost normal," she said to herself. To him she said, "Now you just lie there and rest. I'll get you some hot food in a minute and we won't tell those big oxes at the police station that you're even awake yet. Let them wait."

"No," the man in the bed said. "No. Tell them right away. I want to know who I am. I want them to find out." He raised his head an inch off the pillow, and a sledge hit him between the eyes. He slept again.

When he opened his eyes again two men were in the room. Obviously they had been waiting for some time. Cigar ashes lay in a gray snow on the larger man's vest and the ash tray beside the smaller man was littered with crushed cigarette ends.

"Awake?" asked the big man in what he thought was a gentle voice.

"Yes, I'm awake. Who are you?"

"Didn't the nurse tell you? We're from headquarters. My name's Brody, and this is Lieutenant Byrne."

The man on the bed nodded. This time he felt only a small flutter of dull pain throbbing in his temple.

"What is this?" he said. "What happened to me?"

"You got shot, buddy," said Brody. "Good. Only not quite good enough. He was an inch off center. That's what saved you. What were you doing in Des Moines anyway?"

"I don't know," said the man on the bed. "It'll save a lot of time and my strength if you'll accept that now. It's true, believe me."

"Let me handle this, Brody," said Byrne. "Okay," he said to the man on the bed. "We'll accept it. But try and see it our way. You get picked up on a residential street in our town with blood streaming out of your head. There isn't a dime in your pockets or a label in your clothes, and you don't have an ounce of identification on you. Maybe you've lost your memory, but if you've still got good sense, you know we can't let that lay. We've got to do something about it. The only way we know is to ask questions. Now, we won't go over the same ground again, but please let us dig a little. If you don't have an answer just shake your head, but please try and help if you can."

"Okay," the man said. "That's fair enough. Ask away."

"Have you ever been in Des Moines before?"

The head on the pillow shook, no. "I don't think so," he said. "But I don't know."

"Do you remember anything before you woke up here?"

Again, "No." He'd tried that question on himself.

BYRNE had a lot of questions, and asked them all. Then he leaned back in his chair and lit a cigarette. Almost casually he asked, "Does the name, Rush Henry, mean anything to you?"

The man on the bed thought carefully, then, "Not a thing. I don't ever remember hearing it before."

Byrne looked at Brody, and shrugged his shoulders. "I give up," he said. "I guess it's the McCoy."

Brody nodded. "Yeah, he's on the level, I guess." He looked at the bed from under heavy brows and shook his head sympathetically.

The man in the bed was silent a long time, thinking the name over in his mind. It still meant nothing.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked finally.

Brody nodded.

"How do you know?"

"Fingerprints," Brody said succinctly. "You were registered with the FBI and with G-2."

He digested that, then recognized the implications of what Brody said. "What am I wanted for?" he asked.

Brody grinned at Byrne, then at the man on the bed.

"Wanted?" he said. "Hell, you ain't wanted. You used to work for them."

The man on the bed was silent for a long time. Then he said, "Give it all to me. Who, what, where and how?"

"That proves it. You were a reporter once, too." He turned to Byrne. "Should I give it to him?"

Byrne nodded.

"Okay. You're thirty-two years of age, one hundred and seventy-five pounds, six feet even, dark hair with slight wave, blue eyes, unmarried. Police reporter with Chicago *Express* till spring 1942, Marines 1942, transfer to Military Intelligence, March, 1943. Medical discharge with silver plate in shoulder, April, 1944. You got that, too. We checked."

"What have I been doing since?" asked the man on the bed.

"This is the part that is funny," said Brody. "You been running a detective agency in Chicago. That slays me—a private eye that don't even know his own name. We should write this in the record."

"Can it, Brody," said Byrne. "Give the guy a break."

"He's all right," said the man on the bed. "I think it's kind of funny, too. I'd probably die laughing if I wasn't already scared half to death." He plucked at the counterpane with his finger nails. "Have you got anything more?" he asked. "Like what I'm supposed to be doing in Des Moines?"

"We checked on that, but your office in Chicago either doesn't know or isn't putting out a thing. They just know you're in Des Moines. We didn't tell them anything. We thought maybe you wanted to keep under for a while."

"That'd probably be a good idea, if I could think of a reason why. But let it go." He paused. "You say I'm not married?"

Brody shook his head. No.

"That's a relief. Nobody'll worry too much, then." His temple began to throb and the corners of the room ran a little like wet paint. "Maybe you'd better let me rest a while. If I'm a detective maybe I can figure myself out when I can get up."

"Okay, buddy," said Brody. "Anything you say, and we'll be glad to help you. Anything we got is at your service."

"Then quit playing games," said the man on the bed. "Tell me who I am and who this Rush Henry is. Am I supposed to know him?"

Brody looked at Byrne, who nodded.

"Yeah, you should know him," said Brody. "You're him."

II

IT WAS A WEEK BEFORE RUSH was pronounced fit to leave the hospital. Seven days proved too long to spend concentrating on a void. So he ended the week with his mind a carefully kept blank, his only conscious effort having consisted of a letter directed to the Rush Henry Detective Agency in Chicago. He asked for money, and felt like an embezzler when a check for five hundred dollars arrived by return mail. The accompanying letter was signed by someone called Gertrude, and asked several unanswerable questions about problems involving people whose names meant nothing to him.

After cashing the check with a deep feeling of guilt Rush went to the police station. Brody met him in the hall and took him into a small office. They talked for a while, then Rush said:

"Brody, there's just one more thing I wish you'd do for me. I may have been a hot shot detective a week or two ago, but I'm just a guy named Joe now. Tell me how I ought to go about finding out what I could have been doing in Des Moines. I've never been here. I don't even know anybody here." He stopped short. He didn't know anybody anywhere. "Specifically, what would you do the next day—in my place?"

"Well," said Brody, "first of all I'd check my room at the Fort Des Moines and the spot where I was shot. I'd ask a record of all phone calls I made and, if possible, of who I saw. I'd pick this town as clean as I could, then I'd go back to Chicago and talk to my secretary. But I don't think you'll find much here. The trail's too cold. As for your secretary, it seems like you never tell anybody anything till the blow-off, and she's probably as much in the dark as you are."

Des Moines was a cold lead. A pleasant man with light wavy hair took Rush over his hotel record. He had made two calls

to Chicago, one to Tulsa, and several local calls. But no record had been kept of the numbers. A check on the Tulsa number gave the name of the Mayo Hotel, but no one remembered who had received the call. There had been no visitors of interest and seemingly Rush had led an almost anonymous existence at the Fort Des Moines in the five days prior to his accident. The neighborhood of that accident yielded nothing. The shot, late at night, had been mistaken for an automobile backfire. Only a chance passerby had saved Rush from quietly bleeding to death half under a hedge on High Street.

Rush left his own cold trail and rode the Rocket to Chicago. The LaSalle Street station was a cacophony of sound and color. Rush fought his way to a telephone booth and thumbed through the classified directory, hunting his own address. He found it finally under detective agencies. He passed the address on to a cab driver and sat back in the cab. His eyes searched the streets as they drove. Now and again he would feel a twinge of remembrance and start forward in his seat only to drop back dejectedly as it faded on close scrutiny. He was, he realized, flogging his mind trying to force memory into it. He consciously relaxed and made his mind a blank.

THE CAB drew up before a middle-aged brick building on South State, and he got out and paid his fare. He stood for a moment looking up at the building, then with an effort he walked briskly through the lobby, halting for a moment at the building directory to learn his office number. An elevator door opened and he stepped in.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Henry," said the operator.

"Hello—" said Rush and left an uncomfortable blank space where he knew her name should be. She let him off on his floor without being asked, and he looked up and down an empty hall. A sign directly in front of him pointed in the direction of his room number, and he turned to the right and walked slowly down the hall. He came to a door on his left and stood silently surveying it. There was a reticent bit of printing in its center.

RUSH HENRY
Investigations

He took a deep breath and opened the door. Two faces looked up at him in surprise. A rather large, semi-blonde girl with comfortable features sat behind a desk which held a typewriter and a telephone. In a chair to her left sat a man. His ears were battered and swollen, Rush could almost hear the ringing in them. His nose wandered in a broken line down from thick brows, scarred slightly at their edges. He bounced out of his chair and thrust a ham-like paw toward Rush.

"Boss!" he said to Rush's surprise. "Chee, boss, it's sure great. It sure is great." His eye caught the patch of white plaster on Rush's temple. "What happened boss? Who hitcha? Hey, Gert, look, somebody let him have one."

"I see they did," said the large girl behind the desk. "What happened, Mr. Charles, did Asta sink a claw in you?"

Rush looked at her a moment before he realized she was kidding.

"Are we orphans?" she asked. "Three weeks and three phone calls. All for money. Were you buying Des Moines?"

Rush felt hemmed in. His eyes searching the room saw a door marked Private. He headed for it.

"Later," he said, "later." He opened the door and found himself in an inner office. He walked slowly through the door and sank on the couch he found along one wall. He was trembling. He closed his eyes and looked at the black inner lids for fully five minutes before the trembling went away.

He thought rapidly for another five minutes then got up and went to the door.

"Will you both please come in for a minute," he said and turned back to go sit behind the desk. A moment later he looked up to find them both standing staring curiously down at him. He motioned with a hand.

"Sit down." They sat gingerly. He could see that he was not acting as they had expected. "This is going to be short," he said, "because I don't know very much."

He paused and looked at them. "I suppose you both know me," he said.

They looked at him as though he had gone crazy.

"I hope you do," he said, "because I don't."

"I don't get it," the man said.

"Shut up, Merwin," said the girl. "What do you mean, Rush? What's this about you don't know you?"

"I just don't," he said. He pointed a finger at the plaster on his temple. "I caught a slug here. It was a glancing blow but when I woke up—it's gone."

"What's gone?" asked Merwin.

"My memory. I don't remember anything. They had to identify me through fingerprints with the FBI."

Utter silence descended on the room. Rush looked up.

"I don't quite know how to say this," he said, "but I'm pretty helpless. I gather that you both work for me. I don't even remember your names, but I'll be grateful as hell if you'll keep on working for me, at least until I get straightened around."

"Are you kidding?" It was the large girl. Rush turned his eyes full on her. "What kind of rats do you think we are? You'd have one hell of a time getting rid of us."

"Getting rid of us?" asked Merwin. "Is he gonna get rid of us?"

"Just sit still, Merwin. Somebody will explain it all to you later. I'll handle this now."

"But I don't wanna—"

"Quiet, Merwin!"

Merwin subsided, but a painful crease appeared between his eyes. Rush decided he was thinking.

"Now, look, Rush Henry. I've worked with you since the day you opened the front door of this agency, and it'll take more than a slight case of amnesia to get rid of me. Hell's bells, you couldn't do without me when you knew what you were doing. How can you get along without me now?"

RUSH felt an unfamiliar sting in the corner of his eyes and hurriedly blinked his eyes, thankful that the drawn shades left the office in shadow. The girl was still talking.

"Now, let me get you straight. I'm Gertrude Porter, and this is Merwin. He's not very smart and mostly you have to explain things a minimum of three times, but he knows Chicago like a book and can call every low character in town by all their aliases. He's only lost one tail that I can remember and he's got you a little mixed up with God. I'm your secretary, treasurer, and general front girl. I know everything about your business except what you don't tell me, which is too much, and isn't that a damn shame now? You'll be sorry you're so tight with information." It was a long speech, even for Gertrude, and she lapsed into silence with a surprised look on her face.

In spite of his lost feeling Rush felt a grin tug at the corners of his mouth. He suppressed it and looked up at the pair.

"You'll never know how much I thank you for this," he said. "Now, with some help from you two I may be able to figure out some things. First, what was I doing in Des Moines?"

Gertrude looked at Merwin. Her eyes plainly said, "What did I tell you?" Aloud she said, "Like I told you, you kept too damn much to yourself. I don't have any idea why you were in Des Moines, of all places."

"You mean I just left town with no word to you?"

"Oh, you told me where you were going, which is more than you usually did. But no why."

"But there must have been some hint." Rush's forehead wrinkled in concentration and he felt a small, sharp needle digging inside his brain at the effort. "Did I have any callers—that is, out of the ordinary callers—just before I left? Or did I take any new cases?"

"Well," said Gertrude reflectively, "the day before you left a man came and talked to you in your office for over an hour. When he left you handed me a thousand dollar retainer to deposit. The next day you left for Des Moines."

"That must be the tip-off," said Rush. "Obviously I went to Des Moines on business for this man. Who was he?"

"No," said Gertrude with a thin smile, "that won't work. You forgot to tell me

who he was."

"But I must have said something, or made some notes or something."

"If you did, I didn't see them."

"Maybe I left them in my desk." Rush shuffled the papers that lay scattered on his desk. Then systematically he read each one of them. Finding nothing, he searched the drawers. Nothing. Lots of papers, many notes, but nothing with any possible bearing on a trip to Des Moines, Iowa. He gave up and sat with his hands folded on the desk, a cigarette hanging from his mouth. He forced his mind to concentrate and the needle in his brain dug sharply. A thought occurred to him.

"Who signed the check for the thousand dollars?" he asked.

Gertrude shook her head. "No check—cash."

Rush lapsed back into thought.

"What denomination?" he asked.

"Ten hundreds."

"Call the bank and ask them if they kept the numbers."

He was silent again as Gertrude made the call from the phone on his desk. She put her query and shook her head as she listened.

"No record," she said as she lowered the phone to its cradle.

The needle in Rush's brain made one final dig. The pain was now almost blinding. He shut his eyes and blanked his mind for a long minute.

"One last thing," he said. "You said I asked for money three times from Des Moines. Does that mean I'm running close? I mean, how am I doing for money?"

Gertrude grinned. "You finally asked me something I know. At least you let me keep track of your dough. You got just over ten thousand dollars in a checking account plus about the same amount in bonds and an interest in a bar run by a guy named Barney. You won't go hungry for a while."

Rush was almost incredulous. "Where did I get that kind of money?" he asked.

"Well, I may have been a little rosy because you never told me anything," said Gertrude, "and given you the idea that you weren't very smart. But actually you were a pretty slick dick. That ten grand in the checking account came from a guy named Germaine. You did a job for him and he paid off, but good."

Rush shook his head in amazement. He slowly digested the fact that he had done a detective job for a man named Germaine who had then paid him ten thousand dollars. At last he got to his feet.

"I'm about washed up for now," he said. "I've got a headache to end all headaches. I'm going home to sleep it off. If you'll just hold the fort for me till tomorrow, I'll appreciate it more than I can tell you." He picked up his hat and walked around the end of the desk out of the inner office, closing the door behind him. Gertrude and Merwin stared after him. Words were forming on Merwin's lips when the door slowly reopened and Rush stood in the doorway.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I forgot. I haven't the faintest idea where I live. Will you take me home, Merwin?"

III

RUSH'S FIRST EMOTION WAS the unfamiliar one of fear. He felt it grab at his heart like a cold, constricting hand. His head came up off the pillow and he fought for a long time for composure. His hand on the coverlet tightened into a grip on the cloth, as though it were a lifetime to reality.

Then slowly memory returned, a brutally short memory stretching a bare week into the past. He looked around at the unfamiliar bedroom which should have been so familiar. Minutes stretched away until he slowly eased out of the bed and slipped his feet into unfamiliar slippers that fitted his feet familiarly, and plodded around the apartment, standing for minutes before pictures, opening books, looking in drawers, finding his way in a new world. After the first few minutes it became more than just handling and feeling of objects. It became a search, a search for a man—the man he had been. In each picture he saw a reflection of what lay behind him, of the things that had made him himself. It was noon before he went to the telephone and dialed his office.

"I thought you were dead," said Gertrude. "When you coming down? We've had two calls and one visitor already this morning. All of them have jobs for you."

The needle dug in Rush's brain. The thought of attempting a job he knew nothing about dropped the bottom out of his stomach. He felt drained of all energy.

"Stall them," he said. "Tell them anything. We're busy. We'll call back. Tell them we're not taking anything at present."

"A couple of these sounded like good deals," Gertrude said. "The kind you always liked."

"No," said Rush with a kind of desperation. "Not now. Not for a while. No jobs."

"The same guy called twice. He wants to talk to you personally."

"I don't want to talk to anyone," Rush insisted. "I wouldn't know what to say." Again the needle dug sharply. "Gertrude," he said urgently, "I can't take it. Don't call me for a while. I'm going to have to sweat it out myself. Just sit tight and answer the phone. If anybody gets too inquisitive tell them I'm working on a case." He hung up the receiver before Gertrude could protest. He drew the shades in his bedroom and lay down on the bed burying his head in the pillow.

It was dark in the room when the insistent ringing of the phone woke him again. He came up from the pillow trembling. With an effort he got control of his nerves and lay back, waiting for the ringing to cease. When it was finally still he flung back the covers and went to the phone, taking it from the cradle and laying it on the desk. Then he went back to bed and slept till the sun woke him in the morning.

He ate and slept and ate and slept. On the third day he put the phone back on the hook. Almost immediately it rang. It was Gertrude.

"You've had me scared to death," she said. "What happened to you?"

"I've been resting," he said.

"Don't you think it's time you stopped resting?" she asked in an acid voice.

"Yes," said Rush, and was suddenly surprised at himself. "Yes, I do. It's long past time when I should be doing something. You can expect me in half an hour."

HE replaced the phone in its cradle and and walked to a mirror set in one wall. He looked at the face reflected there and wondered if it would ever become completely familiar. He was thirty-two years old and had a good half of his life before him. If it must be a new life, it was time to start it. Few men began with ten thousand dollars in the bank. He had that and a reputation somebody else had earned. It still seemed as if Rush Henry were another person. Still, he was now Rush Henry and somewhere in his mind must be the knowledge of his trade that Rush Henry had possessed. If he was a detective, he'd be a detective.

Rush dressed and within his half hour time limit was opening the door of his office.

Merwin was sitting reading comics. Rush wondered if he slept in that office chair.

"Will both of you come into my office, please," he said.

They followed him as he crossed to sit behind his desk.

"Obviously I can't go on the way I have been. So I've got to do something. I'm not quite sure, but I think if I light enough fires something will boil over."

Merwin and Gertrude looked at each other.

"Chee, boss," breathed Merwin in a throaty whisper. "Yer back!"

Rush looked at him through narrowed thoughtful eyes. "No, Merwin," he said, "I'm not back, but I'm going to get back if it's at all possible."

"And about time," said Gertrude.

"Yes. Now how about phone calls? Who's been asking for me?"

"General run stuff mostly. Pappy Daley called and I covered for you. Then there's this same guy who calls at least once a day. He wants you personally or no one."

"Did he leave a number?" asked Rush.

"No, he just says he'll call back."

"Do you think he's the man who hired me to go to Des Moines?"

"I couldn't tell. He didn't mention Des Moines. He doesn't mention anything. He just wants to talk to you personally. When

he doesn't get you he always says he'll call back."

"Okay. The next time he calls put him through to me."

"How about Pappy Daley? Do you want to talk to him?"

"Who is he?"

Gertrude's mouth dropped open for a minute, then snapped shut as she remembered. "He used to be your boss when you were a reporter. He's managing editor of the *Express*. My guess would be that he's about your best friend. I'll also lay a little dough that he set you up in this business."

Rush thought that through. A first feeling of warmth faded slightly at the prospect of meeting a "best friend" that he didn't even remember.

"What do you think, Gertrude?" he asked. "Should I call him?"

"Call him? Hell, you oughta go see him. Sit on his lap for a while and let him tell you about yourself. He taught you everything you know anyway. Maybe he could do the job all over again."

"All right. Get him on the phone."

"It's right there beside you. Dial his number."

RUSH frowned at her until she remembered again and gave him the number, from memory. His inquiry brought him only the information that Pappy Daley was out of the city until the next morning, but would call Mr. Henry the minute he returned to the office. Rush had barely cradled the phone when it rang again. He motioned to Gertrude to answer it.

"Mr. Henry's office," she said, and listened. Putting one hand over the mouthpiece she whispered to Rush. "It's that guy again." Rush nodded. "Mr. Henry is in the office now," she said. "He will talk with you." She handed the phone across the desk to Rush.

"Rush Henry speaking," he said.

"Mr. Henry, it is very urgent that I see you privately for a brief conversation immediately."

"I'll be here most of the afternoon," Rush said.

"No, I'm afraid that won't do. There are reasons, which I can't discuss over a telephone, why I must see you somewhere away from the office."

Rush was silent for a moment. "Where would you suggest?"

"Could I meet you at your apartment?"

"At what time?"

"Early this evening, preferably."

"I see." Rush hesitated. "Could you give me some idea as to the nature of your business?"

"Only that it's as important to you as it is to me."

"I see." Rush made a decision born of days of inactivity. "Yes," he said. "I'll see you at eight o'clock at my apartment."

"Thank you very much," said the voice. A dull click and a dead line told Rush that the conversation was over.

"Well, that's that," he said. "I've done something anyway. I don't know what it is but according to him it's important to me."

Gertrude looked worried. "Are you meeting a stranger in your apartment?"

Rush nodded. "Yes. Why?"

"Do you think that's smart?"

Rush grinned. "How do I know whether it's smart or not? I'm new at this. Now, I think I need a drink. Didn't you tell me I owned a piece of a bar?"

"Barney's," said Merwin, obviously glad of something to say.

"Okay, Merwin. You take me to Barney's. And listen, Merwin. Remember I lost my memory. You tip me off to anybody I'm supposed to know."

"That'll be a cinch. You know everybody."

"Okay, I can get by with just saying 'Hello' or 'Howareyuh.' But what does this Barney look like?"

"He's an Irish mug with practically no hair," said Gertrude. "You can't miss him. He's got such a big belly he couldn't reach the bar if he didn't have such long arms."

"All right. Let's go, Merwin."

Merwin escorted him down State Street to a small bar over the door of which hung a sign proclaiming it as Barney's. Inside the lights were dim and Rush had difficulty accustoming himself to the gloom. Merwin pushed him toward the bar and shouted at the mammoth man behind the bar.

"Hey, Barney, look who's back. See,

Barney, it's Rush. Don't Barney look swell, Rush?"

Since Barney was the only other man in the place Rush felt Merwin was overdoing it a little. "Okay, Merwin. Anyone would think I didn't know Barney when I saw him." He stuck a hand across the corner. "Hi, Barney, how you been?"

"Fine, Rush. Business is good. What'll you have?"

"The same." Rush felt that was safe. He felt like a drinking man and a drinking man always has a favorite drink. He waited to see what his turned out to be. Barney set a bottle of Old Overholt Rye on the counter.

"I just got some of this in, Rush. I know it ain't like that 1855 stuff you were telling me about, but it's six year bonded. And that's damn good whiskey these days."

Rush wondered when he had had the fortune to drink 1855 Overholt Rye. He must have gotten around in his previous incarnation.

He passed a very pleasant hour with Barney without disaster. He left, with no suspicion behind him, feeling very pleasant and with the idea beginning to form that he must have been a hell of a guy at one time. He liked Barney, he liked Barney's, and he liked the job he was about to learn. A block's walk with Merwin plodding beside him brought a smile to his lips. He also, he remembered, had found that he was very fond of Old Overholt rye whiskey.

BACK in his office he spent the afternoon speaking to everyone who called. To those who wished to acquire his services he said he was engaged at the moment on an extremely important case that was requiring all his time, but that as soon as he was through he would be very pleased to consider their problems. At six o'clock he closed the office, saw Gertrude to her bus and went to Barney's with Merwin. He spent a pleasant half hour there over more of the Overholt, then walked across the street for dinner and was lucky enough to find a steak.

All in all he was extremely pleased with himself and glowing with good fellowship as he took a cab to his apartment house. In the lobby he paused to talk to the clerk on duty at the desk. From him he learned that no visitors had called for him that evening although there had been one telephone call during the late afternoon. With some notion of learning more about himself he spent a half hour talking to the clerk whose name, he learned from the plate over the desk, was Clarence. When he looked at his watch it was eight-thirty.

"Well, I guess my party isn't going to show up," he said.

Clarence remarked that that appeared likely.

"I guess I'll go to my rooms. If anybody calls, ring through first to warn me. I may be in bed."

With that he headed for the elevator. His hand was outstretched, with finger pointing, when the floor under him trembled and a dull thud followed by an echoing roar and the tinkle of falling glass shook the building. He turned to look across the lobby at Clarence, who was gripping the edge of the desk, his face was a dead white.

"What was that?" he said.

Clarence shook his head in wordless ignorance. The callboard behind him lit with myriad lights and buzzed angrily as phones were lifted from cradles all over the building. Rush turned back to the elevator and pushed the button. At that instant the door slid open and a frightened operator stuck her head out.

"Where was it?" asked Rush.

The girl gulped and pointed upwards. Her mouth worked and she got out the word, "Six."

That was Rush's floor. He was struck with a sudden premonition, and stepped into the car.

"Take me up," he commanded. The girl cast one frightened look at the lobby and reluctantly closed the doors, throwing the lever that moved the car upwards. She brought it to a halt at the sixth floor and hesitantly released the door which slid open. Rush stepped out into the hall and looked in the direction of his apartment. Doors were opening and heads thrust in the hall followed his glance as he saw the door of his apartment hanging at a crazy

angle into the hall. Rush strode quickly to the door and stood looking into the apartment. Unimaginable **havoc** had wrecked the room.

Rush stared at it for the space of sixty seconds. Then he looked at his watch. Eight thirty-two. His appointment had been for eight. If he had kept it, rather, if he had been in his apartment to keep his appointment—it didn't take a detective to figure that one. He turned on his heel and walked back to the elevator, giving the wide eyed operator the ground floor as a destination. He left the apartment building and flagged a cruising cab.

"Steven's Hotel," he called to the driver, and leaned back in the cab.

So this, he thought, is the life of a detective. He grinned in the darkness, and if Gertrude or Merwin could have seen that grin they would have stopped worrying about Rush Henry. Memory or no memory, that grin had been the beginning of many an end.

IV

RUSH RANG THROUGH TO HIS office from his hotel bedroom at nine o'clock the next morning. Gertrude's conversation was rather startling.

"No," she said, "he's not here. I don't expect him until this afternoon."

"Hey," said Rush, "this is Rush Henry, I'm calling—"

"I know," she said. "Mr. Daley has been trying to get Mr. Henry for some time, but he won't be in till this afternoon."

It dawned on Rush suddenly.

"You can't talk?" he asked.

"That's right," said Gertrude.

"Police?"

"Yes."

"The explosion?"

"Yes, we've heard about it."

"I see. Should I call this Daley?"

"That's the best idea. Mr. Henry will be in then."

"Thanks," said Rush and hung up. He leafed through the telephone directory and found the number of the *Express*. He finally got through to a man who identified himself as "Daley speaking."

"This is Rush Henry. You looking for me?"

"Looking for you? You damn ignorant baboon, who isn't looking for you? What the hell have you got yourself into now?"

"I wish I knew. Are you busy?"

"Not too busy to get you out of trouble. Come on over."

"Give me five minutes."

It took ten for the cab to pull up at the curb before the *Express* building. Rush paid the driver before he got out, then with his hat pulled down over his eyes and stooping slightly as he walked, he entered the building. The girl at the reception desk gave him the go ahead.

"Go right in, Mr. Henry, He's expecting you."

The girl's eyes, glancing to her left as she spoke, gave him the cue. He turned right and walked down a hall. At the end of it was a door with M. C. Daley in plain block letters an its panelling. He knocked and then remembered that this man was his best friend and that he was expected. He tried the knob and pushed open the door.

"Come in, you dough head," called a voice from within the room.

Rush entered and closed the door behind him.

"Hi," he said, feeling that to be as good a greeting as any under the circumstances.

"Put it down," said Daley, reaching in a drawer of his desk. He pulled out a bottle of what turned out to be Old Overholt rye and placed it on the desk together with a pair of dixie cups. He poured each full and handed one across to Rush. He drank deeply and looked through a cloud of smoke at Rush.

"Well, what is it this time?"

"It's a long story."

"I figured that out. Can I print it?"

Rush frowned in concentration. This, he decided was no time for the world to know he had lost his memory. "No," he said. "Not all of it, anyway. The rest you won't want to print for a while. It's not hot enough." He wondered how he knew that.

"Okay, let's have it."

"I've got amnesia." Rush figured it was better to get that understood right away.

"You've got what?"

"Amnesia."

"Where in hell did you get that?"

"In Des Moines, Iowa. I got hit with a glancing shot in the temple. I don't remember anything."

IT WAS beginning to dawn on Pappy. "Then—why, hell, you don't even know me."

Rush nodded. "That's right," he said.

"How about yourself? Do you remember anything about you?"

"Not a thing. I'm blank all the way back to a week ago Thursday."

"That's almost two weeks. What were you doing in Des Moines?"

"I wish I knew."

"Doesn't Gertrude know?"

"No. She remembers that a guy gave me a thousand dollar retainer, and that I left for Des Moines the next day. But she doesn't know his name or anything about him."

"Hasn't he called since you got back?"

"No. That's what worries me."

Pappy sat lost in thought for almost a minute. "How about this explosion? How does that fit in?"

"I don't know, but I've got an idea or two."

"Give."

"Well, I've been in town almost a week. I've been laying low fighting the jitters most of the time. But some guy kept calling every day. Said it was business. I finally got hold of myself yesterday and came down to the office to look around. He called while I was there and I talked to him. He made an appointment to meet me in my apartment at eight o'clock. Said it was as much to my benefit as his. I was waiting downstairs at eight-thirty when the explosion took my room apart. I took one look at the place and blew."

"That's not hard to figure out," said Daley after a moment's thought.

"No, it's almost too simple. The guy must have thought I was quite a sucker. As a matter of fact I was. But I'm learning fast. The next time I'll be harder to lower the boom on."

"Yeah," said Daley. "You learn fast. I remember well. Now, how about this guy with the one grand retainer? Do you figure he's in on this deal?"

"Yes and no. You see, I figure that I either learned something or was awfully close to learning it in Des Moines. Somebody let me have one for getting too warm. I came back to Chicago and he wants to put me away for sure."

"But how about this guy with the retainer?"

"That's a funny thing. There must be some reason he hasn't been back to see me, for a report at least. Since he hasn't been back I have to figure he can't get back, which leaves a couple of possibilities. Either he's away, sick or busy, which I doubt, or the same guy who got me has been after him and he isn't around any more."

"What do you figure on doing about it?"

"Well, that's where you come in. Gertrude said he was middle-aged. I want to see a picture of every man over forty, who has died or been killed in the past two weeks. I'll sort them and let Gertrude pick him out."

Daley looked at him in admiration.

"Maybe you lost your memory," he said. "But, son, you haven't lost a bit of that other stuff you had. Just keep coming and we'll have this figured out in a minute. I've got all the factual stuff in the world at my fingertips and I've got leg men who can get me more. I know everybody you know and a few more. You just come up with the brains and we'll put this together in short order."

HE reached to one corner of his desk and pressed a buzzer. A couple of minutes later a girl thrust a pert face around a door.

"Go see Blackie in the morgue, Marion. Get clips and pix on every sudden death of a middle-aged man in the past two weeks. Don't miss any of them. If we don't have pix on all of them, make a note and we'll get 'em."

The girl vanished without comment.

"There goes a good girl," said Daley. "She looks like a model and thinks like a Rhodes scholar. I don't know what I'd do without her."

"What I saw of her, which was only her head, was quite impressive—from a strictly pictorial point of view of course."

"And you'll leave her strictly alone, dammit. You're always getting my feminine staff upset," said Daley. "You wolf," he added parenthetically.

"Wolf?" said Rush with a puzzled frown. "Me?"

"Yes, you. With that damn 'I don't care' pose of yours, they fall in droves."

"The hell they do," said Rush in bewilderment. " You know, I'm learning the strangest things about myself."

Daley snorted. "That's not anything to what you've still got to learn. Hell, there's a couple of books left over yet."

Rush lit a cigarette and grinned through the smoke. "You know, if it wasn't for these busy so-and-sos that lit a bomb under my apartment this would be fun. I mean, if all I had to do was figure myself out. It's not like I didn't know who I was and was lost somewhere. Hell, I know who I am and all that—I just don't remember anything."

"Yeah, that'd be a lot of fun. I wish I could forget some of the things I know."

"Tell me about them, Mr. Daley," said Rush.

"Well, for instance—" Daley stopped abruptly and looked closely at Rush. "The old needle, eh? I'm going to stop worrying about you. There's too much of the old Henry still hanging around for you to get in too deep. And by the way, let's drop the Mr. Daley. You're one of the few people allowed to call me Pappy. I'd feel better if you kept it up."

"That," said Rush, "is a deal, Mr. Daley. I will call you Pappy, Pappy."

The door opened again and the girl named Marion came into the room. Rush noted with approval that the rest of her was in keeping with the promise of her face. A good deal better than adequate, was his considered opinion.

"Marion," said Pappy, "this is Rush Henry. He is an illegal and entirely untrustworthy member of my family. Since I taught him everything he knows I consider myself responsible in a remotely parental way. What he does with anything beside his thinking apparatus is another thing. I'll have nothing to do with it. I advise you to have nothing to do with him when he asks you to, as I know he is going to from the look in his eyes. Now, get out of here before he does it under my very nose."

Marion grinned at Rush. "He didn't mention that my last name is Dorr." She paused, surveying Rush critically, then looked back at Daley. "I'll never forgive him if he doesn't ask me after that build-up," she said, and closed the door behind her.

Pappy spread the pictures and newspaper clippings the girl had brought over to his desk, pushing some across to Rush. "What we want," he said, "is a death of a gent aged forty to sixty or maybe sixty-five who looks as though he might have had a thousand dollars to throw away on a private eye. You look through those and I'll catch these."

THEY worked in silence for some thirty minutes. At the end of that time Rush had accumulated eight stories with pictures. Daley had only three.

"Let's see what you have there," said Pappy. Rush shoved his stack of clippings across the desk to Daley, who leafed through them rapidly. Six he threw out immediately. "You should know better than to—" He paused abruptly. "I forgot that you didn't know better." He pointed at the stack he had discarded. "I know all those guys personally. If they'd been in a jam they'd have come to me, only they are the kind of guys who didn't get in jams. You knew that, only you've forgotten."

"Six of them?" asked Rush. "Did all your personal friends die last week?"

"One of the things you've forgotten is that a newspaper editor knows everybody. And conversely, when anybody knows a newspaper man personally they go to him first if they're in a jam. They always want to keep it out of the paper. We'll discount those guys for a while." He shuffled the five remaining stories. "Now, let me study these." He read each story carefully. Twice he consulted a city directory and three times a bound volume of Dun and Bradstreet. His eventual

gleaning was three stories with a picture clipped to each.

"If your man is dead and anybody knows it, he's one of these three guys," said Pappy tapping the stack. "Now what do we do?"

"I'll phone Gertrude and have her come over. The cops are over-populating my office right now and I'm not quite ready to talk to them yet."

"I'll call her," said Pappy. "They may be listening on the line." He dialed the number of Rush's office and waited. Moments later he spoke to Gertrude and in guarded words asked her to come up to his office immediately. He brought out the bottle of rye again and with help lowered the level of liquid by a matter of inches before Gertrude knocked on the door. Rush started to speak but Pappy held up his hand.

"Do it my way, Rush," he said. "Come here, Gertrude," he commanded. "Look, have you ever seen any of these guys?"

He spread the three pictures on the desk. Without hesitation Gertrude pointed to one of them.

"Sure, that's the Joe that handed over the thousand dollar retainer. I never forget a face, especially if it's got a thousand dollars."

Rush leaned forward from his chair and took the picture she had identified. It portrayed a handsome man in the neighborhood of sixty, although it was hard to tell. The strong jaw hinted at a will that would override the years. The cast of the eyes exuded confidence and the lips were set in a straight line. It was the picture of a man used to power and who has used power. It was a man tremendously alive. The name under the portrait was George Marshall Simon. Rush flipped up the picture to study the clipping attached underneath. George Marshall Simon, it seemed, had been killed in an automobile accident the same day that Rush had been shot in Des Moines. The accident had occurred at the bottom of a steep hill when the steering wheel had presumably refused to function and Mr. Simon had plunged through a rail into a ravine. The results had been quite fatal.

"Is this all you've got on this guy?" asked Rush tapping the clipping in his hand.

"Oh, no. That's only the clip on the death. We've got a complete file on Simon, and probably an obit. He was a pretty important guy. I know he heaved a lot of weight around downtown."

"I'd sure like to see that file and the police file, too. I never heard of a rich man's steering gear going out bingo, just like that, and at the bottom of a hill where there was a handy ravine. I never even heard of a poor man's steering gear giving out like that." He paused and then smiled a slow smile. "But then I never heard of anything at all that happened before a week ago." He looked down at the clipping again. "I would call this a pregnant situation. I wonder what the police called it."

V

PAPPY PUNCHED A BUTTON ON his desk and again the girl called Marion came into the office.

"Yes?" she said expectantly, her eyes on Rush.

"No," said Pappy. "Not him, me. Working hours until five, then he can have you."

"That'll be nice," said Marion. "Now, what do you want—until five o'clock, of course," she added.

"I want service. Get me the complete file on George Marshall Simon. Everything—obit, and all news stories. Also find out who covered his accident and send him in."

"Smoky was on that," said Marion.

"Okay, get the clips and find Smoky."

"Will do, Pappy," said Marion and left the office.

Rush watched her go, then turned amused eyes to Daley. "You're one of the few people who are allowed to call me Pappy'," he quoted. "How long has she been here?"

"Three months, dammit, but she's an exception."

"She certainly is," said Rush, glancing at the door. "She certainly is. Why don't you let her alone, Pappy? She looks like she could handle herself."

"Sure, she can handle herself, but can you? I like her the way she is and I don't want her all involved in one of your messes."

"My messes?"

"Yeah, people who get mixed up with you are always getting killed very dead with bullets or knives or something and she would be no good to me if she got taken suddenly dead."

Rush looked at him in amazement.

"What kind of a Frankenstein's monster was I before I became the peace-loving citizen I obviously am now?"

Pappy snorted. "Obviously, hell. You've been back in town a week, and already busy citizens are leaving time bombs in your apartment. And that slug you caught alongside your head was not just in fun. Ever since the day you first walked into this office people have periodically wanted to kill you. I admit they never quite get the job done but somebody just beside you is always catching a stray hunk of lead. It's too bad the slug is not meant for them, but they're dead just as long."

"I hope you're exaggerating," said Rush.

"I'm not. How about Leslie Germaine, and that blonde down in Weston? Just innocent bystanders but I never see them around anymore." Pappy looked up to see the expression on Rush's face. "Look," he said, "maybe I am exaggerating a little, but I'm very fond of Marion and I need her in my business. I can't afford to have her out of commission. Lay off till this is cleaned up anyway. There's plenty of time."

"And none of it like the present," said a pleasant voice behind.

Pappy swirled in his seat. "Dammit, Marion," he said, "why don't you make more noise when you come in?"

"And miss all this fascinating history. I hope you haven't frightened Mr. Henry to death. Because if you have I'll have to ask him for dinner myself. Life is too short to miss as much excitement as seems to follow him around."

Rush grinned. "What are you doing for dinner this evening, Miss Dorr?" he asked.

"Why, I'm almost free," she said.

"Almost?"

"Well, I'm a growing girl and the way I eat is anything but free."

Rush looked at her speculatively. "I don't quite see where you could do any more growing to any advantage but it seems worth a try." He looked at his watch. "Shall we say five o'clock?"

"Let's," said Marion.

"It's on your own heads," said Pappy. "Now, I hate to mention it, but you were supposed to have some information for us."

"Right here, Pappy," she said, laying a thick pad of newspaper clippings on his desk. "Smoky is giving a story to 'rewrite' and will be here in a minute." She turned to go. "Five o'clock?" she said over her shoulder to Rush.

"Five o'clock," said Rush.

Pappy snorted. "Okay, let's get to work. I wash my hands of you two."

SYSTEMATICALLY they worked their way through the clippings Marion had brought. Several salient facts were soon obvious. Nobody knew a great deal about George Marshall Simon. He controlled a large amount of money. He lived an abundant life. He made no secret of his comings and goings in Chicago, but nobody knew much about him.

He had appeared in Chicago in 1932, bought a mansion on the North Shore, opened an account at a brokerage firm and proceeded to increase whatever he had previously possessed by astronomical sums. George Marshall Simon had died a very wealthy man. From the clippings Rush and Pappy gained the impression that Simon had made no direct effort to hide his past, rather that he had just not considered it important and had refrained from mentioning it for that reason. Pappy dug in his own memory for a clue.

"There's something there. I can't remember what it was. Somebody who knew him well, or as well as anyone in Chicago, mentioned it once. I don't remember who or when, but I got the impression that there was something tragic behind him, something to do with his family. Say," Pappy snapped his fingers. "There was a story on that about six months ago."

As if on cue Marion re-entered the

office.

"Here's some more stuff on Simon. Smoky had it out for some reason. He'll be here in a minute now." She left with a smile at Rush.

The new clippings were dated six months earlier. At that time George Marshall Simon had held a press conference and the story he told had been a mid-winter sensation. In the spring of 1921 Simon, his wife and child had been returning to the United States when they encountered a storm that wrecked the small coastal schooner in which they were traveling. His daughter Ruth and her mother had been lost and Simon saved. He had come on to the United States to drown his grief in a furious assault on the market, an assault which had doubled his original fortune, built in the pearl trade, many times.

It was not until a year before his death that he learned that his daughter might still be living. A sailor named Macy wrote him that he had heard a rumor in the islands that missionaries had rescued a girl who might well be the missing Ruth, and had placed her in an orphanage in San Francisco. He never heard again from Macy; but despite the twenty-two year old trail, detectives, engaged by Simon, were successful in tracing the girl and satisfying Simon of her identity. Simon introduced the girl—now twenty-five or -six years old—as his daughter. During the course of the interviews he told reporters that he held a generous reward waiting for the sailor if he would come forward to claim it.

The affair had been a seven day wonder in the local papers, with the wire services carrying the story. So far as Rush and Pappy could discover, no attempt had been made to claim the reward. The sailor thus far was an unknown quantity. Pappy poured a drink from the bottle of Old Overholt and lit a cigar. Rush puffed on a cigarette as they sat in silence considering the information they had gathered. The door Rush had used to enter the room opened wide and a mountain of a man came walking in.

"Sit down, Smoky," said Pappy. "We've got a few things to ask you."

"Hi, sleuth," said Smoky. "What have I done now?"

"Nothing, we just want some dope on an accident you covered."

"Marion told me. You think there's something smelling, too, huh?"

"That's right. What did it look like?"

"Damned if I know. The cops took the car apart but they couldn't find any evidence of tampering with the steering gear. The autopsy didn't show any traces of drugs or poison. But the guy still drives right through a guard rail and over a cliff. It stinks."

RUSH spoke for the first time since Smoky had entered the room. "It sure does," he said.

"What put you on it?" asked Smoky.

Rush looked at Pappy and nodded his head.

"Okay, Smoky," said Pappy. "I guess we have to tell you. As a matter of fact I think somebody else ought to know. Somebody who can keep a check on you." He puffed his cigar furiously for a minute. "Rush has lost his memory," he said finally.

Smoky looked at Rush, keeping his face deadpan. "All of it?"

Pappy nodded. "Every last bit."

"Fine. I just made twenty bucks."

Rush raised his eyebrows.

"Yeah. I borrowed it from you two weeks ago. Now you've forgotten it."

Rush smiled. "I'll remember."

"I hope you do. I'll pay the twenty. It'll be worth it," said Pappy.

"It's more fun to owe it. He's so damn nice to you for fear you'll think he wants it back." Smoky walked to the desk and opened the bottle of rye, drinking long swallows from the neck. He put the bottle down and wiped his lips.

"What happened?" he asked.

"A guy let me have one in Des Moines, only it almost missed. All it knocked out was my memory."

"What's that got to do with Simon and his neat little accident?"

"I'm pretty sure Simon paid me to go to Des Moines."

Smoky pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"That could fit," he said.

Rush leaned forward. "How?" he asked.

"The accident smells. I also get a whiff of the same stink when I dig around in this long lost daughter deal. Maybe Simon got a sniff and it sent him to you."

Rush leaned back and considered. "Could be," he said. "Could possibly be." He looked up at Smoky. "You said there was an autopsy. That means an investigation. Who was on it from the law?" His eyes squinted in sudden thought. "How did I know that?" he asked.

"You haven't lost all your reflexes," said Pappy. "You know a lot of stuff you don't know you know. Who was on it, Smoky?"

"Carnahan. He didn't say so but he thought it was a little over-odd, too."

"Do I know this Carnahan?" asked Rush.

"But good," answered Smoky. "You've spent many a pregnant hour in his receding hair."

"Do we get along?"

"Carnahan would be the last to admit it, but you do. He's got to play ball with you—you've saved his neck too many times."

"I'll see him tomorrow if you can go with me, Smoky."

Smoky looked at Pappy who nodded. "He's your assignment from now on."

"Okay. Call me when you're ready."

Rush looked at his watch. It was five minutes after five.

"I've got a date," he said.

Pappy sighed with resignation. "Okay, go ahead. But for the love of Mike, watch yourself. I'll never find another secretary like her."

Half an hour later Rush and Marion were eating broiled lobster at Francois'. Rush had used the nut-cracker-like tools with efficiency for some minutes before he suddenly laid them down.

"Now, how did I know how to do that?" he asked.

Marion stared at him in surprise.

"Do what?" she asked.

"Open those lobster claws. This is the first time I ever remember using these weapons, or eating a lobster for that matter."

MARION'S forehead creased in surprise. "Why the waiter suggested lobster because he said you liked them."

"I do, I find. But then I'm finding out the damnedest things about me every day."

"You know, I thought that conversation I interrupted this afternoon was a little odd. Maybe you'd better tell me all about it."

"Maybe I had," said Rush. He grinned at a thought. "If I didn't there would be times when you would think I was crazy, and times when you might be right. You see I am in the midst of a brand new mental incarnation."

"I don't see," said Marion. "Point it out for me."

"It's easy. I lost my memory and I'm building a brand new one."

"That should be fun. I have some old memories I'd just as soon trade in. How did you lose your old ones?"

"I wouldn't recommend it. A guy shot me in the head. It was just a medium fair shot and only bounced off. It took my past with it."

"There must be an easier way. When did this happen?"

"A couple of weeks ago in Des Moines."

"I don't like to pry into what must be a very personal matter, but why did this character shoot you?"

"That is what bothers."

"You don't suppose it was just a nasty fit of spite?"

"No. I think it was probably a very necessary task for him. I imagine I was about to find out, or had already found out, something he didn't want me to know."

"And now you've got to find out all over again?"

Rush nodded. "That's right. And it would be a big help if I knew what I was looking for."

"Working for the press, like I do," said Marion, "I very seldom see a paper. But don't I recall something about a bomb or something planted in your apartment?"

"You do. At least there was a bomb in my apartment, and it went off, and it was in the papers."

"What are the police doing about it?"

"I don't know, I haven't seen them."

Marion's eyebrows raised. "Isn't that slightly counter to customary practice? I thought you always screamed for the law when your property was pushed around in that manner."

"I'm sure I don't know, but I'm also sure I never screamed for the law for anything in the past. As a matter of fact they've been screaming for me."

"Why didn't you let yourself be found?"

"I wasn't ready. I don't know what the guy had in mind when he placed the bomb, and I don't want him to find out I've lost my memory. I'd just as soon he kept on thinking I knew what I'm supposed to know. If I go to the cops they'll catch me out in a minute, and then everybody'll know I'm an amnesiac."

"But you'll have to talk to them sometime."

"Right. But on my own terms. I'm visiting an old friend of mine, named Carnahan, in the morning. At least I'm told he's an old friend. I'm going to ask him so many questions he won't have any time to ask me any. Then I'll get out of there before he knows what happened."

They had finished Benedictine and brandy by this time. Marion looked across the table to Rush.

"Since this was something of a haphazardly arranged evening, I don't suppose you've any plans for the rest of it."

"I hadn't given it much thought, but I do have an idea."

"I'm extremely suggestible."

"That can be carried too far. But what I had in mind was a visit to a joint I find I own a piece of. They have excellent rye whiskey made by a Mr. Overholt, which I find I am very fond of. The joint is known as Barney's," he added.

"It sounds intriguing. I'd like to meet your Mr. Overholt rye whiskey."

A CAB took them to Barney's and the well padded proprietor led them to a back booth. He leaned over to talk in a confidential whisper that shook the walls of the booth.

"They's a guy in a sailor suit up front been asking for you. Never saw him before."

Rush craned his neck. He could see nobody in a sailor suit.

"Asking for me by name?"

"Well, not exactly. He was hinting around, tryin' to pump me. I didn't tell him nothing."

"Point him out to me," said Rush. "Only don't let him see me."

Barney led the way to the shadowy end of the bar and from behind a post reaching from the bartop to the ceiling pointed out a man in the uniform of the Merchant Marine sitting alone in a booth toward the front. Rush looked at him steadily for a long moment.

"Never saw him before in my life," he said.

"D'ya wanta talk to him?" asked Barney.

Rush shook his head slowly. "No," he said. "Don't tell him I'm in here." He walked slowly back to the booth and sat down opposite Marion. He looked up at her, and there was a thin haze in the air between them. The needle which had left off its jabbing at the base of his skull was back again. Rush knew he had not told Barney the exact truth. What he should have said was that he had never seen the sailor before in this particular phase of his life. The sailor came from behind the curtain that shut off everything before he had awakened in the hospital in Des Moines.

"Look," he said to Marion. "When I dropped my memory I picked up a set of headaches that only time can whip. One of them just blew up. Would you mind if I took you home?"

"Very much," said Marion. "I'll take myself home. Or better yet, I'll take you home. You look like it would be more than a one-man job."

Rush was beyond protesting. He only insisted that they leave by the back door. Barney went ahead and found a cab which minutes later left them in front of Rush's apartment house. The clerk at the desk handed Rush the key to another apartment and explained that his would be ready in a week or ten days. He added that the building superintendent would like to see him.

Marion guided him to the elevator and

led him to the new apartment. With an almost masculine efficiency she undressed him and put him to bed. She switched out the light and stood for a moment looking down at him in the light reflected from the living room. Then she turned and left. At the desk in his room she stopped long enough to write a note, which she propped up against the telephone. Then she turned off the lights and left.

VI

THE NOTE SAID: *Thank you for a lovely evening, and pardon me for rushing off. I'm going to take care of some business you forgot.*

Marion

Rush ran his fingers through rumpled hair as he read the note. The headache was gone, but his memory of the previous evening was vague, as though the very act of remembering was a new one and not yet perfected. He remembered the headache and the fact that Barney had mentioned a sailor. Also that he had looked at the sailor from a hidden vantage point. He knew there was a connection between the headache and the sailor and reason told him that the sailor must have come from behind his curtain. Beyond that he could not go.

His wrist watch gave the time as nine o'clock when he took it off for his shower. It was ten thirty when he finished breakfast and headed for the *Express*. Smoky was waiting for him in Pappy's office. He took his feet off the desk and stood up as Rush came into the room.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Just a minute," said Rush. "I've got to check something with Marion. Call her, will you, Pappy?"

She answered the buzzer and nodded at Smoky. Turning to Rush she asked. "How's the head?"

"Foggy," admitted Rush. "Tell me about last night?"

"Drunk again?" asked Smoky.

"No, headache. I folded early. I'm trying to remember the events leading up to the event."

Marion gave a factual report of their evening, but had told him nothing he hadn't remembered. He recalled her note. "What business did you take care of that I forgot?"

Marion shook her head. "Sorry, I was too late. I wanted Barney to have that sailor followed. But by the time I got back the sailor was gone."

"I should have thought of that," said Rush, his thumb and forefinger massaging his chin. "I slipped there."

"You were knocked out ten seconds after you saw that sailor. By the time you got back to the booth, all you were up to was a quick trip to bed."

"And you put me there. Thanks," said Rush, meaning it.

"That's a nasty scar on your shoulder," said Marion and stopped, blushing.

"Thanks," said Rush again and felt his own face get warm.

"Just let me know if there's any little thing I can do for you," she said, retiring in confusion. "I'm sure there must be something I should be doing somewhere else." She picked up a file of papers from Pappy's desk and left the office.

Smoky shook his head resignedly.

"Every guy in the office makes a play for that chick and what they get is a cold shoulder. You walk in, and there she is in the palm of your hand." He hitched his trousers an inch or two up toward the outer circumference of his generous girth. "Come on. Let's see Sam Carnahan."

In the cab Rush briefed Smoky in a plan of attack that would keep his condition a secret. He impressed on him that any suggestion relating to facts that came from behind his mental curtain must be answered by Smoky, even if he had to push his way into the conversation.

CARNAHAN kept them waiting in an outer office for a quarter of an hour and then greeted them from his chair behind a desk.

"I kept you stewing out there while I got my temper under control. I should throw you in the can."

Smoky opened his mouth to speak, but Rush stopped him with a nod.

"Sit still, Sam. You can't jug me. I'm the injured party. It was my apartment that got bombed. Remember? Can I help

it if your flatfeet can't find me?"

"Find you?" Carnahan screamed. "Why in hell should they have to find you? You should have been right there to give them anything you had. What kind of cooperation do you call that? Disappearing right after you're bombed out of house and home. Hiding out over night."

Rush shook his head slowly from side to side as if in sorrow.

"What a cop. What a police force," he said. "Not a single man in the lobby last night when I came home. Not a stake-out in sight. I have to come in to headquarters to volunteer what little information I have."

Carnahan was apoplectic.

"You mean you stayed in that apartment last night?"

"Almost. It was just one floor up."

"I'll have that Brady's buttons. I'll break that no good flathead if it's the last thing I ever do."

"Aw, take it easy, Carnahan," Smoky added his first words. "He was probably out drinking a fast coffee."

"Sure. And let this so-and-so slip in past him."

"I didn't slip in. I walked in. And if you mean what I think you mean by so-and-so, I'm not that either. Calm down. I'm here now. What do you want to know?"

Carnahan leaned across the desk, all business.

"What were you on, Rush? What were you doing that somebody planted a pineapple under you?"

Rush shrugged his shoulders.

"I haven't got the faintest idea. If I had I'd tell you."

"You would, in a pig's eye. You never tell anybody anything. Give me a break, Rush. Good Lord, man. I can't just pass it up and forget it. I gotta show something. Give me a lead."

Rush pursed his lips and looked thoughtful. Finally he leaned across the desk.

"Look, Sam. I've never given you a wrong steer yet. Let me play this out. Give me a little help and I'll drop something in your lap that'll put you in with the Commissioner for the rest of your life."

"I knew it. I knew it. It's the same thing all over again. You got in the middle of a big one and you won't let go. You won't tell me anything. I gotta turn over the whole damn force to you to run errands, and then when you're good and ready you'll drop a hint. Dammit! That's not the way you run a police department, and you know it."

"I don't want you to turn over the force to me. All I want is a little information that I can get somewhere else if I have to. You can give it to me easier and faster. You've got nothing on me and I don't owe you a damn thing. If you don't want to play ball, say so. I'll peddle my own papers and let you pick up the pieces."

RUSH leaned back in his chair and lit a cigarette. He didn't know why but he knew he had Carnahan with him now. He had the feeling that he'd gone through all of this before.

Carnahan said:

"It's the same way every time you get mixed up in something, Rush. It always turns out to be something big and we always have a battle about it and you always win. Sometime you're going to tell me something before the last dog is shot, and I'm gonna drop over dead. Okay, what do you want to know?"

Rush puffed a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling.

"Not much. Just a little dope on a guy named George Marshall Simon."

"Hell, he's been dead a week."

"I know," said Rush, still gazing at the ceiling.

Carnahan looked at him closely, his eyes beginning to narrow.

"What have you got anyway?" he asked.

"Not a damn thing, yet," said Rush. "I'm fishing."

"I know you're fishing—you're always fishing. But you've got something."

"What makes you think that?" asked Rush.

"Nothing, except that you come in asking about an accident case. That's not unusual, except that you're asking the head of the homicide squad who never touches accident cases." Carnahan snorted. "If

that isn't enough let me add that you're asking about as smelly an 'accident' as this homicide man ever stuck his nose into."

"That bad?" asked Rush casually.

"Worse. It was open and shut accident, but it happened on a clear night in a mechanically perfect car to a perfectly healthy man. He was checked two days before. It happened on a road he'd driven over a thousand times, and in clear view of a string of cars. He just calmly drove straight ahead when he should have turned. There was a cliff there—that's all, brother."

"How fast was he going?" Rush still seemed just barely interested.

"Pretty fast, according to witnesses."

"How many witnesses?"

"Several dozen. The road was crowded."

"Who got to him first?"

"Couldn't find out. There must have been twenty or thirty just come and some had already left. Nobody knows who was first."

"Did you print the whole car?"

"Wouldn't have done any good. It was on its side and ten or twelve guys pushed it right way up."

"Well, that's that," said Rush.

"Did you get everything you wanted?" asked Carnahan with heavy sarcasm.

"Mmmm, not quite. Glad you reminded me. What's with this new daughter, or rather this old daughter that just turned up?"

"What do you mean, 'what's with her'?"

"Did you check her? How did she feel about the accident? Where was she? Where did she come from? Is she a phony?" Rush smiled an ingratiating smile across the desk at Carnahan. That worthy gritted his teeth.

"And why in hell should we check her when it was an accident, as any fool could plainly see?"

RUSH stopped grinning. "Because you're no fool, Sammy, and because an accident bloodhound like you is not going to let an accident as phony as this slip past without keeping an eye on a brand new heir who could be as phony as the accident."

Carnahan threw up his hands.

"Okay, I give up. I'll let you keep the secret. I'll be the sucker who shoots his mouth off all the time. Sure, we checked her clear back to Tulsa, Oklahoma. We've had a man on her and a maid in the house for a full week. The commissioner would have a set of broken dishes if he knew about it, and he might be right. We haven't got a thing. She's clean as a hound's tooth."

"Okay," said Rush, getting to his feet. "Thanks a lot, Sam. When I get something I'll bring it to you."

Sam looked up at him sadly.

"I should of known. I thought maybe this once if I gave you everything I had you might tell me what it was all about. I guess I'll never learn."

Smoky, who had been quiet for too long, stuck in his oar.

"Hell, Rush's been holding your job for you for two years. Lay off him. He'll hand it to you in a package."

"Quiet, Smoky," said Rush, noting the flames rising around the Carnahan collar. "Thanks again, Sam." He turned for the door, then stopped. "Oh, yeah. I hear that Simon hired a private eye to check his daughter. Who'd he get?"

"Todd was on it for International. Our men checked with him after the accident. He said the girl looked okay to him."

"Well, thanks. Be seeing you, Sam."

Smoky held the door and they walked into the corridor. Rush looked back to see that the door was completely shut, then turned to Smoky.

"Do I know this Todd?"

Smoky shook his head from side to side.

"Is this a gag, Rush? This amnesia, I mean?"

Rush looked surprised.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You never missed a trick in there. You talked Carnahan's language like it was second nature. You didn't need me. You had him going from the minute you walked in. I don't get it."

Rush smiled at the big man.

"I don't get it either, Smoky. I find myself using words I never knew existed, and using them right. I understand what Carnahan says. I don't know where I got the questions I asked him, but they

turned out to get me just what I wanted to know. I must have some mental patterns still intact."

"You sure must have."

"Now, how about this Todd guy?"

"That's what stops me. You've known him since you first came to Chicago, probably. He was in Weston with you when his pal Mickey got himself knocked off saving your skin. Between you you blasted the town wide open, and cleaned up as neat a group of rackets as I ever saw."

"Weston?" asked Rush.

"Sure, thats' your home town."

Rush stopped dead in the hall.

"It just occured to me," he said in a muffled voice, "that I might have parents and brothers and sisters."

Smoky shook his head.

"Nope. You're a lone orphan. You ain't got nobody except a couple hundred friends and an assorted bunch of blondes, brunettes and redheads."

Rush mopped his forehead with the palm of his hand.

"Okay, let's skip it. I've got too much else to think about right now without worrying about friends and relatives. You can give me a fill-in some other time. Where is this International outfit that Todd works for?"

"It's on the way to the office. I'll take you now."

In the cab Smoky described Jim Todd and his boss, both of whom were old friends of Rush. He gave him a brief sketch of the Weston affair and tried to estimate for him how he would greet Todd and how long it must have been since he bad seen him.

THE CAB drew up at an office building on Madison. They took an elevator to the tenth floor and entered an office whose glass bore the name *International* with no elaboration. A girl behind a reception desk smiled at them.

"Who'll it be, Mr. Henry?" she asked.

"Jim Todd, please," said Rush.

"He's in his office," she said.

Rush looked hopefully at Smoky. He was in luck. Smoky knew where the office was. He led the way down a hall to a glazed glass door marked, *Jim Todd, Chief Investigator*. Without knocking he pushed it open and walked in. Following him, Rush saw a tall, lanky man with a shock of sandy hair topping a battered face spattered with incongruous freckles. The vague picture of a private detective Rush had been framing in his mind took a beating. This man looked like a street car conductor.

"Sit down," said Todd over his shoulder. "I gotta find something in this file, and I'll be with you."

He busied himself for a minute then took a paper from a manila folder and threw it on his desk. He sat down behind the desk and looked up at them.

"What's on your mind, Rush?"

"Information."

"I know. You always want information. What do you want that somebody else paid us to find out?"

Rush grinned. Not at Todd, but at the character these very different people were giving him.

"It's the Simon thing. What did you get on the girl?"

"What's it to you?" It was a simple question, not a challenge.

"Tell me what you got and I'll tell you why. I don't want you adding my stuff to yours as you go."

"Okay," said Todd. Rush gathered that it might be a long story from Todd's look of concentration. "Simon called in the old man three years ago. Told him he'd lost his wife and daughter in a shipwreck just before coming to Chicago. Seems he'd made a small fortune running a pearl schooner in the South Pacific, and was on his way back to retire. They got caught in a big blow and the next thing he knows he's in an open boat with another guy. They're picked up a couple of days later and brought to Frisco. He went back when he got his health back, and looked but no can find."

"What became of the pearls when he hit the water?" asked Rush.

"Had them in a sack around his neck. Must have been a pretty good size sack because there was almost a hundred G's worth of pearls in it. He came on to Chicago and drowned his sorrows in the stock market. It was pretty good drowning be-

cause he stands at about ten million right now."

"What sent him to you?"

"Well, when he finally gave up hunting he started inserting an ad in West Coast papers and in the union magazines for sailors and dockworkers and the like. It kind of got to be a habit. They'd always run the ad and just send him a bill every so often.

THEN about three years ago he got an answer. A sailor named Macy with the Merchant Marine had been blown out of a ship in the same waters as Simon. He got to an island in a canvas raft and the natives took care of him.

"The missionary on the island was very friendly and they did a lot of talking before somebody turned up to save Macy. The missionary told him that he was the third white person besides himself to land on the island. The other two had been a woman and her daughter from another shipwreck. The woman was unconscious and died shortly after arrival and the missionary had cared for the girl for almost a year before a coastal skipper had taken her off and arranged for her passage to Frisco, where the missionary's church maintained an orphanage.

"The sailor didn't think anything about it till he got back in Frisco himself and all at once remembered Simon's ad, which he'd seen a thousand times. He checked and it looked like a good thing to him, so he wrote Simon. Simon called the Old Man and the Old Man put me on it."

"What did you do?" Rush forgot to smoke the cigarette that dangled between his fingers, in his interest in Todd's story.

"Well, I checked on the island and found that the Japs had it. They got there a couple weeks after the sailor left. I checked on Macy and he'd disappeared. Shipped out probably, although there was no record of it. Then I checked on the orphanage. It had burned down in '29 with all the records, but I found an old girl who had worked there and she remembered a girl who had come to the orphanage under those circumstances and had been adopted by a family who later moved to Oklahoma. She thought their name was Carr."

"Was it?" asked Rush.

Todd nodded. "Yeah, I found them in Keystone, Oklahoma, a little town at the fork of the Cimarron and Arkansas River. Actually I didn't find them. They were dead, but people remembered them and their adopted daughter, Ruth. I traced her to Tulsa where she worked for an oil company, then to Des Moines where she worked for an insurance company. I found her there and brought her to Chicago. Simon identified her by a locket she had that had belonged to her mother. It looked open and shut to me."

"No faint smell anywhere?" asked Rush.

"Not a sniff." Todd touched a match to the stub of his cigar. "As a matter of fact, the girl is advertising herself right now. She wants to find the sailor Macy, so she can reward him for finding her."

"How about the accident that knocked off her old man?" asked Rush, his eyes on Todd's face.

Todd was slow in answering.

"Now, there you have something else. I didn't have anything to do with it, but I talked to Carnahan, and it sounds a lot like somebody did a job. A damn good job," he added.

Rush frowned in concentration for a long minute.

"What about the girl? Would she do that kind of a job?"

"That," said Todd, "is what Carnahan wanted to know. I'll tell you the same thing I told him. No. Double no. She's a sweet innocent kid who wouldn't know how to rig a deal like that if she ever got the idea in the first place. The answer is 'No', or I'm in the wrong business."

"Okay," said Rush. "That's good enough for me. I'd be the last guy in the world to say you were in the wrong business."

"Now," said Todd, "how about you? What's your angle?"

THIS was the moment Rush feared. He had bluffed Carnahan and made it stick, but this was different. He didn't have the excuse that Todd was a public official who shouldn't hear certain things too soon. Smoky's eyes were on Rush,

watching to see how he would handle this.

"It's a tough thing to explain," said Rush, "because I don't know very much myself. The main thing is that Simon came to me a few days before he was killed and hired me to investigate his daughter. Something put his back up, and he wanted her checked."

"What was the rub?" asked Todd quickly.

"He wouldn't say," said Rush, not knowing if it was the truth or not. "He just wanted her checked by an independent investigator—someone who had no connection with the thing before. I went to Des Moines as a start and began nosing around. Before I found out anything for sure somebody gunned me on a side street and I woke up in the hospital." He pushed the hair back from the angry red streak just above his temple. "It was a very near miss. When I got out of the hospital I came back to Chicago and lay low for a while. Then some guy wants to hire me and makes a date to meet me in my apartment so no one will see us together. I get there late and the apartment blows up. It ruins the apartment but I'm okay. Now I'm mad and I can't get my teeth into anything to fight back at."

Todd frowned thoughtfully.

"You sure you didn't get anything in Des Moines?"

"I'd swear I didn't. I cased her room. I hit her boss and the people she worked for, but I didn't get a thing." Rush didn't know that he'd done those things, but they were what he would do now if presented with the same problem.

"I don't like it," said Todd. "Either you found something you didn't know you found, or somebody thinks you got something and doesn't want to give you a chance to use it."

"I've racked my brains till they're ready to fall out and I can't remember a thing." That much, at least was true. He looked at his watch. "We've got to blow, Smoky. Jim, it's white of you to give us the dope, and if you come across anything else, let me know. I haven't got a client now, but I don't want people gunning me every other day for something I don't know." He thought a moment. "Maybe I have got a client at that. Simon gave me a thousand bucks. I think I owe it to the old boy to dig up the guy who rigged that wreck."

"You better figure out how it was done first," said Todd.

"Oh, I got that. At least I know the only way it could have been done. What I don't have is who or why."

He turned and left quickly with Smoky on his heels and Todd staring after him.

VII

ON THE STREET OUTSIDE Smoky looked at Rush in ill-disguised astonishment.

"You mean you know how old Simon was knocked off?"

Rush nodded. "It's really quite simple," he said, feeling like Philo Vance.

They walked a dozen steps in silence.

"You're gonna leave it there, huh?" asked Smoky.

"Right now, yes. I'll tell you later, Smoky. I've got to do something right now. Where's the Library?" he asked unexpectedly.

Smoky stared at him in amazement.

"The Library?"

"Yeah, the place with the books."

"What in hell do you want with a Library? You got some time to kill, so you're gonna read?"

"I haven't got any time to kill, but I'm going to read. Where is it?"

"Come on, I'll take you there. I want to watch this."

He called a cab and directed it to a corner on Michigan Avenue. They rode in silence, Rush obviously deeply immersed in his own thoughts. At the corner of Washington and Michigan they got out and walked up the stone steps. Rush walked to the information desk and asked for help. Five minutes later the clerk was back with an armload of books which she deposited on a table. Rush sat down and searched the index of each book, then settled down to read. It was all very mysterious to Smoky who finally picked up a volume and looked at the binding. It was a textbook in advanced psychology. He stood up and looked over Rush's shoulder.

Rush was reading a chapter on amnesia. Smoky sat down and relaxed, now that he understood. He fidgeted for over an hour as Rush sat deeply engrossed. Finally he could stand it no longer. He leaned over to Rush.

"I'm going outside to smoke. I'll wait for you." His voice sounded abnormally loud in the quiet and he looked around guiltily. Rush nodded absently and Smoky walked outside. Another thirty minutes passed before Rush joined him on the steps.

"Where's the Adams building?" asked Rush.

"Over on LaSalle," said Smoky. "What do you want there?"

"I want to see a guy. Let's go."

"Hey, we haven't eaten," said Smoky in dismay. "It's two o'clock and I haven't had bite since breakfast."

"Okay," said Rush. "You go eat. I'll go to LaSalle. What's the address?"

"Just name the building to a cab driver, he'll get you there. Say, are you sure Pappy won't be mad if I let you go on alone?"

"Never mind me," said Rush. "I'll be safe enough. You go eat. I'll meet you at the office at five."

He got in a cruising cab and five minutes later debarked in front of a new office building. The elevator took him to the fifth floor, where he walked down a hall and entered a door.

"Is the doctor in?" he asked the receptionist.

"Have you an appointment?"

Rush shook his head. "No, but it is rather important. Is he occupied?"

"Not at present, but he never sees anyone without an appointment."

"Would you mind telling him that a man who has lost his memory is outside and would like to see him?"

The girl looked at Rush strangely for a moment then got up from her desk and entered an inner door. She returned a moment later.

"The doctor will see you immediately," she said.

RUSH pushed past the gate in the small enclosure around the reception desk and walked through the door the girl had entered a moment before. He found himself in a modern office with comfortable furnishings. It was not garishly modern, nor was there anything of sufficient modernity to be distracting. It was quiet and comfortable. Behind a large oak desk sat a man of just under middle age. His face was pleasant and his eyes interested as he looked up at Rush.

Rush said, "Dr. Gillette?"

"Yes. Won't you sit down?" He indicated a deep leather chair beside the desk. Rush sat down and leaned back. The doctor sat looking at him for well over a minute. His gaze was not uncomfortable and Rush relaxed, returning it.

"You have lost your memory?" asked the doctor.

Rush nodded.

"Just now, or has it been any length of time?"

"It's been gone for almost three weeks," said Rush.

"And you haven't done anything about it till now?" The doctor seemed surprised.

"The first week I was in Des Moines. Then I was identified, and when I was able to get around I came home to Chicago."

"But you still haven't done anything about your condition?"

"The doctors in Des Moines did what they could. You see, it came as a result of a gunshot wound on my head. It's what they called a physical trauma and would take time to heal. I came home to wait."

The doctor looked at him for another minute. "Why did you decide to come to me?" he asked.

"It has become necessary, in fact urgent, that I remember several things that happened, and several things that I knew before I lost my memory." He hesitated a moment. "You see I am a private investigator and I was on a case at the time I was shot. I have since been bombed. It seems obvious to me that I learned something that I now have lost. I have managed to pick up a few threads of my investigation but some things escape me. In fact I'm not fully sure of what I was investigating."

"Can't you ask your client?"

Rush shook his head. "He has since died under very suspicious circumstances. He gave me a rather large retainer and I feel bound to do what I can to fulfill my part of the bargain."

The doctor seemed lost in thought as he sat looking at Rush.

"What do you want me to do? If your amnesia is from shock there is nothing a psychiatrist can do."

"Maybe I'm misinformed," said Rush, "but I understand that under hypnosis it is sometimes possible to penetrate the curtain in cases like these."

"Sometimes only," said the doctor. "There is no such thing as a sure thing in psychiatry."

"You could hypnotize me, though," said Rush leaning forward.

The doctor nodded. "Yes," he said. "Any practicing psychiatrist can attain hypnosis, given the cooperation of the subject."

"You'll find me very cooperative," said Rush.

The doctor stood up behind his desk.

"All right," he said. "I'll have to ask you to sign a release first, however."

He called in his secretary who brought a blank for Rush to sign. He noted that he absolved the doctor of all liability if anything went wrong. He signed and turned to the doctor in readiness to proceed.

"Now, just what is it you want to learn?" asked the doctor.

"I want to know what a man named Simon said to me in my office on his only visit there, and I want to know what I found out in Des Moines, Iowa."

The doctor's eyebrows had risen at the name Simon. He lowered them now to narrow his eyes thoughtfully.

Rush said:

"I'm not going to insult you, doctor, by asking that what I have said and what I may say under hypnosis remain a secret. But as a number of things including my own skin are at stake—some of them more important than my skin—I would like to ask that even in casual conversation with close friends you never even mention the fact that I have been here."

"That is understood," said Doctor Gillette.

"Then I'm in your hands."

"Lie down here," said the doctor, moving to the head of a couch with a slightly raised head rest. "Lie here and relax completely. Spend the next minute or two concentrating on each separate muscle in your body and relaxing it. Blank everything else from your mind."

RUSH settled himself on the cushioned rest and followed directions. Feet, calves, thighs, abdomen, back, shoulders and neck—he relaxed every muscle he knew he had. He lay with his hands flat on the couch beside him, completely limp.

"Open your eyes slowly," said the doctor. Rush opened them and found the lights in the room lowered. Focusing, he saw that the doctor, sitting behind him, held the point of a silver pencil eighteen inches away from his eyes and slightly above the normal line of sight. He had to raise his eyes against the upper lids to see it clearly. The lids felt heavy. There was a light somewhere behind him that glinted on the silver point of the pencil. The doctor's voice was quiet but somehow forceful.

"Look at the pencil," he said. "See nothing but the point of that pencil." He raised it slightly so that Rush's eyes pushed more heavily against the upper lids.

"Think that you are tired. Remember the time in your life when you were the most tired. You are that tired now. Your eyelids are so heavy they push against your eyes as you watch the pencil."

He moved the pencil an inch toward Rush.

"The most important thing in the world is sleep. Think how much you want to sleep. You're tired. You are sleepy. Your eyelids are heavy—heavier—heavier. You are sleepier, sleepier, sleepier."

Rush's brain felt detached from his body and floating in space. A delicious peace settled over him. The point of light on the pencil came nearer.

"You are almost asleep. When I bring this pencil to within an inch of your eyes you will be asleep. Sleep—sleep—sleep."

The pencil moved and Rush's eyelids fluttered. He fought once to open them to

see the pencil, but it was much too hard. He closed his eyes.

"You are asleep," said the doctor.

He was.

The doctor spoke softly to him asking, probing, returning to the same question, asking again. Rush spoke in a disembodied voice—spoke a word now and again. Finally the doctor put his hand on Rush's forehead.

"When I count three you will be awake. One—two—three."

Rush stirred. His eyes opened, shut, opened again. He rubbed them and looked around. The doctor pushed a switch and lights came on in the room. Rush turned and put his feet on the floor.

"Well?" he said.

"Who is Sheehan?" asked the doctor.

"Sheehan?" said Rush. He turned the name over in his mind, saying it, testing it, getting the feel of it. "So far as I know, I never heard of anyone of that name," he said.

"You're wrong there at least," said the doctor. "I couldn't get much from you. But when I mentioned Simon you always mentioned Sheehan. It was a reflex of some sort. Sheehan is connected with Simon in some way."

Rush shook his head.

"It doesn't mean a thing yet. What about Des Moines?"

The doctor shook his head now. "Not a thing, I got a reaction. You grimaced and backed away from the name, but not a word. You were the least talkative subject I have ever hypnotized."

Rush let his breath out in a long whistle.

"Well, that's that. Sheehan, eh?" He stood up shaking his head from side to side. "I'll try it out on somebody else. Thanks, doctor. Send your bill to my office." He handed him a card.

They shook hands and he left with the doctor looking after him with unfulfilled curiosity in his eyes.

Rush by-passed the *Express* and went directly to his new apartment. He sat in a chair in the living room and concentrated. He thought until the walls of the room pressed down and became a band of steel at his temple. The headache came and he felt his way to the bedroom where he fell fully clothed on the bed and slept deeply. He dreamed of ships and storms at sea, but never a dream of a man named Sheehan.

Morning brought an anxious call from Pappy Daley. Rush reassured him and made an appointment for lunch. Then he took a shower, dressed and telephoned his office. Positive action gave him a feeling of strength and decision.

"Gertrude," he said, "I'm leaving for Des Moines this afternoon. I think I know what I'm looking for now. If I can flush this trigger-happy character out into the open, I'll have a definite lead to work on. I want reservations on the Rocket this evening and some money. Better give me five hundred. I'll pick up tickets and dough this afternoon. And Gertrude—while I'm gone look through every paper in the office and see if you can find anything on a guy named Sheehan. Now, give me Merwin."

Merwin answered with a "Hyah, boss."

"Merwin," said Rush, "I've got a job for you. I want you to keep an eye on the Simon outfit. Get help if you need it. Keep a watch on the place and see who goes in and out and try and find out who they are. You might make friends with somebody in the house. If you hear the name of Sheehan anywhere near the Simon home, run it down. And if a sailor turns up, follow him. Get everything you can on him. That's important."

VIII

EVENING FOUND RUSH ON THE Rocket, headed for Des Moines. He had lunched with Pappy Daley and given him a full recap, omitting nothing. Without a second thought he had placed complete confidence in this man whom he had known only a matter of hours in his new life.

"Do you want Smoky to go with you?" Pappy had asked.

"No," Rush had said slowly. "I've got to go it alone. If I carry a bodyguard, which is what you want Smoky to be, I'll never draw fire."

Rush couldn't put his finger on the instant that he began to feel uneasy. His first involuntary reaction was to look

around as the sensation grew that someone was watching him. The few solitary diners were occupied with their meals and seemed more than ordinarily harmless people. Annoyed, he drank the remains of his coffee and asked for his check. The uneasiness grew and as he waited for the waiter he found himself drumming with nervous fingers on the tablecloth. Angrily he clenched his fist, relaxed it and forced his hand to lie quietly on the table. The check came and he left a bill on the plate. He looked at his watch. Nine o'clock, less than two hours away from Des Moines. He walked back to the club car and at each step his dinner weighed heavier in his stomach. He ordered brandy at the bar.

"Only beer, suh," said the bartender. "We's in Iowa now. No liquor over the bar."

The thought of beer was nauseating. Rush went to his chair and picked up his briefcase. He carried it to the smoking room and slipped out the pint flask of rye he had stashed there. He swallowed deeply and lit a cigarette, waiting for the liquor to hit bottom. It hit, and burned. No gentle glow but a fiery burning in the pit of his stomach. He felt awful. He forced himself to sit quietly and analyze his feelings. It took time, but he got it. He was afraid. He knew it was an unusual reaction for him, but he knew it was true. He was afraid. He tried to find the basis for his fear. He remembered the feeling of being watched that had come to him in the diner. He remembered the feeling he had had at sight of the sailor in Barney's Bar and found that they were akin. It was possible, he decided, that his subconscious had recognized someone aboard the train—someone whom he had reason to fear. There was only one answer to that. He forced another slug of liquor down his throat and made a journey.

It carried him through the dining car, the four coaches ahead, and back to the club car. As casually as possible he inspected every face in the car. He recognized none of them. No single face altered at sight of him. And not once during the journey did he feel even a subconscious tug of warning. He went back to the club car and sat down. He was trembling as though with a sudden chill. Carefully he considered the facts again and came face to face with the realization that he was afraid to come to Des Moines. Having met the fact he relaxed and the trembling stopped. He closed his eyes and mentally blanked out Des Moines, Simon, Carnahan, Todd and everything connected with them. He forced himself to think of something pleasant, and since the pleasantest thing in his new existence was Marion Dorr, he thought of her.

The Rocket pulled into the Fourth Street station in Des Moines and Rush picked up his briefcase, his bag being checked through. There was quite a crowd getting off and on at Des Moines and the platform was packed with friends and relatives, greeting and saying goodbye. Rush descended into the mob and pushed toward the edge. He was almost free when a hard point jabbed into his back and a voice spoke in his ear.

"Don't turn around, Henry."

Rush stopped quite still.

"Walk straight ahead to the Packard sedan parked just beyond the baggage house. Get into it. I'll be several feet behind you, but don't try to make a break because this gun is loaded and I won't hesitate to use it. Now, move."

RUSH MOVED. He walked purposefully toward the automobile as directed. At his approach the back door swung open and he stepped inside. The driver was facing away from him, with a hat pulled over one eye. He spoke from that position.

"Sit on the jump seat," he said.

Rush noted the seat pulled down and sat on it. A second later another topcoated figure with a slouch hat obscuring its features entered and sat behind him. The car moved away with the slamming of the door. Rush started to turn around and speak, but the movement brought a sharp order.

"Eyes front, Henry, and be quiet. There'll be no conversation."

The car nosed out of an alley and turned right. An arm snaked over his shoulder and felt for a gun. It took almost a minute in that awkward position but the man be-

hind him made very sure that Rush was not armed. They rode in silence for a matter of minutes, passing through a poor section of the city with ramshackle buildings on either side. The street lights were dimmer and farther between.

"This is going to be short and sweet, Henry," said the voice behind him. "No last words, no nothing. I know how you work. Never tell anybody anything till the pay-off. This time there's no pay-off. It's down the chute and out. Step on it, Carl."

The car moved ahead with more speed and broke out of city streets into sparsely settled country. The street lights dropped behind and there were fields on either side of the road. Rush estimated a mile had gone by when the car swerved and turned down a dirt road. They continued for several hundred yards to a place where the road was cut through a small rise. The driver braked the car to a stop and stepped out. He took a gun from a shoulder holster and held it on Rush.

"Outside," he said.

Rush stepped out of the car. Behind him he heard the other man leave by the other door and walk around to stand behind him.

"Over to the side of the road," came the order.

His mind racing furiously, all thought of fear gone, Rush stepped toward the narrow shoulder that separated the road from a small gully cut by years of rain. Far down the road Rush saw dim yellow lights bouncing toward them.

"Hold it, Henry," said the first man. "Wait till this car goes past. We'll shoot if we have to, so don't break for it." He came to the side of the road and stood beside Rush, the gun under his coat and against Rush's side. The car came closer and in the still night Rush could hear its labored ancient engine. In the seconds it took to approach Rush had time to measure his situation fully. He was all done one way or the other. The ultimate description of his position was in the phrase, "nothing to lose."

As the flivver drew abreast Rush brought his elbow back in a vicious swing at the hand that held the gun against his side. It roared and he felt a tug at the muscles of his back as he jumped sprawling across the hood of the old car. Flame spurted twice as he flattened in the V between the hood and fender. At the top of his voice he screamed at the driver. "Give it the gas. They're trying to kill me."

Some miracle made his voice heard over the roar of the battered engine and gave the driver understanding. The ancient wreck shook, staggered, gathered speed and thundered down the old dirt road, bouncing from side to side. Cautiously Rush crept back to the door and climbed over the open tonneau to sit by the driver. Turning he saw the car behind them swinging around and blazing after them. He looked at the man beside him. Leathery face thrust forward peering into the beam of his dim lights, the man bent over his steering gear like a rural Barney Oldfield. As they swung onto the paved highway he spoke to Rush out of the corner of his mouth.

"You better think fast, young man. They're gonna catch us in about two minutes."

"Got any bottles?" asked Rush.

"There's an empty case of beer in back."

Rush was in the back seat in a second. Taking bottles in each hand he dropped them out of the side, strewing them from side to side to cover the road. When they were gone he peered cautiously around the back curtains of the car. The onrushing headlights came zooming toward him, then, just as they seemed to overtake the older car, they swerved, headed for the shoulder clung for a moment, righted, and dropped back.

Ten minutes later, shaking his head over a disconnected explanation, but richer by twenty dollars, the old farmer let Rush out on a side street in Southwest Des Moines. Rush found a neighborhood tavern and called a cab. While he was waiting he ordered a beer and drank it in deep enjoyment. Never again would the thought of beer nauseate him. He could even foresee it superceding rye in his favor.

He knew that something else was true now. The flush of physical fear that had ridden with him to Des Moines was gone.

He knew it was gone for good. This was borrowed time he was living on, borrowed twice within thirty days. Everything from here on was velvet. He could relax and pay attention to more important things.

IX

IN HIS ROOM AT THE HOTEL Fort Des Moines Rush poured iodine on the gash of raw flesh at the small of his back. A matter of an inch closer and it would have plowed his spine. He slugged down a long drink of rye as counter-irritant to the bite of the iodine. Then, completely relaxed for the first time in three weeks, he undressed, showered, and slept a deep, dreamless sleep.

He awoke refreshed, bathed briefly, shaved, redressed his back, put on his clothes and ate breakfast in the coffee shop. He finished the morning paper over coffee and took a cab to the police station. There he asked for Lieutenant Byrne. He was shown to an office on the second floor. Byrne looked up as he entered the office, frowned for a moment, then recognized him. He came around the desk with his hand held out.

"Welcome back to Des Moines," he said. "I hope you're getting better treatment this time."

Rush shook the proffered hand.

"Just barely. I walked out of the railroad station with a gun in my back and missed getting what was in the gun by a matter of a hundredth or so of an inch. If a farmer calls in here with a wild story about cops and robbers in the country, he's right. It's me he's talking about."

Byrne's eyebrows knit in an attempt to follow the trend of the conversation. Rush grinned at the dismay on his face and told him the whole story, at least the part of it that occurred in Des Moines and vicinity.

Byrne reached for a button on his desk.

"Give me a description and I'll have them picked up in twenty-four hours."

Rush shook his head. "No," he said, "that's not quite what I want. I'd rather they were loose. I'm anxious to see what they'll do. I don't think I'm going to get anywhere just nosing around so I'm going to put out a little bait. Legally, I haven't got a thing on them yet. I couldn't identify with anything that would stand up in court, and I would lose whatever chance I have of cleaning up the deal that started the whole thing if they were in the clink."

Byrne was doubtful.

"These guys sound tough. I'd just as soon not have any blood shed in the city limits if I can help it. You better let me put a man on you to cover."

"I'm afraid the men I'm after are too smart for that. It might ruin the whole set-up." He paused. "Can you get me a permit to carry a gun in Iowa?"

"Sure," said Byrne and rang a bell. He issued a brief order to the uniformed policeman who answered and a minute or two later handed Rush a temporary permit to bear small arms.

"Now, what else can I do for you?" asked Byrne. "You didn't come back to Des Moines just to get a pistol permit."

"No, as a matter of fact I didn't. Actually, I'm not sure what I came here for the first time. But I've got an idea and I'm trying to tie it up with some other things I've learned."

Byrne looked at him curiously.

"You don't put out a thing, do you?"

Rush smiled.

"Not much. I haven't got much to put out. I'm going to try and retrace my steps, and see if anything comes to me. About the only thing I want from you is the address you found me at the last time I was here."

Byrne named an address on High Street and came around the desk to shake Rush's hand again as he left.

"If there's anything we can do for you let us know. Glad to help out if we can."

Rush thanked him and walked to the door. He turned with his hand on the knob.

"Does the name, Sheehan, mean anything to you?" he asked.

Byrne wrinkled his forehead in thought.

"Not a thing," he said finally. "Want me to check?"

Rush nodded and came back to the desk as Byrne held a telephone conversation. At its end he cradled the receiver and looked up at Rush.

"Nothing," he said. "We've never even booked anybody by that name. Sorry."

"It's okay," said Rush. "I didn't expect you'd have anything."

He left then and took a cab to the center of town.

IN THE CAB Rush checked a pair of addresses he had written on the back of an envelope. They were Jim Todd's check points in Des Moines—the insurance office the girl had worked for and her home address. He noted with interest that the girl's home address had been a number a few hundreds higher on High Street than the spot on which he had been gunned. He gave the cab driver the address of the insurance building.

An hour later he left the insurance building no wiser than he had been before. He got exactly what Jim Todd had gotten —vital statistics. Age, weight, height, hair and eyes of the girl they had called Ruth Carr. Her comments sheet bore only the brief notation, "Competent and steady." Her references were from an oil company in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

He gave a cab the home address he had copied from the personnel card at the insurance company. As it drove west on Grand Avenue he felt a return of the same feeling he had had in the diner on the Rocket. Not fear, just the feeling of being watched. Twice he turned abruptly to peer through the rear window of the cab. He could spot no follower. If he was being followed it was by an expert. Five minutes later the cab drew up at an address on High Street.

He dismissed the cab and knocked on the door. A maiden lady of anything but tender years answered his knock and ushered him into her living room.

"Yes," she said with relish. "I know Ruth Carr real well. She was a nice girl. Kept to herself. Had no men hanging around although why they shouldn't I don't know, she was real pretty. She'd sit and talk to me now and then and tell me about her work. It was real interesting about how they figure how much chance there is that you'll die and how much they can afford to pay for so much premiums. It sounded just like a gamble to me."

She had more to say about the insurance business but Rush tactfully headed her off. He got her back on to Ruth Carr.

"Like I said, she didn't have no men hanging around so you can see how surprised I was when two of them turned up and was around all the time for almost three weeks."

Rush was surprised, too.

"Two of them?" he asked.

"Well, not at once. The first one was here almost every evening for two weeks. Then he left town and another one came about a week later. Of course he was the one that told her about her father. I was so surprised you could of knocked me over with a feather. Little Ruth Carr a millionaire's daughter. She left the next week and first thing from Chicago she sent me a lovely new dress and the next week a new rug came for the living room. It's this one on the floor." She looked at the floor with pride.

Rush was more interested in the first male caller. The second was obviously Todd. He asked about the first man.

"Well, he was littler than the second one. Stockier, too. There wasn't much to describe about him but he did have a lot to say. They sat in the parlor every night for two weeks with the doors closed talking away like long lost friends."

"Did you happen to overhear what they were talking about?" asked Rush.

"No, the doors was always tight and they talked real low. I never—" She stopped abruptly and looked suspiciously at Rush. "Say, what is all this to you? Why are you asking all these questions?"

"Why, Miss Simon's father was killed in an accident a few weeks ago and I represent the insurance company that held a policy in favor of his daughter. We are just checking to make sure no mistake was made in identifying her. We always have to make an independent check-up when such a big policy is involved."

"More money for that girl?" asked the landlady leaning forward.

Rush felt that he might as well make it good as long as he was spending the funds of a non-existent insurance company.

"The policy is for a million dollars," he said casually.

"My lands think of that. And all her father's other money, too."

Rush nodded.

"I believe she is the sole heir. About ten millions, I hear."

"Oh, my goodness. All for that lovely little girl. I must write her a letter telling her how sorry I am about her father."

Rush had private ideas as to what kind of a letter she would write. Including, no doubt, a mention of other things besides rugs and dresses that would be appreciated. Nothing bald, just a discreet hint. He asked again about the first man. There was nothing more to get from the landlady. Her vague description could fit anyone who was shorter than Jim Todd and that was almost everybody. A jutting jaw, brownish hair, she thought, and maybe blue eyes. She wasn't sure. A blue shirt and brown suit she seemed to remember. Beyond that nothing at all. Rush tried Sheehan on her but it meant nothing. She seemed to remember a neighbor who had had a cousin named McGeehan or Meighan or some such name, but no Sheehan. Rush left her busy with the thought of all the money that now belonged to little Ruth Carr.

He walked several blocks toward town on High Street to reach a cross street that took him the one block to Ingersoll, the main crosstown boulevard where he could catch a cab. As he walked he looked up at a house number and noted that he was approaching the spot where a bullet had bounced off his skull in a dim street at late evening. He toyed with the idea that he might find his lost memory lying around under one of the trees that shaded the sidewalk.

At the exact address he paused and looked at the ground, then up to the house beside the street. He stood as he would have stood when walking and looked back to where the shot must have come from to hit him at that angle. At what he felt must be the exact spot his eyes met an automobile traveling slowly toward him. His reflexes recognized it as a Packard before his conscious mind, and he made a dive for the passageway between two houses. The car picked up speed and shots rang out in the peaceful afternoon air. Rush ducked behind one of the houses, cursing the lack of foresight which brought him to this particular street without the gun for which he now held a permit.

CAUTIOUSLY he nosed around the far side of the house and saw the rear end of the Packard disappearing in a burst of speed. Astonished housewives were sticking their heads out of doors to trace the unusual sound of gunfire. Rush crossed High Street at a dog trot and cut cross lots to Ingersoll where he caught a cruising cab and rode to the hotel.

In the hotel lounge he ordered rye, drinking one fast and sitting over the next. He tried to sort out his thoughts and find some semblance of order in the puzzle that surrounded him.

He wondered what kind of detective he had been. The picture of a private operative that he dredged up from his mind was a cross between Philo Vance and Nick Charles. They always seemed able to take a series of unrelated facts and build them into a neat answer to any question that needed answering. He decided that he wasn't that kind of a detective. As a matter of present fact, he didn't think he was any kind of a detective at all. He had a dozen facts, but no answer.

He had a shooting in Des Moines; a phony accident in Chicago; an attempted murder in Des Moines; and a sailor in a bar in Chicago the sight of whom sent him home with a headache. He had a man named Sheehan whom nobody had ever heard of, either in Des Moines or Chicago. He had another sailor named Macy who had a reward waiting him as yet unclaimed. He had an unknown visitor to Ruth Carr in Des Moines. He had lots of facts and they didn't mean a thing to him.

He decided that he wasn't any kind of detective he had ever heard of before. He'd have to dream up a new kind of detective and be it. The only thing he could think of to do right now was move around and stir people up. Let them think he knew something while he was trying to learn something else. He'd get everybody as close

together as possible and then light a fire under them. He'd catch what boiled over and maybe it'd be an answer. That's the kind of detective he'd be. That was the kind of detective he was, had he, to coin a *cliche,* but known.

That night he bought passage for Tulsa on Mid-Continent Airlines. Tulsa, it seemed obvious, was the place to start stirring things up.

X

THE PERSONNEL MANAGER OF the oil company in Tulsa was in and willing to see Rush. The office was on the nineteenth floor of the Philtower and overlooked the business district with the Arkansas River curving a dividing line between city and the oil industry, with the mammoth Mid-Continent refinery spread along the opposite banks. The personnel manager's name was McLaughlin. He was a youngish, ruddy-cheeked, faintly balding man whose appearance gave Rush to expect a hearty Chamber of Commerce greeting. He got the opposite. A limp and a semi-petulant frown.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Henry?" he asked.

"Didn't the girl give you my message?" asked Rush. "I told her it was in regard to Ruth Carr."

"Oh, yes. I remember now. What did you wish to ask about Miss Carr?"

Rush grinned what he hoped was an ingratiating grin.

"Just about everything," he said. "I hope it's not too much trouble to get her whole history."

McLaughlin put his fingertips together pontifically.

"We don't have a great deal. She came to us from Keystone. Her parents were living then, although I have since learned that they were foster parents. She had references from the banker in Keystone and from a commercial school here in Tulsa."

"That's not quite the kind of thing I'm after," Rush said. "I'd rather get something a little more on the personal side. What kind of a girl was she? What kind of people were her friends? What were her likes and dislikes?"

"I'm afraid that kind of thing lies a little outside of the province of a personnel manager, Mr. Henry." McLaughlin spoke as to a backward student.

"I realize that," said Rush. "But I hoped you could tell me someone who could give me the information I want."

McLaughlin stared at Rush for a moment or two and Rush got the feeling of being measured for a suit of clothes.

"Just what is your interest in Miss Carr?" asked McLaughlin at last.

Rush sighed inwardly and gave him a recap on the same story he had told the landlady in Des Moines. He added a few touches that occurred to him and waited.

"I see," said McLaughlin. Then with a start he leaned across the desk toward Rush. "Surely your investigation doesn't mean that there is any doubt as to her identity?"

"Not at all," said Rush. "It is strictly routine, although in this case, with the amount involved being so large, we are being more thorough than usual."

"Well, I can assure you that Ruth, uh, Miss Carr is the soul of honor. I give you my personal guarantee that she would never be a party to anything that had the faintest tinge of dishonesty."

So that's the way it is, thought Rush. This bloated fathead was in love with her.

"You knew Miss Carr personally, that is, outside of business hours?" Rush asked. He lit a cigarette, looking through its smoke to enjoy McLaughlin's discomfort.

"Well," said McLaughlin with obvious effort, "it's possible that our relationship went slightly beyond the employer-employee stage. She worked in this office for a while and we had dinner several times. I had ample opportunity to form an excellent opinion of her."

RUSH decided that he'd get no unbiased information on this line.

"Why did she decide to go to Des Moines?" he asked.

"I was not fully in her confidence but I was quite content with the explanation she gave. She said that she had been offered a much better job there and felt that she owed it to herself to take it."

"Was it quite sudden?" asked Rush.

"Rather, although she gave the customary two weeks' notice."

"Were you asked for references?" asked Rush.

"Why, yes," answered McLaughlin. "Why do you ask?"

"Don't you think that's rather strange in view of the fact that they made a good offer without them?"

McLaughlin stared at him open mouthed.

"Why, yes that is rather strange," he said. "But I'm sure there's a logical explanation," he added with a rush. He thought for a moment. "Surely, such a minor thing wouldn't be of importance in an investigation such as yours."

Rush grinned. "In an investigation such as mine you are never sure what is important. You just keep looking for things that don't fit in any accepted pattern then try and make a new pattern that they fit."

He stood up and walked to the door. Hat in hand he turned back to McLaughlin.

"Thank you very much for your time. You've been very kind."

After leaving the office he went to his room in the Mayo Hotel. Having been forewarned of the dry state of Oklahoma's laws, he had provided himself in advance with adequate rations of rye. He poured a drink and sat on the side of the bed to think. It was no good. All the thinking in the world would do him no good. The only way he would ever get results was with action. The only problem then was what action. He decided to visit Keystone. The Carrs were dead, but there would be someone there who remembered them. He called the desk and asked about transportation to Keystone.

Late in the afternoon a stage bus landed him in Keystone. Luckily he found the banker who had given references for Ruth Carr still in his office. His name was Galloway. He remembered the Carrs well.

"Old Sam Carr always carried a good balance in the bank. Nothing tremendous, but he always had enough to pay his bills and keep him going. Thought he was going to get rich once. Some oil company optioned forty acres he owned south of here a ways and drilled it a couple of places, but they was wrong. Both dry holes. Now, Ruth, you say," he went on. Rush let him gather steam since he obviously was a monologuist as far as conversation was concerned.

"They adopted her out in San Francisco a long time ago—must have been '21 or '22. She was just a baby when they brought her back here. They didn't say nothing about her at all, just that she was a baby they adopted. Cute little dickens, I remember. Grew up cute too. Never did know much about her though. The guy you oughta see is Mark Pastor. He lived next to them for forty years. He'n Sam was life-long friends. If anybody round here knows anything about the Carrs, it's Mark."

He lit a cigar and offered one to Rush who refused it.

"Mark lives straight out this street that goes by the bank. It's about a mile beyond the edge of town. We ain't got no taxies here so you'll have to walk it but it's nice solid gravel. Can't go wrong. It's first house on the left after you leave town. Carrs was across the road and a quarter mile further out."

RUSH sat out the speech which included a story of the mortgage on the Carr family home which had been paid off by a lucky deal in wheat. Then he left the bank and ate in a tiny lunchroom on the main street. It was seven o'clock and the sun was low in the west as he headed south out of Keystone on a gravel road. Twice he stopped to remove a small stone from his shoe, and his feet were tired from sliding in the gravel when he reached the gate of Mark Pastor's home at seven-thirty.

The man who answered his knock on the door was old with an oldness that was neither weak nor decrepit. His handshake was vigorous and his leathery cheeks tanned by Oklahoma sunshine gave the impression that this same sunshine had acted as a preservative. He ushered Rush into a living room right out of the nineteenth century. He sat him in a chair and asked what he'd have. Rush looked at him in surprise

"I thought Oklahoma was a dry state," he said.

"I've heard mention of the fact," said Mark Pastor. "I didn't put much stock in it. When the stores stopped selling it, I started making it. It took a little time but I've finally got what I consider a fine brand of corn whiskey. I'd admire to pour you a little."

Without waiting for consent he left the room, returning a minute later with a quart fruit jar containing a colorless liquid. He poured two tumblers better than half full and handed one to Rush.

"There's some that requires a chaser," he said. "Can I get you a glass of water?"

Not being willing to admit a weakness, Rush refused. He was sorry a moment later when the fiery fluid hit bottom. By the exercise of great self-control he managed to keep a straight face and to nod when the elderly gentleman asked his opinion.

"Excellent," he gulped. The older man smiled benignly as though receiving only his just due.

"Now what do you want to know about the Carrs?" he asked.

Rush set his glass down gingerly, feeling that any abrupt movement might explode the lethal mixture.

"Everything," he said. "I'll qualify that a little. I want to know everything about their adoption of the girl they called Ruth Carr."

Mark Pastor leaned back in his chair and took a drink of the corn whiskey that made Rush close his eyes momentarily.

"They went to California on a vacation in 1921. Before they left Sam Carr told me that they thought they might adopt a baby while they were gone. They couldn't have any of their own and they wanted one the worst way. They thought it would be a good idea to go that far away from home so the parents of the child, or any relatives of the parents wouldn't be too close. They came back in October with a little girl baby. They said she was right at two years old. I had a talk with Sam. He didn't know much about the baby except that they'd fallen in love with it at first sight. The people at the home in San Francisco wouldn't tell them a thing about its parents, but they said they could guarantee that he'd never hear from them one way or the other. He got the idea that they were both dead. Ruth didn't know she was adopted till she was twelve years old. She took it pretty bad for a while, she was so fond of the old folks. But even then, she was as good a daughter to them as they could ask. Lots of folks own children don't treat their parents as well as she did them."

THE old man gulped down the rest of his glass of corn and Rush followed suit with a tentative sip that almost tore the top off his head. The old man filled a knobbly pipe and lit it, looking over the match at Rush.

"Now, of course, you don't have to tell me why you want to know all this and, of course, I didn't have to tell you. But, I'm pretty sure you're gonna satisfy an old man's curiosity. After all, three separate and distinct people asking the same questions is bound to rouse an old man's curiosity."

Rush leaned forward, sitting on the edge of his chair.

"Three?" he said. "Three people have been here asking about Ruth Carr?"

"That's right. There was a man here about nine months or a year ago, a detective he said he was. He was representing this millionaire in Chicago that is her real father. I told him just what I told you. Got a letter from him a couple of weeks after saying that I had helped in identifying the daughter of a man named Simons. Wanted to give me something for my trouble. I wrote him and told him it was no trouble and not to bother sending me anything as I didn't need anything." He puffed briefly on his pipe. "Ruth sent me a bunch of books she knew I would want a little while later. A mighty thoughtful girl, Ruth."

"I know him," said Rush. "Jim Todd of Continental. But how about the other one? You said there were three."

"Oh, yes. The first one was a couple of years ago. He tried to sell me an encyclopedia and pumped me about the people across the way and up a quarter of a mile. I told him they were dead now and

tenants were farming the place. He pretended to look in a book and said he had been given the name Carr and the information that they might want to buy an encyclopedia for their daughter Ruth. Then he pumped me about Ruth. I just told him what everybody knew. He could have found out some things by asking in Keystone. I guess he thought he had me fooled because he tried again to sell me the encyclopedia. It was pretty obvious though that all he was interested in was Ruth Carr."

"Did you mention him to Jim Todd?" asked Rush.

"Yeah, but he didn't think much of it. He figured I was making a mountain out of a molehill."

"What did this man look like?" asked Rush.

"Well, I'll tell you about that. Without my glasses I can plow as straight a furrow as anybody in Oklahoma, but I can't read a word. I remember I was unhappy as all get out that week because my glasses were broken and I couldn't read a word, and I love to read. I couldn't see that man worth a damn and that's the truth. He was medium height, and kind of stockily built. But I couldn't tell you a thing about his face. It was a blur to me."

DEAD END again. It was the man in the parlor at Des Moines all over again. Rush sighed and drank the rest of the corn whiskey as a supreme gesture of thanks for hospitality. It burned a path of fire to his stomach where it lay in a pool and ate its way toward his bones. He stood up and thanked Mark Pastor for his information.

"Thanks a lot," he said. "I can't tell you the full story of all this interest in Ruth Carr. I don't know it yet, and what I know isn't ready to be told. I'll make a bargain with you though. As soon as I know all I have to know, and it's all right to tell it, I'll write you a letter and give you the whole story."

"I'm a patient man, Mr. Henry," said Mark Pastor. "I can wait. But I'm also an old man, and I can't wait very long. Hurry it up, will you?"

"Just as fast as I can, Mr. Pastor," said Rush with feeling.

"Before you go, I'd like to make you a little present," said the older man. "You're one of the few men I've ever met who can drink my corn whiskey without fainting. I want you to take some with you." He left the room for a minute and returned with a quart bottle filled with the same liquid dynamite. Rush took it gingerly, feeling something like the first man to explode an atomic bomb. He stowed it safely away and shook Pastor's hand.

"Thanks again," he said. "You've been a big help."

Pastor held his hand for a moment.

"I've got plenty of pretty good guesses about what you're after. You look like an honest man, so let me tell you that Ruth Carr is an honest woman, if I know anything about it, and I do."

On the gravel road Rush pondered the last sentence, for almost a mile. Two men, unknown to each other, and neither interested personally in what he was after had made a definite point of establishing the integrity of Ruth Carr. If they were right it added another troubling fact to the list he had made for himself at a bar in Des Moines.

His head was down as he held a match to a cigarette when the shot rang out. A hot finger plucked at his sleeve and burned his arm. His reflexes were working perfectly this time. In a single motion he extinguished the match and dove for the ditch beside the road.

XI

RUSH ACTED SOLELY ON INstinct. The momentum that carried him to the bottom of the ditch by the road rolled him over twice. He lay for a moment flat to the ground parallel to the road. In the quiet he could hear steps running in the lose gravel. A second later he was rolling logwise out of the ditch and under the fencing that separated the road from a field of corn. In the corn he crouched and ran crabwise the length of one row. In the time it took him to cross the field three shots whistled through the corn stalks at random. The last felt close, clipping a stalk a yard to his right. Beyond

the cornfield lay a field of grass and scrub oak, spotted with an occasional taller tree and clumps of bushes. Rush made his way into the field and wormed his way into a clump of bushes.

There was a crackling and rustling in the cornfield and in dim, cloud-obscured moonlight, Rush saw a shadowy figure emerge into the grassy field. He dug closer to the earth and breathed from the top of his lungs making as little sound as possible. Footsteps tramped close by his hiding place, faded, and came back. . . . They stopped two yards from the clump of bushes that hid him. A voice, raised just slightly over a conversational level spoke into the night.

"I know you're in this field, Henry. I know you're unarmed or you'd have dropped a shot at me before now. Come out and talk to me and I'll let you go. If you don't I'll get you if it takes all night."

It took only a few words for Rush to recognize the voice he had first heard in a crowded railroad station in Des Moines. It was not a voice he would bargain with. He dug still deeper into the clump of bushes. Footsteps faded and from a distance he heard the man saying the same thing again. He was obviously quartering the wooded meadow to make sure he was heard by his quarry.

Rush took stock of his situation. It was not good. If he lay till dawn the gunman would find him and dispatch him with ease. The nearest house was a good half mile away and Rush had an idea that a stray shot in this section of Oklahoma would not arouse any suspicions. They'd probably find his body after the buzzards made their first visit. That was not for him. The alternative was flight. The cornfield was out because it would be impossible to cross it without making some noise among the brittle stalks. His only way out was a move in the other direction. He'd have to take his chances and move.

Cautiously, inch by inch, he backed out of the bushes. Then on hands and knees he made it to a squatty scrub oak He could hear the gunman some fifty feet to his right talking into the night. Silently he advanced to a tree and peered around it with eyes now well accustomed to the darkness. He made out a dim figure coming toward him. Keeping the tree between them Rush circled as the man passed within ten feet of his hiding place. Rush gave him fifty feet again and moved in the direction from which the gunman had come.

Moving from scrub oak to tree to clump of bushes he covered perhaps a city block before he felt safe enough to stand upright and look behind him. He could see nothing but hazy moonlight filtering through the trees. He started to walk and kept up a good pace for a matter of ten minutes. He came upon a small stream which he followed to its confluence with a larger stream which must be the Arkansas River.

HE NOW had the choice of retracing his steps, or moving upstream, which was the opposite of the direction he wanted to go. He sat on a flat out-cropping of rock and lit a cigarette, shielding the match with his coat. He puffed deeply and leaned back wearily. The moon broke through the clouds briefly and illumined the river. Rush could see the head of an island and beyond the shadow of high banks at the opposite side of the river.

"You're not very smart, Henry," said the voice. It came from behind and above him. "I figured you'd head this way if I went the other. Now you're sitting in a neat little trap. The river on two sides and me on the other."

With the first word Rush had stubbed out his cigarette. Now he rolled off the ledge of rock and worked his way toward the river. He was at the water's edge when a shot rang out.

"None of that, Henry. Get back."

Rush threw caution to the winds and ran into the water diving headlong and plowing under water. He took a deep breath and went under water, swimming as best he could, hampered by his clothes, floating down stream. When his lungs seemed about to burst he slowly floated to the surface and let his head come cautiously out. A shot roared and a bullet splashed bare feet away. He gulped air and went under again. This time he angled his course out into the river, toward the island. Twice he came up for breath and each time a shot rang out and a bullet splashed

dangerously close. Then distance began to tell and Rush swam silently with his head barely out of water. Ten minutes later he was on the island. One last shot rang out as he vanished into the underbrush of the island.

He trampled through the underbrush to the other side of the island, a matter of fifty yards, and surveyed the narrow channel separating him from the high bank opposite. Wading into the water he found it deep and swift. It carried him thirty yards down stream as he swam the twenty feet to the river bank opposite. There he found no foothold and could not even begin a climbing of the bank. He slipped back into the water and let the stream carry him, staying close to the bank watching for a spot where the bank lowered to a point where he could climb it.

He estimated he had floated a half mile when the river shot past the end of the island. Fifty feet further he felt his feet dragging on a sand bottom. At the same time the bank flattened out and he clambered from the water. Water squished in his shoes as he made his way into the underbrush. Fifty yards in he changed his course and moved parallel to the river. He walked that way for perhaps an hour swearing gently to himself as his sodden clothes caught on brambles and branches swished in his face. Twice he fell headlong, tripped by roots of trees bared by eroding soil.

Finally he stopped in a hollow covered by overhanging branches. At the bottom of the hollow he collected leaves, dry twigs, and chunks of rotted wood from a dead tree. Then with a lighter whose cap had half protected it from the moisture he finally got a fire started.

Slowly it leaped into life and cast cheerful tongues of light in the hollow. The branches overhanging and the grassy slopes leading up from the bottom of the little valley gave the illusion of a roof and walls. Rush took off his clothes and wrung them out, then he stretched them to dry. He opened a sodden pack of cigarettes and placed them close to the flames. Then, clad only in his underwear he lay on the ground close to the fire and shut his eyes.

WHEN he opened them, the fire was out and he was shivering in the cold grey light of the false dawn.

Quickly he rebuilt the fire and put on his clothes, first warming them at the fire. The cigarettes were dry enough to smoulder and he dragged deep. The smoke was bitter and burning but he continued to drag on it as he finished dressing.

Rush stamped out the embers of the fire, made a stab at combing his hair, threw his bedraggled necktie in the bushes and turned his collar over his coat, giving himself a faintly Bohemian air. Then with a second fiery cigarette in his mouth he turned north out of his hideaway and left the Arkansas River to tend to its own business.

An hour's journey across fields, through wooded plots, over hills and through meadows brought him to a gravel road, the exact counterpart of the road on the other side of the river. He turned east and began walking.

An hour later he was still walking. Two cars and a milk truck had passed him at what seemed tremendous speeds, throwing gravel and gravel dust at him in a cloud. Each time Rush stod for a moment cursing the motoring public, then returned to his solitary task of putting one foot in front of the other.

At long last, just as he had decided that Oklahoma was populated only by bugs and speed maniacs he came to a farm house. In the yard stood an ancient automobile, vintage and model hidden under coat after coat of paint and dust applied alternately. It looked like a Dusenberg roadster to Rush. That car was going to take him to civilization if he had to buy it. He almost had to. It took a twenty dollar bill to persuade the character who called the farm home to transport him to a town named, of all things, Wekiwa. Another hour and a blowout later Rush was on a stage bus headed for Tulsa.

A room clerk he had never seen gave Rush his key with some misgivings, eyeing his sodden clothes with distaste. Rush gave him look for look and paused only for cigarettes in his hurry to get to his room.

There he did the things he had been dreaming of during the ninety minute trip

into Tulsa. He asked Room Service to bring him two steaks with full accompaniment. He downed a full half pint of rye straight, wondering at the time what had become of the quart of corn whiskey, and climbed into a tub of almost boiling water. There he luxuriated for a full fifteen minutes when, lobster red, he stood up, turned on the shower full blast with icy water for ten seconds. Then he dried, put on pajamas, robe, and slippers and drank a second half pint of the rye. The world assumed a more pleasant aspect as Room Service came with his food.

There was an obvious question in the waiter's eye when he uncovered two meals and could only see one person in the room. Rush, however, waved him airily aside and, as soon as the door had closed, proceeded to eat two steak dinners with ease and pleasure, after which he leaned back in his chair, lit a cigarette and blew smoke at the ceiling. When the cigarette was gone, he lit another, pouring a second cup of coffee from the silver pot. Then he leaned across to the desk beside his bed and picked up the phone. When the operator came on the line he placed a call for Chicago.

XII

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON AND the call went right through. Little more than a minute later Rush heard a familiar voice on the line.

"Daley," it said.

He felt a warm flush because the voice was familiar and he knew that when he identified himself Daley would be glad he had called. The fact that he had friends made his memoryless condition easier to take.

"Hello, Pappy. Rush speaking."

"Hya, boy. How goes it?"

"Just fair. I got bushwacked last night. It was the second time."

"Anything fatal?" asked Pappy.

"Just a scratch both times. I'm getting quite a collection of sore places. There's a thin slice out of the small of my back and a one ounce chunk out of my arm."

Pappy was silent. Then, "You're in pretty deep aren't you?" he asked.

"It looks like it. I can't figure out why it's so all fired important that somebody get rid of me. I know less than nothing, and from the ground I've covered in the last couple of days I couldn't have known much before."

"Maybe Simon told you something that you don't remember."

"That's about the only answer." A thought occurred to Rush. "Will you check the Chicago directory for a man named Sheehan? He has something to do with it. I don't know what, but there's a tie-up somewhere. I'll explain when I get back."

Pappy snorted.

"Do you know what you're asking, man? It would take a corps of researchers three weeks to check the Sheehans in the Chicago directory."

"It's not that tough. You can throw out ninety per cent of them before you start checking. Try the hotels for Sheehans registered during the week Simon came to me."

Pappy was dubious.

"It's too much like needles and haystacks. The hotel angle might give us something, but the directory is too much."

"Okay," said Rush. "Maybe it is too much of a job. But I'm grabbing at straws. I need a lead bad."

"You'll get one," said Pappy confidently. "You always have before." He paused and Rush heard him talking to someone in the room. "When you coming back?" Pappy asked.

"I'm leaving tomorrow. I should be in the next morning sometime."

Pappy repeated his words to someone in the room. The next voice Rush heard was Marion Dorr's.

"I hear you're getting your lily white hide punctured all over the place."

"In a modest way," said Rush. "Nothing serious."

"I'll expect you to bring you back in the original package. I'm accepting no substitutes."

"It may be a little worn, but it'll be me,"

said Rush. "Keep dinner for me night after tomorrow."

"I'll have it warming on the front burner."

"It's a date." He yawned in mid word. "Tell Pappy I'll come to the office the minute I get in. Have him phone my office and tell Gertrude I'm still alive and when I'll be in."

Rush hung up then and yawned his way to the bed dragging off his robe and kicking off his slippers as he went. Thirty seconds after he pulled the covers under his chin he was asleep.

HE WAS awakened by a loud breathing through heavy congestion. It was his own breathing. His head was stopped tight and his throat was raw. When he raised up to look at his watch pain shot from his neck up into his head and stayed. It was five o'clock and he had a terrible cold. He rang for room service and got ephedrin for his nose and musterole for his chest. He took three aspirins, anointed himself and dropped drops in his nose. Then he lay back and tried to rest. It was no good. The cold had settled further into his chest and racking coughs shook him at intervals. By nine o'clock he was thoroughly miserable and wanted only to get home. The hotel desk made reservations for him on an evening train and he spent the day waiting in bed. He dosed himself at intervals with all the medicines he could recall anyone having recommended, including enough whiskey to make him light-headed.

At the train he checked his bags through and took his seat in the parlor car, unfolding evening papers and preparing to read. The train was in motion before Rush realized they had started. He dropped his paper and reached for a Kleenex. Across the cloud of soft white paper he saw a vaguely familiar jut of jaw. He sneezed and looked again. As he looked the head turned slowly and the eyes looked into his. A faint cold smile twisted the corners of the mouth below the eyes. Then with a sinking emptiness in the pit of his stomach Rush realized that he had seen that chin before, and where. The eyes were new to him because they had been hidden by the brim of a hat. The chin he had seen over a topcoat collar and below a slouch hat on a lonely road outside Des Moines. He knew that if the man spoke it would be with a voice he had heard before, a voice he had heard in a cornfield in Oklahoma. The print blurred before him as his eyes watered. He sneezed again and concentrated on his present problem.

This time he was not unarmed, his gun was in a holster at his shoulder. But a train is a bad place for gunplay. He remembered what Pappy Daley had said about innocent bystanders in his vicinity. He wanted no part of flying lead in a railroad parlor car, or anywhere else if he had his druthers.

He got to his feet and walked to the sandwich bar at one end of the car. The waiter leaned across to take his order.

"What's the next town we hit?" asked Rush nasally. His cold had completely closed up his head. His chest was a little better.

"Coffeyville, Kansas, is the next stop, sir," was his answer.

"When do we get there?"

The waiter looked at a clock behind him.

"Twenty-seven minutes, sir."

"How long a stop do we make?"

"Just five minutes."

Rush thanked him and returned to his seat. With as much nonchalance as he could command he again raised his paper before his face and seemed to read. Twenty some minutes later lights began flashing past the windows and the train slowed for a station. He heard a long toot of the whistle for a crossing. The train stopped and Rush looked at his watch. Eight-eighteen. He sat quietly for four minutes and thirty seconds. Over his paper he noticed that the man with the jaw was turned to the other way looking out of the window for a second. As silently as possible he lay down his paper and slipped back up the aisle toward the door. On the car platform a conductor was lowering the iron sheet over the steps.

"This is my station," said Rush. "I was asleep."

"You should have left a call. Don't

know how I missed it. Hurry up there. The train'll be pulling out."

RUSH jumped to the platform and the conductor swung the door shut. The train began to roll and Rush walked with it a few steps. Suddenly he heard a pounding on the train door moving beside him. He looked up and framed in the glass was the face of his nemesis. Rush grinned a sickly kind of grin and waved. The train gathered speed and rolled out of the station into the night.

Rush walked slowly into the station and inquired about transportation back to Tulsa. He was informed that he could catch a bus in thirty minutes. He made the bus and at nine-thirty was again in Tulsa. A phone call got him a reservation on a plane to St. Louis and Chicago. The plane was to leave at three o'clock in the morning. He went to a late movie which soothed him into a sound sleep. He awoke with an usher shaking him at twelve-thirty. A cab took him to the airport.

He sat at a lunch counter sipping hot coffee when the chills came. Gulping hot coffee stopped them for a moment, but they returned full strength. By the time the plane landed he was shaking one minute and burning the next. He knew he was very sick. He took the plane anyway.

Aspirin and hot coffee from the stewardess kept him going until they left for St. Louis, then he began to have trouble with his breathing. He called the stewardess to his side.

"Look," he said thickly. "I'm getting no better fast. Can the pilot call the field in Chicago?"

The stewardess nodded.

"Tell him to have them call Michael Daley at the office of the Chicago *Express*. If he isn't there, have them find him. I want an ambulance and a doctor at the field to meet me. I think I've got pneumonia."

The stewardess felt his forehead and took his pulse. Without a word she went through a door to the pilot's compartment. She was gone fifteen minutes. Then she opened the door and came to stand beside Rush.

"They've talked to Mr. Daley and he'll meet the plane with a doctor and ambulance. Sweat it out, we'll be there in forty minutes."

Rush lay back in his seat and struggled with his breath. It became more of an effort with each breath to draw in the next. There was a tight band of steel around his chest that clamped tighter at each breath. He felt as though he were swimming through air that was not air, as though a vacuum sucked at his breath, snatching away the air meant for his lungs.

The big ship sideslipped into a landing and rolled to a stop in front of the airport buildings. A large red ambulance whirled to a stop beside the door. With speed the airport attendants rolled the steps into place beside the door and curious passengers watched as stretcher bearers entered the ship and lifted Rush from his seat.

The last thing Rush remembered was Pappy sitting beside him in the ambulance. He may have dreamed it, but he saw Marion Door's face floating above him for an instant and it might have been she who held his hand.

WHOEVER held his hand then, it was Marion Door holding it when he had his next conscious moment. There was a dim whiteness around him which he recognized as the walls of a hospital room. He looked at Marion for a long time without saying a word. It hardly seemed worth the effort. It was better just to look at her.

"He's awake," she said.

Pappy Daley came to stand at her shoulder.

"How do you feel, Rush?" asked Pappy.

Rush thought about how he felt. Just back of conscious thought there hung a picture of black stormy nights, with hands reaching, always reaching for him. His muscles felt tired and used as though he had been running a long obstacle race.

"Lucky," he said. "What day is this?"

"Thursday."

"Which Thursday?" He knew he'd been there a long time.

"The next one. You've been here for five days."

"How much longer will I be here?"

A new voice entered the conversation.

"At least ten days."

The voice came from the foot of the bed and belonged to a matronly woman in white.

"You'll be in bed for some time after that," she said. "Now, you two will have to go. The more he rests the faster he'll be up. You were here when he woke up. That's all for this time."

Marion and Pappy made no protest. They left with promises of prompt return, and often.

The days passed slowly and with increasing boredom. Gertrude came twice with office news. Several cases Rush would liked had been offered and rejected. He was still in business. Merwin called, looked at Rush with respect. He seemed impressed by anyone sick enough to go to a hospital. He admitted that he'd be glad when Rush came back and left with obvious relief. Rush could see he wanted no part of a hospital.

The sixth day was finally all Rush could take of a hospital. Overriding everybody's objections he had himself moved to his apartment. The doctor promised a daily call and dug up a nurse for the days. Smoky moved in to keep him company at night. He was well but weak. All he needed was rest and he could get it at home.

Rush and Smoky played cribbage at nights till Rush got sleepy. Thus far he had managed to keep the problem that faced him entirely from his mind. He knew that if he started thinking he would think of nothing else. He was ready to forget it till he could put full time to thinking about it.

His third night home he and Smoky were well into their third game. Marion Dorr had left a half hour before, having brought Rush's dinner and stayed for a drink with Smoky. Rush was dealing and Smoky was in the bathroom adding a drop of water to a half glass of whiskey. Rush picked up his hand and was sorting cards when Smoky spoke from the bathroom.

"On your toes, Rush." His voice was tense. "Don't look up."

Rush kept his eyes on his cards.

"Now, dive off the bed to the floor and roll under. Quick!"

RUSH dived and in the same second Smoky appeared in the bathroom door, his arm back, his hand holding a shaving mug. With great accuracy he heaved it at the window behind the spot where Rush had been sitting. There was a splintering crash of glass, a shot and a bullet that thudded into the ceiling, and a scream of pain from the fire escape landing beyond. Smoky was across the room in two steps. He smashed out the rest of the glass with a fist wrapped in a towel and reached out to the landing. Leaning back he pulled hard and jerked a man into the room. He was a little man with a ratty face, a slim pencil mustache, thick greasy hair, and eyes that were never still darting around the room. Blood streamed from his forehead.

Smoky came down with the edge of his palm on a wrist and a gun fell to the floor. It lit in front of Rush's nose and he picked it up crawling out from under the bed.

"A nice shot, Smoky," he said. "What have you got there?"

Smoky's hamlike hand raised and fell against the side of the man's head. He reeled across the room and slumped against a wall.

"I don't know, but I'll sure as hell find out."

He walked across the room and picked up his quarry. Again he knocked him the length of the room. Then he picked him up and shook him as a cat shakes a rat, viciously. He slapped him across the face with a jarring fist. He lifted him up in the air and slammed him to the floor. He picked him up again and threw him into a chair.

"Okay, who are you?"

The only answer was a whimper.

Smoky slapped him, back and forth, three times. Blood appeared at the corner of his mouth and mingled with the stream that ran from his forehead.

"There's more of that, rat," said Smoky. "Who are you?"

"Angelo." It was a whimper. "Nick Angelo."

"Who sent you?"

A shake of the head. Smoky's hand drew back.

"Please!" It was a wail. "I dunno—I dunno—I never saw him before. He pay me. That's all I know."

"How much?" asked Smoky.

"Five hundred dollar." Angelo's head was on his chest and his words came from far off.

"In advance?"

"Half. He give me the rest tonight when I'm through."

"Where?" Smoky was on him fast.

"Giorgio's—in Berwin."

Smoky was at a phone in an instant. Over his shoulder he called: "What'd he look like?"

"My size, dark hair, maybe brown. Sharp chin."

Smoky dialed a number, spoke several sharp sentences, and hung up.

"There'll be a man here to pick you up in five minutes. Go with him and point out this man. It may make a couple years' difference in how much the judge gives you."

Rush spoke his first words.

"Better fix up that forehead. It's a dead giveaway. The guy'll duck the minute he sees it."

"I'll give you ten to one he never sees it at all. This chump got all he was going to get in advance. The other guy's blown by now. Did you recognize the description?"

Rush nodded slowly.

"Yeah, this is his third try at me. Both the other times he did it personally. I'll show you the scars. He does a better job."

There was a pounding at the apartment door and Smoky opened it to admit two men. They took Angelo by the arms.

"Come along, Nicky. We've finally got you. You must of had bad luck lately to try a caper like this."

They left then, leaving Smoky and Rush alone. Smoky booby-trapped the apartment with some tiny cowbells he found in the drug store on the counter. He pulled all shades down completely and fastened bells to them. It was an effective alarm system.

XIII

THE NEXT MORNING PAPPY woke them with his knock on the door. Smoky let him in. He sat on the foot of the bed looking at Rush.

"Well," he said, "It's about time you climbed off the rack. They're popping more shots at you than a duck in a shooting gallery."

"No innocent bystanders this time."

Smoky looked puzzled as Pappy nodded.

"Your luck will turn. If enough people keep shooting at you somebody will eventually hit you instead of somebody else." He stuffed tobacco in a pipe and took his time lighting it. "What are you going to do now?"

"Get up," Rush said. "I was going to make a stab at it in a couple of days anyway. I'm pretty sure why they're shooting at me. Now I've got to find out who and prove it."

"That should be a breeze," said Pappy. "First tell me why."

"Well, until I went to Des Moines the whole setup was perfect. I'm not sure what's true and what's not true about Simon's daughter, but I do know there's a smell there somewhere. Until I came along nobody noticed it except possibly old man Simon. He called me in to check something he had learned. They made a stab at me in Des Moines. While I was out of the way they knocked off Simon. The cops and everybody else called it an accident. They're all clear if nobody starts nosing around. I start nosing around, they start shooting. It's clear as mud."

"Okay," said Pappy. "That holds together. "Now, all you've got to do is prove it. That should be a cinch for you. You won't need any help from a broken down old newspaper editor. I can go back to my desk and stop worrying about you. Of course, I'd be happy to know how you're going to do it. Just curiosity of course."

Rush looked at him suspiciously.

"Well," he said, "I haven't thought it out yet, but I will. Everybody keeps telling me what a hell of a detective I was—

if they're right, I'll find a way."

"I'm sure you will," said Pappy. He sucked flame into the dead ashes of his pipe. He blew a cloud into the air and peered through it at Rush. He was the picture of unconcern as he asked, "But, you haven't got anything in mind yet?"

Rush shook his head.

"Okay," said Pappy with obvious satisfaction, "I have."

Both Rush and Smoky stared at him.

Pappy puffed vigorously at his pipe, enjoying their regard.

"I may not be a hot shot detective," he said loftily, as though being a detective were several miles below his dignity, "but I have rather excellent connections. They've been at work ever since you first came to me with your story. When you've been in the newspaper business as long as I have you begin to recognize the value of connections. Why, I—"

Rush stopped him with a palm outstretched.

"Not today Pappy," he said. "I'm in no shape for a lecture on the newspaper business."

Pappy managed to look hurt.

"Very well," he said. "I'll come to the point. One of my connections, an old friend and valued advertiser in the *Express,* is Jim Curl. Jim runs an employment agency." He paused and beamed at them.

"That's fine," said Rush, "but I don't need a job."

"That's where you're wrong. You do need a job, badly. And I've got just the one for you. It just happens that Jim has furnished domestic help to the Simon household since it was established. He got a call from them just the other day for a domestic couple. Of course he called me right away and I told him I'd furnish just the domestic couple he needed."

Rush cocked an eyebrow at Pappy.

"I begin to get it," he said. "But, Pappy, who could be the other half of this domestic duality? You assured me I didn't have a wife."

"Oh, I've arranged that nicely" said Pappy enjoying himself immensely. "It's going to hurt, but I've arranged a short leave for Marion. She's consented to act as your wife, solely in the interests of justice, of course."

RUSH had no word for that. He leaned back on his pillow and surveyed Pappy in astonishment. Then he leaned forward.

"There's something you've forgotten, Pappy," he said.

Pappy raised his eyebrows in inquiry.

"They know me. They've been shooting at me long enough to know exactly how I look."

Pappy grinned patronizingly.

"I see I'll have to supervise the whole thing. Of course you've forgotten, but when you were working for Uncle Sam you used something in the line of disguise that beats anything I ever saw. You should have the stuff around here somewhere. You fooled me completely at a distance of three feet."

Rush thought for a moment.

"I know where it is. Look in the bottom drawer of the dresser, Smoky. I found it when I started looking over my stuff. I wondered what it was."

Smoky took a large square box, about three inches deep, from the bottom drawer. Rush opened it and began taking things out. Over his shoulder Pappy told him what they were.

"That's a partial toupe. You paste it at the hair-line and it drops it about half an inch to three-quarters of an inch. Those are contact lenses built for your eyes. You put them on and they change the color of your eyes. They're thicker than ordinary, too. You get a little popeyed with them in."

Rush lifted out a handful of pieces of rubber.

"The little hollow ones fit in your nose and the long round ones go in your mouth inside your cheek along the upper gum. They change the whole shape of your face. Then you take that grease paint and make yourself a little ruddier and you're a new man.

Pappy left then with the air of a man who had accomplished great things.

Rush stood long before his bathroom mirror with Smoky seated on the tub as a critical audience of one. It took him two

hours to disguise himself to Smoky's satisfaction. When he was through he turned away from the mirror for a long minute and then turned suddenly back. The face in the mirror was that of a stranger.

"It's okay, Rush," said Smoky. "I wouldn't believe it if I hadn't watched it myself. Just remember that you're another guy—a guy who works in other people's houses and you'll be all right."

He was all right. Pappy recognized him, having seen him in disguise before, but Marion was fooled completely. She came into the office at Pappy's ring.

"This is Mr. Parker, Marion. Will you take some dictation from him?"

She got out her book and looked at Rush expectantly. He dictated a letter to a non-existent firm, asking them to accept an order for type metal for the *Express*. Twice during the dictation Marion looked at him with a puzzled look but she continued to take the letter. When she had finished Rush stood up and walked to her chair. Leaning over he kissed her soundly before she realized his intention.

"Thanks, toots," he said. "You was swell."

Her eyes were fiery as she looked from Rush to Pappy who was bent over his desk in agony, laughing. Rush grinned and said:

"Don't be backward, dear. We're married now."

She got it then and stood back to survey him from head to toe.

"That's fine," she said. "You're perfect, except for the clothes. Those are too good for the male half of a domestic couple. You'll have to walk up a flight and save ten dollars before you fit the part completely." She looked at him thoughtfully and added. "After this when you decide to kiss me, warn me. I want to enjoy it."

Rush's blush did not come through the ruddy grease paint.

PAPPY had made a two-thirty appointment for them. In the three hours he had, Rush went out and bought a complete wardrobe. It's total cost was one hundred dollars, less than he paid for a single suit for himself. At two o'clock he met Marion at the *Express*. She wore a simple print frock that must have cost all of seven dollars. Her hair no longer perched atop her head and she wore no make-up. Rather her face looked slightly oily, which she admitted came from cold cream insufficiently removed. Her shoes were slightly run over and her fingernails were barren of polish a little dirty, and well chewed.

"That's the part I hated worst," she said. "I had the habit badly as a child. I'm afraid I'll start again."

Rush asked Pappy to call a cab, but Marion shook her head.

"I have a brother-in-law named Johnson of all things. I've borrowed his car and he's taking my roadster till this is over." She handed him a driver's license and car registration certificate. "You are now Carl Johnson, aged thirty-six. The other specifications are close enough to fit."

"What's your name?" asked Rush.

"Martha," she said. "That's my sister's name."

Rush had a last minute thought.

"Look, you can back out of this now," he said. "These people are playing for keeps. You have no stake in this."

"I've got a job," said Marion. "Pappy'll fire me if I don't."

Pappy had his mouth open to object when she shushed him.

"I wouldn't miss it for anything," she said.

"There's another thing," said Rush. "We'll have to share the same room."

"Ah, the fate worse than death," said Marion. "I'll take my chances on both. If you don't snore or walk in your sleep I'll manage everything else."

Pappy looked at her with a jaundiced eye.

"I'm beginning to have a suspicion about how you'll manage. You're a forward baggage. Maybe you'll be the one who'll have to manage, Rush."

"I'll carry a gun," said Rush.

In Carl Johnson's middle-aged Ford Rush and Marion drew up at the Simon home at two-thirty sharp. They were ushered into a rather gloomy living room by a maid in uniform. They waited five

minutes for Ruth Simon to come talk to them. Rush heard her footsteps in the hall before she entered, and looked up with interest. Because of this girl he had suffered numerous indignities to say nothing of the loss of his memory. He bore scars in three places from bullets fired because of her. About her he had heard many stories, all complimentary and from disinterested parties. It was an anomalous preface to a meeting with her.

Rush disguised the curiosity in his eyes as she came into the room. It was more difficult to disguise the surprise. He should have been prepared by McLaughlin's obvious infatuation, and she tallied completely in the files of the insurance company at Des Moines. But that description had not prepared him for Ruth Simon in the flesh. He didn't know what he had expected, but it certainly hadn't been beauty. Ruth Simon was beautiful. Dark where Marion was blonde, taller and more slender than Marion, they were a perfectly complementary pair, or would have been had Marion been dressed and gowned for the meeting.

HER VOICE, when she greeted them, was pleasantly low and absolutely neutral. Whatever her background, she fitted her present situation perfectly.

"You are the Johnsons," she said. "I'll be quite brief because I'm rather busy at the moment. Your recommendations are satisfactory and so is your appearance. Your duties would be general housework with a little supervision of the kitchen and two maids by Mrs. Johnson. Mr. Johnson will be responsible for the yard and all equipment in the house and garage including washing machines and that sort of thing. He will also act as chauffeur when needed. That won't be often as I drive myself most of the time. The situation pays two hundred dollars a month and all living expenses for the couple." She paused and looked at Rush. He decided that this was the place where he accepted or refused.

"How about time off?" he asked with what he hoped was an air of authenticity.

"The maids and cook have Thursday. You will have Tuesday. If a special occasion arises arrangements can be made for changing that. Also most evenings will be free for both of you unless I give you warning in advance that I shall need you."

"That will be satisfactory, madame," said Rush.

"You will call me Miss Simon," said the girl. "And now if you will excuse me, Eloise will show you to your room. I hope you won't mind twin beds. The last couple insisted on them."

That almost did for Rush. With an effort he controlled his lips.

"That will be satisfactory, Miss Simon," he said.

"Very well," said Ruth Simon, "I'll call Eloise."

Eloise, who proved to be the girl who had admitted them, took them to a rear room on the second floor. It had a private bath adjoining and gave onto a balcony that ran the length of the house. Rush brought their bags up from the car which he parked at the rear of the house. Together they unpacked and distributed their meager belongings in drawers and closets. Then they sat on the twin beds and looked across the narrow corridor between them at each other.

"The private bath fixes everything swell," said Rush. "We can dress in there."

"You disappoint me mightily, Henry," said Marion. "I hoped for a pleasurable week or two of fighting you off. Now it looks like you're not even going to make a gentlemanly pass. It's almost as if you were afraid you'd have to fight me off, and I think you would if you had to."

"This," said Rush with dignity, "is business."

"So it is. So it is. But if I catch you making up to the black-haired hussy who owns this joint I'll tear you limb from limb. I saw you looking at her downstairs."

"That might also be business," said Rush.

"It might, but it had better not be. What kind of a wife do you think I am?"

"An illegal one and a nagging one. A bad combination if you ask me."

"A pleasant one, too, as you'll find out," said Marion. "And soon," she added.

They ate dinner in a glass-enclosed breakfast nook that extended from one side of the kitchen. Mrs. Dalmas, the cook, was happy to meet them.

"We've been needing a man around this house for a long time. Not that you won't be a help too, Mrs. Johnson," she said to Marion.

Marion smiled demurely.

Tressa, the other maid, sat next to Rush and flirted when she thought Marion wasn't watching. Rush was not sure, but he thought it was her knee that kept brushing his under the table.

"I beg your pardon," he said finally with a good deal more than the necessary emphasis. He smiled sweetly and moved his chair a fraction of an inch. "I didn't mean to crowd you," he said.

"Oh, don't move because of me," she said. "You weren't in my way."

"Don't mind him, dearie," said Marion with malice. "He's nice but he's clumsy." She kicked Rush viciously in the shin under the table.

Rush changed the subject to their employer.

"A nicer girl never lived," stated Mrs. Dalmas unequivocally.

Eloise came in late and added her opinion.

"She deserves everything she gets," she said. "The old man never said a word from one week to the next, but Miss Ruth's always got a good word for you."

Rush pumped a little but got no hint of any suspicion regarding the accident or Ruth Simon's genuineness. It was all in all a very pleasant meal.

IN THE week that followed everything went smoothly. Several times Rush was called upon to take Ruth Simon somewhere in the limousine and call for her later. Her other trips she drove herself. Then one evening at nine she called Rush from a vicious game of gin rummy with his supposed wife.

"I'm glad you were in, Carl," she said. "I have to go out for a little while and I'd like you to drive me." She seemed strangely nervous.

Rush pondered over her lack of composure as he got out the limousine. She had seemed so sure of herself in his previous contacts with her that this small crack in her armor seemed indicative of a deeper disturbance than appeared on the surface.

In the car she gave him directions that took them to a street corner just out of the downtown district of Evanston. There she had him park and extinguish the lights. Obviously they were waiting for someone. She tapped on the glass that separated them and Rush opened the sliding panel.

"You may smoke if you wish, Carl," she said.

Rush thanked her and slid the panel back into place, or almost into place. In the dimness Ruth Simon failed to notice that he had left a crack of a half inch through which he could hear her nervously slapping gloves into the palm of a bare hand. He lit a cigarette and settled back to wait. Five minutes passed then from the dim street behind them Rush heard footsteps. A hand turned the knob of the rear door and a figure slipped into the seat beside Ruth Simon. Rush caught a flashing glimpse of a jaw outlined against a street light. He leaned back, his head turned away from the rear seat, but his ear to the crack.

"Why didn't you come alone?" It was a hoarse whisper savage in its intensity.

Ruth murmured something Rush didn't catch.

"You know better than that," said the masculine voice. "Too much depends on this for me to try anything like that."

"Why did you have to see me at all?" asked the girl.

"I had to. I've decided the time is ripe for me to appear."

"What about that detective?"

"He's disappeared. That's why I'm afraid. We have to move fast."

"Why do you have to appear at all?" asked the girl. "Why can't I just give you a reward and send you money when you need it after that? You know you can trust me."

"That would be fine, but something else has happened. I got word today that the guy I told you about is back in the country."

Rush's ears moved involuntarily as he

stretched to catch every word.

"What will you do?"

"Keep him away from everybody as long as I can. He'll come to Chicago and ask to see you now that Simon is dead. I'll meet him and persuade him to forget it if I can. If I can't—" He left it in the air.

"Oh, you wouldn't!"

"Wouldn't I? For ten million I'd do a lot worse things than that."

"I want to get out of this. I had no idea it would be like this."

The man tried to calm her. Rush wrinkled his forehead over the murmur of voices, now lowered, in the back seat. Then the man's voice spoke more loudly.

"Be quiet. The driver will hear you!"

RUSH settled further down in his seat with his ear held more closely to the minute crack in the window. The conversation continued at a lower level but Rush could catch snatches now and then. The man was outlining careful plans to the girl.

"I'll make it tomorrow. I'll just knock at the door . . ."

A passing car covered the rest of the sentence. Ruth was speaking when it had gone.

"—but what do I do? How do I act?"

"Just like you've acted all along. Like Simon's daughter. Be surprised. Be happy. Be generous with your dough. Say you're giving me fifty grand or something."

There was a silence in the back seat.

"I don't like it," said Ruth Simon in a small voice. "I wish I was still in Tulsa. I wish I was still Ruth Carr."

"Stow it," said the man. "Just keep your head and it'll all be over in a couple of weeks." He hesitated a moment. "We've got to work fast. This thing may blow up in our faces when that guy gets here. If he comes," he added.

Another car roared past and Rush missed several sentences. Then he caught one clearly—a masterpiece of lovemaking.

"How about a kiss before I go?"

The answer was obviously negative and followed by a brief scuffle. Rush raised up and looked around, putting a surprised look on his face. The bare movement in the front seat was enough. The movement subsided in the back seat. The door opened and the man stepped out onto the pavement. For a brief instant in the streetlight Rush saw his face full. His ears had told the truth. It was the same face that had peered out of the train. The door closed and Ruth Simon rapped on the window. Rush opened it for her.

"You may drive on, Carl. Slowly, please. I wish to think."

XIV

RUSH LET THE CAR IN GEAR and they moved slowly off through residential Evanston. He kept the car from the more heavily trafficked street, driving quite slowly, his mind racing, putting fact with fact. The mysterious "guy" who was now back in the country must be Sheehan. No one else was involved. No other name had appeared anywhere. He had to be Sheehan. "Pull up here for a moment, Carl," Ruth Simon said. "Leave the glass open. I want to talk to you for a moment."

Rush stopped the car at the curb in the middle of a block of private homes and turned to look into the back seat. Ruth Simon took her time about talking.

"I'm sure you are not prone to gossip, Carl," she said at last. "But I would rather that the story of this evening's meeting did not become general property. The young man who met me is an old friend. He had hoped that we might marry at one time but I had never considered it even before my father found me. It's unfortunate, and I had hoped that we might forget each other. However, he followed me to Chicago and I finally promised to meet him tonight. I tried to make it plain that I had no affection for him other than a friendly feeling. I'm sure I got it across but at least it is settled for the time being."

Rush maintained a respectful silence.

"Were you able to see him very plainly?" she asked.

"No, Miss Simon," lied Rush. "The light would have been too dim if I had happened to look around."

"That's just as well," she said with detectable relief. "He was rather upset because I didn't come alone. However I'm very glad that I didn't. You turned around just in time to relieve a very embarrassing situation. I hope I can continue to count on your silence."

"You certainly may, Miss Simon," said Rush. "I won't tell a soul," he said, adding privately, except Marion, Pappy, Smoky and maybe Carnahan.

"You may take me home now" she said.

Ten minutes later he drove under the portico of the front entrance and got out to open her door. In the light that shone from the entrance way he would have sworn that he saw tears glistening on her cheek. He remembered the testimonials he had been given as to her honesty. He wondered if they might not be at least partially right.

Rush gave Marion a full recap on his evening. They were in the twin beds and he whispered across the aisle between them. Marion had a woman's slant.

"She sounds to me as if she were in a bad spot and didn't know how to get out of it."

"Could be," said Rush. "Two guys who never saw each other went out of their ways to convince me of her honesty."

"There's one thing I would like to have heard her say," said Marion. "How did she sound when this guy intimated that he'd do away with this man whoever he is?"

Rush considered the question.

"Horrified, I'd say. She took about a three seconds' pause to get what he meant. Then she said 'Oh, you wouldn't!' "

"She's obviously scared to death of this stranger, or she wouldn't have taken you. It sounds like she didn't know what she was getting into until it was too late. I'll wager she has no suspicion about her father's death, if he was her father."

Rush jumped out of bed and slid into his slippers.

"Where are you going?" asked Marion.

"I should have done this a long time ago. I'm going to give this place the once over."

"What in the world do you think you'll find?"

"Nothing, probably. Anything I want would be in her room but I don't want to overlook anything. Maybe I can get to her room tomorrow."

SILENTLY Rush let himself out into the hall and walked carefully on the balls of his feet to the head of the stairs. There he paused and listened. The big house was sound asleep. Treading softly at the side of each stair he eased down to the first floor. There he paused again, listening. There was no sound. He turned left and walked ten steps to the door to the library. Inside he walked across to a kneehole desk and turned on a shaded lamp that hung over its open front. With a drape from a davenport he shaded it still further so that no light shone toward the windows.

Then silently and systematically he opened each drawer and thumbed through the papers in each pigeonhole. He found a checkbook which he laid aside for the moment. The papers themselves were entirely innocent. No personal letters, nothing that did not pertain to the management of the house. The checkbook was also innocent. It did however bear record of several fairly regularly spaced checks made out to cash for amounts ranging from two to five hundred dollars.

He was putting the large checkbook back in its place when he noticed a crack between pages at the back of the book. He opened it and found a little pad of money order receipts. They were for amounts ranging from two to five hundred dollars. He checked them with the stubs and they matched. For each check drawn to cash there was a money order receipt for a like amount.

Ruth had been sending money to someone. He wondered who. He also wondered if he could find out who. There was a phone on the desk and after deliberating the odds he picked it up and dialed Pappy' number.

That gentleman was irate at being waked in the middle of the night.

"Sit still, Pappy," said Rush. "This is business. Can you check money order receipts to find out who the order was made out to?"

"I don't know," said Pappy after a moment's thought. "I can try. Have you got the receipts?"

Rush read the serial numbers off to him. When he was through he said, "That's all, I guess. I haven't got much, but if the papers get a call to cover a story at the Simon residence, send Smoky. The long lost sailor is due to turn up tomorrow or the next day."

"What do you mean you don't have much? That sounds like quite a little to me."

"It is and it isn't, Pappy. I can't put my finger on a thing. Not an ounce of proof. Carnahan would laugh at me if I asked him to pick this guy up. I'm afraid it calls for a little more pushing around." He started to say good-bye, then remembered something. "You can stop looking for that Sheehan in Chicago. He just got into the country this week."

"That's just fine. Now my staff can go back to putting out a newspaper. Who the hell is he anyway?"

"I haven't the faintest suspicion. I think he put the bug in Simon's ear that sent him to me. I know this guy is afraid of him. You'd better check the plane reservations. He'll be on the spot the minute he gets to Chicago and I want him protected."

"That's a little better. I don't have to check the whole city of Chicago now. Just a few thousand with plane and hotel reservations. Do you have any idea how many hotels there are in this town?"

"I'll look it up. This is important, Pappy. Hire a couple of boys. I'll pay for their time."

"You'll fly, too, if you grow wings. This is news. The *Express* will handle it." Pappy started to say good-bye. Then a question occurred to him. "Any idea who this long lost sailor is?" he asked.

"No, except that he's the guy who's been popping shots at me all over the middle west. If my information is right, his name should be Macy." Pappy started an explosive sentence. "No, Pappy. I told you I can't prove anything. Besides, he's my only angle. I've got to leave him on the loose a little longer."

"How's your disguise working?"

"Fine, seeing that nobody here ever saw me before. The big test will come when this Macy gets here. He's had several glimpses of me."

"On you toes then, sonny. He's playing for keeps."

"That's for me," said Rush. "Now I'd better get off this phone. It's an extension and anybody could listen. I'll call you again when I can and check on those money order receipts."

"How are you getting on with your wife these nights?" asked Pappy with a vocal sneer.

"We've got twin beds, you old lecher," said Rush and hung up.

HE replaced the drape on the davenport and turned off the light above the desk. As silently as he came he returned to his room. Marion was still awake.

"Did you find anything?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Rush. "I talked to Pappy on the phone, though." He told her of his conversation. She was silent for a long minute after he had finished.

"He's right somebody is playing for keeps," she said quietly.

"They certainly are and I wish you were out of this."

"Don't worry about me. You're the one who's on the spot."

"It won't be much longer," said Rush. "I have an idea things are about to happen Get to sleep and we'll kick it around again in the morning." He turned over on his side and shut his eyes. Marion raised one arm in the gloom and looked pensively at Rush's dark head outlined against the pillow in the dim light cast through the window by the moon. It was quite a long time before she lowered her head to the pillow and dropped off to sleep.

The alarm clock woke them at seven thirty. They were not scheduled for breakfast till eight thirty but it took them a little longer to get ready in the mornings since dressing was done in the bathroom and took a longer time.

After breakfast Rush made his daily inspection tour of the house, wondering as he went what he would do if anything went wrong with the machines and equip-

ment he was supposed to be maintaining. Everything was in order. He spent an hour polishing the limousine. As he was finishing Ruth Simon got out the roadster and left the estate. Immediately Rush returned to the house and found Marion in the kitchen enjoying a second cup of coffee. He signalled her to follow him. In the downstairs hall he whispered to her.

"Keep a lookout for me. I'm going to give her room the once over. Come up to the top of the stairs and wait. If anyone comes upstairs, greet them with a loud hello. I'll leave the door open a little and hide. If it's Ruth, stop her and talk for a minute while I get through the French window onto the balcony and back to our room."

Marion nodded that she understood and followed him upstairs. Rush listened a moment at Ruth Simon's door, then boldly pushed it open and closed it behind him, leaving a small crack through which he could hear any warning from Marion.

He gave this room the same careful scrutiny he had given the desk downstairs. The dressing table and bureau gave no hint of anything but a young lady of expensive tastes and the money to satisfy them. He carefully returned everything to its original place and turned his attention to the beds. There was nothing under the pillow or mattresses. In the bottom of a suitcases under a corner of loose lining he found the only thing he could legitimately call a clue. It was a yellow telegram addressed to Ruth Simon. It had been handed in at San Francisco a month before.

Check all mail to Father from San Francisco. Destroy all letters.

IT WAS unsigned. Rush replaced it in its hiding place and returned the suitcase to its closet. His clue, such as it was, was merely confirmation of a guess and not full confirmation at that. He had suspected that Sheehan had written something to Simon either casting doubt on the identity of his daughter or on the good faith of the sailor who had originally set him on her trail. He still didn't know what Sheehan knew. Obviously a letter from Sheehan had reached Simon, but letter and contents were now lost. Rush considered the possibility of searching Simon's office for the letter. He discarded it as impractical, not being a really first class burglar, so far as he knew. He'd have to ask Pappy if first run burglary had been among his pre-amnesia accomplishments. He left the bedroom and motioned Marion to follow him to their bedroom.

"Nothing there," he said when the door was closed behind them. "I got a little confirmation on a guess, but that's all. We'll have to wait till the sailor turns up."

He didn't have to wait long. Ruth Simon returned for lunch and at two o'clock the chimes rang indicating someone was at the front door. Eloise opened it and called her mistress. A few seconds later she was in the kitchen.

"He's here," she said, her voice trembling with excitement. "I listened for a minute. It's the sailor who helped Mr. Simon find her. He's here to claim his reward."

"What does he look like?" asked Tressa.

"He's young. At least he's not very old," said Eloise. "He's got brown eyes and dark brown hair and he's kind of good looking. Like George Raft kind of."

"What'd he say?" This from Mrs. Dalmas.

"He said 'Miss Simon, I believe you've been looking for me. My name's Tom Macy. I wrote your father a letter a year and a half ago that started him looking for you.' She looked at him for a moment then she said 'I certainly have, Mr. Macy. I owe a great deal to you.' Then she took him into the library and shut the door."

Rush looked at Marion as though to say, this is it. Then the door to the kitchen opened and Ruth Simon came in.

"I suspect Eloise has told you about Mr. Macy," she said. "I've called the newspapers and expect several reporters here in a few minutes. Will you arrange some refreshments, Mrs. Dalmas? And, Carl, go to the basement and bring any liquor you think they might like. I've heard that reporters enjoy a drink now and then."

Rush nodded and left on his errand thinking that she had fine instinct at least. He found a plentiful supply of scotch and a case of Old Overholt rye. He promised

himself one of those bottles before he left. He took a bottle of scotch, a bottle of rye, and bottles of seltzer from a case in the grocery storage room. He took them to the library where he found Ruth Simon in conversation with Macy. Their talk ceased abruptly as he came into the room. He walked to the sideboard and set up bottles. He turned to leave when Ruth Simon called to him.

"Carl, this is Mr. Macy. He is the man who is responsible for my father finding me after many years. He will be with us for a while as our guest. . . . I'd like to be sure that he has everything he wants."

"I'm very happy to meet Mr. Macy," said Rush as subserviently as he knew how. "I know it must give you a great deal of happiness to have found him, Miss Simon."

"Glad to know you, Carl," said Macy in the familiar voice that still had the power to send a shiver down Rush's back. The jaw was familiar, too. Rush matched it with the rest of the face and filed it.

"I'll be glad to do anything I can for Mr. Macy," he said.

"I'm sure you will, Carl," said Macy slowly, his eyes never leaving Rush's. "I appreciate it."

"I must get ice, Miss Simon," said Rush hurriedly. He left the room quickly with a tingling in the small of his back where he knew Macy's eyes were focussed. He knew that Macy's close inspection was to see if Rush connected him with the street corner man in Evanston, but he couldn't escape the feeling that those sharp, ferreting eyes would soon penetrate the layer of grease paint, the partial toupe, the contact lenses and the nose pads and see Rush Henry lying underneath. It was not a healthy thought. As Pappy had said, Macy was playing for keeps.

XV

RUSH TOOK UP HIS PLACE BEside the temporary bar and waited. He wished mightily that he could pour himself a double from the bottle of Old Overholt that stood at his elbow.

The front door rang and Eloise ushered in a reporter. It rang several times in the next five minutes and each time a man came in and took a seat in the library. Then Eloise ushered in Smoky. He stood in the doorway and surveyed the room.

"You can start now," he said. "The *Express* is represented."

His answer was snorts in various keys from the other men of the press. There were two more arrivals. Then they all agreed that everybody was there. Ruth Simon stood up and spoke to the men.

"I've asked you to come here this afternoon to meet the man who is responsible for my father's finding me after many years' separation. I have personally been searching for him since my father's tragic death. His name is Tom Macy. I imagine you gentlemen will want to ask him some questions."

They did.

"How long have you been back in this country, Mr. Macy?" asked Martin of the *Daily News*.

"Just a couple of weeks. I was on the *Sophie J.* Australia-New Zealand run."

"How long were you gone?"

"Just over six months."

"Isn't that a little long for a trip to Australia?" This was Smoky.

"We were laid up in Adelaide for repairs. We blew a boiler on the number two furnace. It took us the better part of two months to get parts and get out."

"Then you didn't know that Simon had found his daughter?" asked Newell of the *Sun*.

"I saw it in a three months' old paper in Adelaide. I didn't know it when I left, although he must have found her just about that time."

"Why didn't you cable him? Hadn't you heard about the reward?" Smoky again.

"I thought there would be plenty of time after I got back in the States," said Macy.

"It must have given you a shock to learn that Mr. Simon was dead," inserted Martin.

"Not at all," said Macy. "I was, of course, sorry for Miss Simon, but I was sure she'd be generous."

Rush's eyes were on Ruth and she looked distressed at the line the questioning had taken.

"I'm sure she will be," said Martin.

They asked other questions about the islands, the shipwreck, the missionary and his original contact with Simon. He passed a hundred per cent. His story was identical with Jim Todd's. The reporter's downed the last swallow of their last drinks and looked as though they would like to leave. Smoky had one more question.

"I know you'll think I'm out of line," he said. "But I'd like to know how you identified yourself to Miss Simon. That is, what kind of credentials you had."

Macy was ready for him.

"I had the best of credentials. I showed her a carbon copy of the first letter I wrote to her father."

"I have both letters," said Ruth Simon. "I'll show them to you if you wish."

Smoky assured her that he was completely satisfied and she brought a close to the interview with her general statement to the press.

"I'm sure you are interested in the reward I propose to make to Mr. Macy," she concluded. "While money can never repay him for what he has done I am giving him fifty thousand dollars as a partial token of my thanks to him. I also assure him that should he ever need anything in the form of assistance that I can give him, he need only call on me."

She had the check already made out. A cameraman who had come in late unslung his camera and took a picture of her handing the check to Macy.

RUSH poured a final drink for several of the reporters including Smoky, whose glass he loaded almost to the brim with whiskey. He smiled complacently as Smoky choked. The fat reporter looked at him over the rim of the glass and drained it without a breath.

"The next time you mix a drink for me," he said as he put the glass down, "remember to put a little liquor in it."

Rush watched him with new respect as he left the room. Macy and Ruth Simon waited in the library as Rush cleaned up the temporary bar. Rush's shoulder blades itched as he felt Macy's eyes blazing into his back. He turned once and found him looking straight at him with a speculative slant to his eyes. Rush remembered that it is almost impossible to disguise the back of your head and thereafter kept his front to Macy as much as possible. Macy had had ample opportunity to memorize the back of his head in the automobile in Des Moines.

His tray stacked, Rush left the room closing the door behind him. The hall was deserted and he whirled to put his ear against the door panel. He heard Macy's voice dimly through the thin oak.

"I don't trust that man you have working for you. There's something about him that I don't like."

Rush didn't wait to hear more. The blowoff was on the way if Macy recognized him. Only one ingredient was missing to start the fire he had promised himself. Sheehan was due in town, then he could strike the match.

Marion was asleep and Rush on the verge when he heard the first sound. He pegged it as a night noise in the old house and turned over on the other side. Then he heard it again and came wide awake straining to hear. It came from somewhere outside his window which stood half open. Noiselessly he slipped out of bed and to the window. He put his head down to the screen and listened again.

Somewhere outside his window someone was opening a door. He searched his mental plan of the house. Outside his window ran a balcony which edged two sides of the house in a sort of L shape. His room lay at the bottom of the L and Ruth Simon's at the top of the staff. Between and at the bottom of the staff of the L was the room occupied by Macy. Ruth Simon's room was too far away. It had to be Macy's door to the balcony that he heard.

He slipped to the dresser, took his gun from the top drawer, and went back to stand beside the window. Macy's opening door meant only one thing. Macy had recognized him. It might be the back of his head, it might be his voice, it might be any one of a dozen things, but Macy had recognized him. Hence, Macy was after him.

He was the one stumbling block in Macy's path—the one man who could ruin him. Rush backed into the shadows be-

side the window and waited. Faintly he heard the door click shut. There was silence for a full minute then, soft as the whisper of cats' feet on grass, a step, and another step, more faintly still. Then silence. Rush waited interminable minutes. Then he could stand it no longer.

His room's only entrance to the balcony was through the window and that opening was covered by a screen. It was, however, hinged at the top and secured by a hook at the bottom. Silently he slipped the hook and edged the screen outward in infinitesimal moves. Inch by inch the opening grew till he could step through it. He thrust a bare foot onto the balcony and followed it, balancing carefully, testing each ounce of pressure on what might be a squeaky board. Once outside he lowered the screen as carefully as he had opened it. Then cautiously he crept to the corner of the L.

He stood there a moment listening. He heard no sound, either of footsteps or breathing. Macy was not around the corner. He felt a sense of anti-climax. He dropped to his haunches and moved his feet out behind him until he was lying prone on the balcony, his head at the point where the corner of the building met the floor of the balcony. Then he inched forward till he could sweep the other section of the balcony with his eyes.

For a moment he thought it was empty and cursed himself for jumping at mirages. Then his eye caught a hint of movement at the far end of the balcony. He strained forward to see. Light from a window that must be Ruth Simon's cast a small square of yellow on the balcony floor, and squatted at the outer edge of that square, head down and leaning forward, was Macy. Rush scowled in amazement as he realized the implication. Macy was window peeping.

It had no meaning, no place in any scheme of things. Rush watched him for the space of five minutes then the light went out. Rush eased his head back around the corner and waited. After a long minute the silent footsteps moved toward him. He held his breath as they reached a point barely three feet from his head. Then came a repetition of the sounds he had heard earlier. Door opening, door closing. He waited another minute then silently made his way back to his own room.

He lay awake for a long time thinking. Window peeping. It seemed a strange practice for a man who had as much at stake as Macy. It would have been more logical if he had eavesdropped on Rush. He finally gave it up. He could find no reason for Macy to spend the time and effort watching Ruth Simon prepare for bed.

Morning came, and breakfast. Rush was finishing his last cup of coffee when Eloise informed him he was wanted on the phone. He went to the kitchen phone and took up the receiver. It was Gertrude.

"I've got a telegram for you," she said.

"Is it important?" asked Rush.

"I would think so. It's signed Sheehan."

Rush looked around the kitchen. Marion was the only other occupant.

"Okay, read it to me."

" 'Flying to Chicago. Arrive Thursday. Meet me at Sherman three o'clock'."

Gertrude waited for him to talk. This was Thursday. He'd have to move.

"Okay," said Rush. "Have Merwin there. I'll see you right away."

"Check," said Gertrude. "There's one more thing."

"What is it?"

"I don't know. Pappy said to give it to you if you called. Said he got it off the AP wire last night. A man named Mark Pastor got shot dead in Keystone, Oklahoma. No weapon in the house, so it's murder. That's all. I don't get it."

"I do," said Rush and hung up. He got it all right. Pastor was one of the last people alive who had known Ruth Simon intimately as a child. He was another of the ones who knew something they didn't know they knew. He was unluckier than Rush. The shot didn't miss dead center by an inch with him.

He turned to Marion, but before he had time to talk, Ruth Simon came into the kitchen.

"I've just had bad news, Miss Simon," he said. "My mother has been taken to the hospital with a burst appendix. I wonder if Martha and I might have the rest of the day off to be with her?"

"Of course." Ruth Simon was gen-

uinely sympathetic. "If there's anything I can do—"

"Thank you, very much," Rush cut in on her. "Come, Martha, hurry. They operate in an hour."

They were in the car and out of the driveway before Rush explained to Marion.

"You mean we're not going back?" she said.

"Not as Carl and Martha Johnson. That'll never work again. When I go back it will be with a gun."

Marion looked at him for a moment.

"Why won't our aliases work again?" she asked.

"The gloves are off, my suddenly ex-wife. Macy was a second fast in hanging up on the extension. He knows who I am now, but thank the Lord I know that he knows and can be ready for him."

XVI

RUSH DEPOSITED MARION AT the *Express* office with instructions to relay the story to Pappy. He went on to his apartment where he removed all traces of Carl Johnson and became Rush Henry. In his mind he said, Rush Henry, the Second. He wondered as he removed the make-up if someday his amnesia would slip away as easily, bringing back the original Rush Henry. He still thought of that first Henry as someone else, as someone he would like to have around to help him over the rough spots. He was becoming more sure of himself but there were still moments when he fought indecision, and doubts swarmed up in the wake of positive action. From what he had heard of the original Henry, there wasn't a doubt strong enough to daunt him and indecision was an unknown thing. He wished the old Henry would turn up soon.

In Carl Johnson's car, Rush Henry drove to Rush Henry's office. Gertrude sat with her feet on an open drawer reading a paper-back mystery. Rush stood in the doorway surveying her with raised eyebrows.

"Is this what I pay you for?" he asked.

"Yep," said Gertrude without looking up from the book.

"Okay," said Rush. "I'm new here. I just asked for information. Where's Merwin?"

"At Barney's. He said he'd wait for you there."

"Okay. Anything new?"

"There've been a lot of calls for you. Sounded to me like the voice was disguised. Very anxious to locate you."

"That would be our Mr. Macy," said Rush. "He misses me very much. He misses me so much that he'd like to miss me permanently."

"Shall I arrange it?" asked Gertrude.

"Don't be bitter, cherub. Things are looking up. Let me see that telegram."

It was the same telegram she had read over the phone. He checked the hour it was handed in. Noon the previous day. Rush reached for the phone and dialed the number of the *Express*. In a few seconds Pappy was on the wire.

"Do you have somebody covering the airlines for Sheehan?" Rush asked.

"Check," said Pappy. "I've got a private pipeline to the offices. As of this morning no one by the name of Sheehan holds a reservation from anywhere in the west."

"Damn," said Rush. "He's coming under another name."

"How do you know?" said Pappy.

Rush told him. "The hell of it is, we don't have the faintest idea what he looks like. Macy does. If he gets to him first we're done and so is he."

"When are you meeting him?" asked Pappy.

"Three o'clock," said Rush. "At the Sherman."

"Need any help?"

"No, I'm going to have Merwin cover me. If Sheehan turns up I'm going to take him out to the Simon place. They haven't dared replace any of the servants and I don't think Macy will go up against two of us. He'll wait or try and bluff it out."

"Be careful," said Pappy. "You've been doing swell so far. I don't want you to slip at this late date."

"I'm only afraid I'll be too careful. I'm never sure when I should shoot the works and when I should hold fire. If I don't get my memory back before this is over I'm going to send in for a Little Dandy detective outfit with a set of lessons."

"You won't need them. Good luck," said Pappy.

RUSH removed his vest, attached a shoulder holster, buttoned his coat, patted it to see that nothing showed and left for Barney's. He found Merwin in a back booth deep in a racing form. He ordered a double rye and sat down by Merwin.

"Hullo, boss," said Merwin. "Where yuh been?"

"On business," said Rush.

"Got somethin' for me?"

Rush nodded. "How are you on shadowing, Merwin?"

Merwin looked hurt.

"Boss," he said, and battered pride hung like gravy on every word. "Boss, you know I'm the best tail in the business. In Chicago anyways. I don't never lose nobody."

Rush patted him on the shoulder.

"That's okay, Merwin. You know I lost my memory. I can't remember everything like that. Now, listen carefully. I'm going up to a room at the Sherman Hotel. You go with me and wait in the hall outside. If you hear trouble, come bustin' in. I'll try and leave the door unlocked. If everything goes all right I'll come out with a man. Follow us. I'll make it easy for you."

Merwin began to assume his hurt expression again and Rush hurried on.

"When we leave the place we're going to, you follow the other guy. Forget about me. Run him to ground whereever he goes and phone Gertrude."

"Where is this place yer goin'?" asked Merwin.

"Out on the North Side. While we're inside keep a kind of heavy eye on the joint. There may be fireworks, although I doubt it. But if there's a rumble, call the cops and then come running. Remember, the cops first, then come after us."

"I got it, boss," said Merwin. "A light tail on you and this gent till you separates, then follow him home."

"And report to Gertrude," Rush added.

"Should I carry a rod?" he asked.

"Yes," said Rush reluctantly, having no idea how Merwin was with firearms. "But don't use it unless you absolutely have to."

"I gotcha. You can count on me, boss."

Merwin returned to his trance over the dope sheet and Rush ordered another rye and a sandwich. He ate in silence, heavy in thought. Sheehan was the key to the whole puzzle. The only answer that made sense was that Sheehan had met Simon on the trail of something. Simon in turn, had put Rush on the case. There was a vital something somewhere to give Macy a motive for the killings. First Simon, then the almost senseless murder of Mark Pastor. There was something those two men knew or were about to find out that made their death necessary. Sheehan must also know it. There was someone else who should also have an inkling, mused Rush. Rush Henry.

Another rye took him to two o'clock and he left Barney's heading down State toward Randolph, Merwin twenty steps behind him looking as inconspicuous as a flea on a St. Bernard in the afternoon shopping crowds. Rush decided he would do as a shadower.

HE turned into the Sherman at two forty-five, having made a couple of stops for cigarettes, ball scores, a punch board and a final rye. At the house phone he learned that a Mr. Sheehan was registered in Room 827. He was connected with the room. The voice that came on the phone was big with plenty of boom in the lower registers, and extended a hearty invitation to Rush to "come aloft." Rush was hardly through the door before a glass was forced in his hand. In the glass was two full inches of a third rate bourbon. A swallow was enough. Rush guessed it at about twenty per cent bourbon, eighty per cent neutral grain spirits. He wouldn't have it in his own bar.

"Well, Mr. Henry. I guess you wonder why I've come all the way from Frisco just to see you?"

Rush admitted that he was interested.

"Well, it's because I can't come to see the man who sent for me. He's dead. Know who I mean?" he said, leaning toward Rush and blowing his breath in his face. It was almost worse than the taste of the cut whiskey.

Rush nodded.

"Of course you do—Simon." The

hearty, booming voice was almost deafening. "That's who sent for me. He's the man who put you onto this deal and he's the man who sent for me. Guaranteed me full expenses. I expect I can get them from his estate. I have his letter."

Rush agreed that he would have no trouble on the score of expenses.

"Now, why? Why did Simon want me to come to Chicago? You know that, too?"

Rush felt safe in nodding. This man seemed to love to answer his own questions.

"He asked me to come because I'm the only living person in this hemisphere that can identify his daughter finally and absolutely. You see"—he lowered his voice impressively—"I am the captain of the ship that brought his daughter off that island in the Pacific. The old missionary's probably dead now. There may be a couple o' colored guys down there that remember the baby, but they wouldn't know the thing I know, because it happened aboard my ship." He sat back on his chair as though expecting general applause. He poured himself a drink.

"You know," he said, leaning forward again, "all I got to do is take one look at that girl and I'll know if she's the one or not."

Rush felt it was time he took part in the conversation. He knew what the missing something was. Complete and final identification of the girl. This noisy mariner carried a more dangerous secret than he knew.

"That's fine," said Rush. "There's only one thing to do. If you don't mind I'd like to do it right now."

"Of course, of course, Henry. Anything you say. Simon told me in his letter that I was to trust you."

"Then let's visit Simon's home and see the girl he accepted as his daughter. If you identify her completely I have no doubt you'll receive a good deal more than your expenses to Chicago."

"What're we waiting for?"

"Not a thing," said Rush.

In the hall outside the room, Merwin was walking away from them as the door opened. He beat them into the elevator and leaned over the operator to ask a question, masking his face during the downward trip. He was first out of the elevator and away from them across the lobby with no sight of his face being given during the entire trip. At the curb Rush hailed a cab and noticed with satisfaction that a second cab was available to Merwin.

During the trip Rush was regaled with a something less than salty tale of the sea. It involved native girls and various tribal customs that missed being amusing by a good country mile.

THE TRIP took well over a half hour in the afternoon rush traffic. Rush resisted the impulse to look around and see if Merwin was behind them, but as they turned in to the sweeping drive to the Simon home he noted a cab passing them and turning the corner a block away. That, he hoped fervently, would be Merwin.

They left the cab and Rush asked the driver to wait, a further precaution against ambush. He personally rang the bell. Eloise opened the door.

"We'd like to see Miss Simon, please. It is very important."

"Whom shall I say is calling?" asked Eloise.

"Mr. Sheehan and Mr. Henry," Rush answered.

Eloise ushered them into the library and left them there while she went for Ruth Simon.

Moments later Ruth Simon came into the room and looked at them inquiringly.

"Miss Simon?" asked Rush.

"Yes," she said with perfect composure. "Did you wish to see me?"

"Yes," said Rush. "Won't you sit down? This may take a little time."

She sat in a chair and Rush held a light to her cigarette. He lit one for himself while his companion put a new flame to his old cigar. Rush found himself a chair and leaned forward to speak.

"It may be painful to bring this up so soon after your father's death but I feel it is necessary."

Ruth Simon looked merely surprised.

"Your father paid me a thousand dollars to do something for him a few days before his death. I was out of the city at the time and had no further chance to see him. However, I felt duty bound to complete

my task and that brings me, at last, to you."

"This is very interesting, Mr. Henry. My father mentioned nothing of this to me." Rush gave her an A-1 for acting. She was perfect.

"By the very nature of the task he gave me he could not mention it to you. You see, ten days before his death he received a letter from San Francisco casting serious doubt on the validity of your claim to be his daughter."

The girl raised her hand.

"You misunderstood, Mr. Henry. I never claimed to be my father's daughter. He found me and told me who I was. I had no part in the matter."

"My choice of words was unfortunate. Rather let us say, the letter gave him reason to doubt that you were his daughter. He retained me to look into it. The writer of the letter was to be out of the country for some time and he felt he owed it to you to straighten things out as soon as possible. I'm happy to say that my own investigations revealed nothing that strengthened the doubt. However, and this is why we have come—the man who wrote that letter is here. Mr. Sheehan," he said, indicating his companion.

Ruth looked at him with nothing more than the interest indicated by the situation.

"Mr. Sheehan has met you before although it's doubtful if you remember. He is the captain of the ship that brought you to San Francisco at the age of three. Assuming that you are truly Ruth Simon."

The girl paid no heed to the last sentence. She leaned forward now with real interest.

"Then you knew my mother, Captain Sheehan?"

He shook his head. "I'm sorry, miss. She died before I touched on the island. The old missionary had just buried her with full Christian rites a month before."

"The point of our visit," broke in Rush, who saw no reason to prolong the meeting, "is this. Captain Sheehan can absolutely prove that you are or are not Ruth Simon."

"Then I welcome Captain Sheehan with open arms. Frankly I have been so overwhelmed in the months since my father found me that I've scarcely come to believe it myself. It's been almost too much to be true."

Rush turned.

"Well, Captain?" he said.

"I could have told you the minute she walked into the room. She's the girl all right. If you'll notice her left eyebrow. She's brushed the hairs over it a little now, but under those hairs there's a tiny scar. It wasn't tiny when I first saw it. It was a bleeding big gash where she fell against an open hold. Cut herself bad, she did. My first mate who did my doctoring had to take two stitches in it. He wasn't much of a surgeon, but I see now that he did a first rate job there."

RUSH stood up and walked to Ruth Simon. With a forefinger he touched her eyebrow and moved the hairs to show a scar running half an inch through the brow and fading away into her forehead.

"Thank you, Captain," he said. "You've finished a job for me and I'm sure you've been a great boon to Miss Simon." He reached for the hat he had placed on a table. "As I said, your father advanced me a thousand dollars. My charges may not equal that figure. To whom should I return the difference?"

"To nobody, Mr. Henry. You've set my mind at ease and that's worth anything you could care to charge."

"There's another thing," said Rush. "Your father guaranteed Captain Sheehan his expenses for the trip to Chicago. You'll want to reimburse him I'm sure."

"More than that," she said, "I want to reward him."

She went to a desk and wrote in the checkbook Rush remembered so well. She tore out the check, waved it dry, and handed it over.

"I hope you'll believe that my thanks are much greater than any money I can give you," she said.

They left then and Rush noted the cab turned into the street behind them as they headed for town. He let his companion out at the Sherman and kept the cab on to his own office. There he took a bottle of rye from his desk and poured a large drink. He drank it and sat lost in thought. Gertrude looked in for a minute to say she

was going out for dinner while he was still there since she assumed he wanted her to stay late. He nodded and sank back in his reverie. There was a faint smell of something somewhere and he couldn't put his finger on it. Certainly not Ruth Simon. She had acted her part with superb aplomb.

He had started his fire, mixed his ingredients and waited for the boiling over. The fire had gone out and the ingredients refused to mix. His big scene had fallen as flat as a stale beer. He had nothing to go on now. Tomorrow or the next day or next week Carnahan would be asking questions and he'd have no answer. He'd promised a feather for Carnahan's cap and now he didn't even have the cap.

He reached for the phone and dialed the *Express*. Luckily Pappy was still in. He reported in full.

"No angles left?" asked Pappy.

"Not a hint," said Rush.

"You still work out there, don't you?"

"I'm not sure. I won't take Marion out there again, though. Macy is onto us. I'm certain he listened on the phone this morning. He knows who I am. He stayed under cover this afternoon, but he's still there. He still has something to protect. I don't want Marion in his way." Rush started to ask about the airlines and how Sheehan had managed to reach town when the thought struck him. The man to ask was Sheehan. He said a quick good-bye to Pappy and dialed the Sherman.

HE WAS told that Sheehan had checked out a half hour before. Rush swore briefly. His only wise gesture of the day had been to put Merwin on Sheehan's trail. He poured a drink, but never drank it. Merwin opened the door and shuffled nervously into the room. Rush looked at him expectantly.

"Well," he said.

"He back-doored me, boss," said Merwin from somewhere in the region of his chest. "It never happened to me before. I knew he wasn't on to me. He just was duckin' anybody that might be on his tail. I wasn't expecting anything and I give him a light tail. Then he back-doored me."

"Hold it," said Rush excitedly. "Hold it. I don't care about that. I don't even care that you lost him. Are you sure he tried to lose you?"

"Of course," said Merwin in surprise. "He goes into this apartment hotel out west and I wait. I wait a long time when I get suspicious. I go in and the janitor tells me a man asks for the back way out. That's it. He back-doors me."

Rush drank his rye.

"That's it, Merwin. That's it. I'm glad he lost you, because if he hadn't we might never have known that he was trying."

"But, boss."

"It's okay, Merwin, relax."

"Then you ain't mad?"

"No. Now leave me alone, I've got to think."

Merwin reached for the door and pulled it open. Through it they could hear a weak knocking on the outer door.

"Get that, Merwin," said Rush, drawing his gun. "I've got you covered from in here."

He turned off the light in his office and stood in the shadow of the door as Merwin opened the door to the hall. Merwin turned the knob and the door pushed in against him. Not a hard push, just a steady even push. Merwin stepped back and a body fell into the room. Instantly Rush holstered his gun and snapped on the lights. Lying face down on the office floor was the mammoth figure of a man with a flaming shock of red hair. Quickly Rush pulled him through the door and shut it behind him. Merwin locked it on Rush's command. Between them they carried the man into the inner office and stretched him out on the divan. Rush poured rye into a glass and poured it between lips that looked a strange blue in the weatherbeaten brown of the face.

The man gasped, swallowed, gagged and fought for air. Rush repeated the treatment. This time the whiskey went down more easily. He undid the man's coat and felt for his heart. It was pumping like a diesel engine. He withdrew his hand and looked at it. The tips of the fingers were stained with red. Speedily he had the coat, vest and shirt off. High in the man's armpit, through the fleshy part of his chest was a clean bullet hole. He turned him over and felt of the back of the shoulder. There just under the skin was a solid

hunk, the bullet. Without a word he took a knife from his pocket, held it in the flame of his cigarette lighter till it was very hot, then wiped it on a piece of Kleenex from his desk drawer.

He turned the man completely over and motioned Merwin to hold him still. Then, as though he did it every day, he cut firmly through the skin and pried out the bullet. He dropped it on his desk and sent Merwin for hot water from the office washroom. In his desk he found a first aid kit and poured iodine from the bottle directly into both holes of the wound. The man gasped and opened his eyes, struggling upright on the couch.

"Sit still," said Rush with a voice of authority.

Merwin came with the hot water. Rush washed away the blood and bandaged the shoulder, taping it securely. Only then did he step back and survey his patient.

"Don't tell me who you are," he said. "Let me guess."

The man looked at him with eyes dull from shock.

"You," said Rush, "have to be Sheehan. You can't be anybody else. If you are somebody else, then I'm not Rush Henry and Lord knows I'm not too sure of that."

"You may not be Rush Henry," said the man weakly, "but I was Mike Sheehan till an hour ago anyway."

XVII

THE BIG MAN TOOK A DRINK of Rush's rye and color began to come back into his lips.

"If I had known how hard it was going to be to see you," he said, "I'm damned if I'd ever made the try."

"I'm glad you did, Captain," said Rush. "You're going to make it possible to clear up a very ugly situation." He poured more rye in the Captain's glass. "Maybe you'd better tell me what happened."

"I heard about Simon's death and it smelled a little funny the way I read it in the Chicago papers. I had written Simon that I could positively identify his daughter. Then I left the country, sailing coastwise to Balboa Heights in the Canal Zone and back. When I got to Frisco there was a letter asking me to come to Chicago and telling me that he had put you on the case. I didn't even know there was a case."

"There wasn't till he put me on it. I backtracked the girl to Des Moines and got shot for my trouble. When I came to, Simon was dead."

"How about that?" asked Sheehan. "Was it an accident?"

Rush shook his head slowly. "No, it was as neat a killing as I ever saw. I know how he did it, but it took a hell of a lot of nerve and beautiful timing."

"That's why I wired you and came on to Chicago. The hell of it is that if I hadn't been a little greedy all this never would have happened. I could have told Simon in my first letter how to identify his daughter."

Rush was curious.

"How?" he asked.

"By a scar."

Rush frowned.

"Over her eye?" he asked.

"Eye? Where'd you get that idea? It's on her right leg, just below the hip. It must still be a couple of inches long.

Rush whistled softly to himself as something fell into place.

"Go on, Captain," he said. "Don't mind me. Something that bothered me doesn't bother me any more."

The captain looked puzzled, then shrugged his shoulders.

"She got it when she fell on some broken glass on board ship when I brought her to Frisco. It was a nasty gash I took ten stitches in it to close it up. Never thought about that baby again until last year when I read the story in the papers. Then I figured it out and couldn't see any reason I shouldn't get a little of the reward dough that Simon was passing around. If I'd told him then it'd of been all over."

"That's all done and gone," said Rush. "Let's worry about now. What happened to you today?"

"I got in on the plane and took a cab. I used another name because I was leery of the whole setup. The cab turned out to be a trap. Took me to some old shack somewhere. I don't know anything about Chicago, so I still can't tell you where it

was. Then the cabbie turns around in a hurry and sticks a gun in my face. We go inside and there's another guy there. He tries to buy me off first, then he threatens me. That makes me mad. I tried to take the place apart but they got one in my wing. And that's all, brother. It slowed me up and somebody let me have one on the head with a club. I woke up about an hour ago with some punk sitting holding a gun on me. I fiddled around with the ropes—they can't tie knots worth a damn—and got my hands loose. When the kid looks away for a minute I throw a cushion at him and take him fast. He's still laying there, I guess. Then I started bleeding again, so I figured I better get to you as fast as I could. I got a cab and just barely made it."

THE rye was doing excellently by Captain Sheehan. He gained color and vigor by the minute. He drained his glass and looked at Rush.

"Now, what do we do?"

"We go out and look at the girl's leg," said Rush.

"You mean you still think she's the old guy's daughter?"

"I don't know," Rush admitted. "I just don't know. There's something damn fishy about the whole thing. I'm anxious to see that leg."

"Let's go," said Sheehan. "I'm anxious to meet a guy myself. Maybe we'll find him."

"Are you sure you're up to it?" asked Rush.

"Don't worry about me," said Sheehan. "That rye put me right on my feet. I've weathered tougher storms than this."

Looking at his six feet two of brawn Rush could believe it.

"Okay, come on," he said. "I can almost guarantee you'll meet your friend." He turned to Merwin. "You follow us, Merwin. Or better yet, come in the car with us and we'll let you out a block away. Keep the house in sight until we come out. Slip up close if you can. Don't come in unless you hear gunfire. Just wait for us."

Merwin indicated that the instructions had filtered through and they left. Rush got Marion's coupe from the parking lot and once again headed for the Simon house. At the door Rush pushed the button that rang the chimes and waited. The door swung open and a light in the entrance way gleamed on the barrel of a gun pointed rigidly at his stomach.

"Come right in, Henry," said Macy. "And bring Captain Sheehan. I've been expecting you both since I learned that the good captain had slipped his ropes and gotten away."

Sheehan growled deep in his throat and the gun barrel swung to center on his chest.

"No fancy tricks, Captain," said Macy. "I'll drill you in a second."

"I'll jump for him and you take him, Henry," said Sheehan. "One more slug from that pea shooter won't hurt me."

"No," said Rush. "No use shedding any more blood than we have to, unless it's Macy's. Let's go in and talk."

"There'll be very little talk, Henry. I told you I was ready for you. Come in." The last words were a command.

He motioned them to walk ahead of him to the library.

"You know the way, Henry. And by the way, that was an excellent disguise. I almost missed it entirely."

"Thank you," said Rush and led the way to the library. He shoved open the door, stepped in, waited for Sheehan to enter, and suddenly slammed the door in Macy's face, turning the latch in the same motion.

"Nicely done, Henry," said a voice behind him. He whirled to find the fake Captain Sheehan standing in a closet doorway with a gun held purposefully in his hand. "Now if you'll just unlock that door everything will be all right."

Rush shrugged his shoulders fatalistically and turned to unlock the door.

"A good try, Henry," said the real Captain Sheehan.

Macy came in smiling sardonically.

"I told you I was expecting you, Henry. I'm not quite the fool you must think me."

"Of all the things I've thought you," said Rush, "a fool is not one." His hand moved to the V of his coat and instantly two guns trained on him. "No," he said. "Cigarettes."

"Hold it," said Macy. "Use mine."

He handed a cigarette to Rush and held a light for him. Sheehan refused. Rush dragged deeply and looked at Macy.

"What next?" he asked.

Macy made an unmistakable gesture with his thumb. It pointed straight down.

"I'm also not such a fool as to consider you a fool, Henry. I assume that you have reserves posted ready to assault the house at the first sign of gunplay. Hence, I am going to remove you to a more auspicious spot. Captain Sheehan is an added responsibility we hadn't counted on. I think we will take him along, too."

SHEEHAN had had enough. With the roar of a bull he charged Macy. A ham-like hand struck down the revolver and another hand reached for Macy's throat. It never got there. The pseudo Sheehan had a knife in his gunfree hand in the flash of a second. Rush, realizing too late that they would never fire a gun in that house except as a last resort, dove for him. In one motion he slugged Rush beside the temple with the flat of his gun and drove the knife into the muscular part of the real captain Sheehan's arm. It was over in ten seconds. Rush sat foggily on the floor holding his head which ached unbearably. Sheehan stood teetering on feet set wide apart, both arms hanging limply at his side, a stream of rich profanity pouring from his lips. Macy let him finish.

"Both arms, by Joe," said Sheehan. "Now both arms are gone. But I've still got my feet by Joe." He lashed out at Macy with his feet. Macy dodged nimbly, a wry smile on his face, and the fake Sheehan stepped coolly in and slugged him with the butt of his gun. The captain tottered, took a step and slumped to the rug. Macy drew back his foot and kicked him solidly on the temple.

"That," he said, "should hold Captain Sheehan. Now, Henry. We've had enough of this nonsense. Come with me."

Rush struggled to his feet and shook his head, trving valiantly to drive away the fog that dimmed his eyes. Macy ordered him out of the house by the rear door and he led the way with Macy's gun always in his back. Silently Macy closed the door behind them and ordered Rush into the driver's seat of a closed coupe that sat on the driveway pointed toward the street.

"Don't start the engine," he directed. "Release the brakes and take the engine out of gear. There is enough slope here to carry us into the street without the engine."

Rush followed directions. The car began to roll. The driveway ran past a wing of the house and joined the main drive that passed the entrance portico. As they reached this juncture, Rush heard a familiar voice calling his name. Looking over his shoulder he could see Merwin at the front door of the house pounding and shouting to him. Two minutes too late he thought and then put the thought behind him. There was enough to demand all his concentration here. Let Merwin take care of Merwin he was no use to Rush Henry now.

The car coasted into the street and Rush started the motor. In gear the car gathered speed and, following directions, Rush drove through Lincoln Park. Several times Macy ordered him to slow down as he peered out of the car toward the left. Each time he motioned forward with the gun he held in his hand.

"Where the hell are we going?" asked Rush finally.

"You just said it, Henry," growled Macy, "You're going to hell. You won't care where I'm going then."

They drove past the Conservatory, the Zoo and the Museum. Several blocks further on Macy ordered him to slow. This time he seemed satisfied and motioned him to stop. Rush pulled up in a parking island and stopped the motor. Traffic streamed past and above the roar of the engines and in lulls of traffic Rush could hear the lake pounding on the shore to his left. The surf mingled with the ringing in his ears and became one sound. It only made his head ache the more.

Macy put the gun in his ribs with a solid shove.

"Out, Henry. No tricks. I'll shoot you here and be gone before anybody hears the echo. Walk across the street and to the lake. I'll be right beside you."

He was. Every step of the way Rush

was made conscious, by repeated jabs in the ribs, of the presence of the gun. They walked to the very edge of the lake.

"This time I'm taking no chances. I was rushed in Des Moines and you were too cute for me in Oklahoma. There'll be no slips this time. It's the bottom of Michigan for you."

They now stood on huge rocks piled high to keep the hungry lake from eating away the shore. The bathing beach above them was dark and deserted. A breeze of fresh air blew in from the lake and cleared some of the fog that clouded Rush's brain. He suddenly became very angry—not at Macy, but at himself for standing like a lamb led to slaughter waiting for the ax.

He whirled on Macy, knocking aside the gun which exploded harmlessly, the bullet going into the lake. His fist came back for a blow when his feet betrayed him. On the uneven footing of the rocks he slipped and fell backward toward the lake.

As he fell he saw the flash of the gun. heard for an instant in time the report of the shot. Then everything was black and peaceful. The cool waters closed around him and he sank endlessly into blackness and rest.

XVIII

SOMEBODY WAS FORCING HIM down onto a sharp point with a great fluffy pillow. He could get no breath through the pillow which seemed to press on his whole body. He opened his mouth wider and the pillow became a deluge which swept icy water into his mouth. He struggled and the sharp point in his back disappeared. Now he was floating in the deluge. His hands clawed at the water and it streamed by his face. Just as the will to struggle became out of balance with the wish for peace, the waters parted and his head came gasping out of the surface of Lake Michigan.

Gulps of air forced into his lungs gave him buoyancy and he floated with his mouth just above water. With the air came conscious thought.

Where?

There's no lake in Des Moines.

Survival took his conscious thought then. Weakly he edged toward the rocks and clung to them with waves breaking now and again over his head. With a semblance of returning strength he half pulled, half crawled his way to the top of the rocks and lay panting in the night. Minutes later he rolled on his side and looked out over the lake. It looked familiar. It was.

Michigan—Lake Michigan. How did it get beside a street in Des Moines? He fought for memory and the process was slow. His brain felt rusty and little used. I turned around, he remembered. I turned around when I heard the footsteps and somebody shot at me. When was that? Yesterday? Impossible, because now I'm beside Lake Michigan.

Something thicker than water ran into his eyes and he wiped them with the back of his hand. In the moonlight his hand looked black. That meant blood. He put his hand to his head and winced as he touched the rough edges of his wound. His hand came away sticky with blood.

But I was shot in Des Moines. Where am I? Where in God's name am I? It was a silent cry that had the intensity of a scream. For the first time in his memory Rush Henry was frightened, not of a man or a gun, but with an intangible unreasoning terror. He fought it back and reasoned. There's Michigan, so this is Chicago. I'm home. Any taxi driver can take me home.

He strained to one elbow and felt in his pockets. There were crumpled bills, soaked and matted with water. There was more than one, so he had enough to get home. No thinking then. Just concentrate on getting home. Push up to your knees, Henry. Now one foot on the ground. Shove. Both feet. Steady.

In a shambling, half stumbling walk he started off the rocks. Two steps and he tripped, falling headlong. It took another five minutes to get to his feet. He stumbled off the rocks and half ran to a tree. He leaned against it for a full minute. Being on his feet made his head throb agonizingly, but strength flowed in little driblets to his legs. He put one foot in front of the other and let his weight fall forward. A foot pushed ahead, then another foot,

and another. He was walking faster now.

Lights of automobiles flashing past on the drive loomed and disappeared. The drive was now only a few yards ahead. He directed his feet toward a lamp post and leaned against it watching the thin stream of late night traffic. At last he sighted the little yellow light above the windshield that meant taxi. He stepped cautiously into the street and waved at it. By some unbelievable miracle it was empty. Rush opened the door pulled himself into the cab with a great effort and slumped into the seat. The cabby turned around and surveyed him with obvious misgivings.

"Where to, buddy?" he asked.

Rush reached in his pocket and pulled out the bills he had felt there in the dark. In the dim light of the overhead lamp he examined them. The outside bill was a twenty. He peeled it off and handed it to the driver. Then he gave him his address.

"Get me there and in bed and the twenty's yours," he said in a throaty whisper. "I fell in the lake and hit my head. I may pass out."

HE DID. Some guardian god had given him an honest cabbie and an hour later he was sound asleep in his own bed, his head treated inexpertly but sufficiently, without his eyes ever having opened from the moment he shut them on the Outer Drive in Lincoln Park.

The sun traced a pattern through the venetian blinds, a pattern that finally reached Rush's eyes and wakened him. He stirred restlessly turned onto his side and burrowed his head into his pillow. Ten minutes passed and he rolled over on his back and opened his eyes. The ceiling looked back at him blankly. For a moment an unfamiliar uneasiness hit him full. He had no bearings in time or place. Then he remembered the waters of Lake Michigan and the taxi-driver. The uneasiness returned doubled. Something was wrong.

He got out of bed and examined his head as well as he could in the mirror. It would need a little professional work. Then he went to the phone in his living room and called the apartment house desk.

"What day is it, Charlie?" he asked.

"Thursday," said Charlie.

"I mean of the month."

"Oh, it's the thirtieth."

That was all to the good. He had left Chicago for Des Moines on the twenty-eighth. It figured right. Then a chilling thought struck him.

"What month, Charlie?"

"Why, August, of course. What is this, a rib?"

"No, Charlie, it's no rib," said Rush as he slowly lowered the phone to its cradle.

A month gone by. What would Simon think? And Sheehan, he must have come and gone by now. Something had happened and he didn't know what. He'd have to hit for the office as fast as possible and check. Maybe Gertrude knew what had happened.

As he hurriedly dressed he discovered a new sore spot in a new muscle every move he made. At last he brushed his hair over the wound on his scalp and felt at least semi-presentable. He left the apartment building and fifteen minutes later stood in front of his office building. He entered with misgivings. The elevator girl gave him a little confidence. She saw nothing wrong in his appearance and from her greeting might have seen him only yesterday. At his floor he strode down the hall and halted before his office door. It looked exactly as it had when he had left it a month before. He opened the door and immediately found a difference.

Merwin sitting dejectedly on a chair against one wall looked up, stared unbelievingly, jumped to his feet and ran to Rush, his hand outstretched.

"Boss," he said. "Boss, you're all right."

Gertrude looked at him as though he had done her great personal injury. She reached for a phone and dialed a number.

"Homicide," she said briefly into the mouthpiece. She waited a minute and said, "Carnahan." Another brief wait. "Carnahan, call off your dogs. He's here. Just walked in the door. Yeah, I'll tell him." She hung up.

"You'll tell me what?" asked Rush.

"That he wants a piece of your throat. He's had men out after you since twelve o'clock last night. Where the hell did you go?"

He looked at her a moment, then walked to the chair Merwin had vacated and subsided weakly in it.

"I don't know, Gertrude," he said. "I just don't know. The last thing I remember is getting shot at in Des Moines."

"Des Moines—Des Mo—? Well I'll be a sister of a male dog. You've got it back."

It meant nothing to Rush. He said as much.

"Your memory, man, your memory. You lost it in Des Moines a month ago."

RUSH had no answer to that and no questions. The very idea, without the problems it meant, overwhelmed him. He sat, stunned, staring at Gertrude. She took a long look at him and reached again for the phone. Rush vaguely heard her call Pappy and ask him to come over, bringing Smoky. Vaguely he sat, his mind racing ineffectually from thought to thought, leaping from problem to problem, thinking of none of them, hardly recognizing them as problems or even as thoughts. Finally he forced himself to stop thinking.

"Is there still a bottle of rye in my desk?"

Gertrude nodded.

"Get it, will you, Merwin?"

Merwin got it and Rush drank thirstily from the neck of the bottle. The Old Overholt tasted the same. The smoky flavor seemed a tie to a world that whirled past him. He drank again and the warmth in his stomach was another familiar feeling in an unfamiliar world. Then he sat and made his mind a blank. Ten minutes passed before Pappy and Smoky entered the room without knocking. Rush opened his eyes and surveyed them calmly.

"I'm in a hell of a mess" he said.

Pappy nodded.

"You sure are. Maybe this'll cure you of your habit of keeping everything to yourself. Now, what are you going to do?"

"If I knew what I'd done, I could tell you. How much do you know?"

When Pappy, Smoky, Merwin had all finished with their share of his story he began to ask questions.

"Simon's death," he said, "what was it?"

"Murder, you said," volunteered Smoky. "You even said you knew how it was done."

"Give me all the facts. Maybe I can figure it out again."

Smoky recited in detail the facts relating to the death of Simon. Rush lit a cigarette and gazed dreamily through the smoke.

"I do know how he did it," he said at last.

They looked at him expectantly.

"I'll tell you when I've got Macy," he said. "I want proof."

Pappy looked as though he wanted to swear but he held his tongue. Rush turned to Merwin.

"What happened to Sheehan and to you last night?"

MERWIN looked embarrassed in the limelight. "Well, like you said, I waited outside. Only there wasn't no shots. I thought it was kinda funny the way you stood in the door talking to that guy but I didn't bust in. Then after a while I got to thinking that he acted like he had a rod on you. So I ups to the door and bangs away on it. Nothin' happens so I tap a window next to the door and bust in. The next thing I know I wake up in an alley in Cicero."

"What did you do?"

"I called Gertrude and she called Sam Carnahan. He goes out to the house and wakes 'em up. They ain't a sign of a disturbance anywheres. There ain't even a glass out where I busted the window. It's one of those kind with molding so you can't tell if there's any new putty. Sam apologizes to the babe that lets us in and we blow. He's hotter'n a pistol. We go see Gertrude and there ain't no sign of you yet so he puts out the word to look you up. They're still lookin' when you blow in a minute ago."

"I'm going to have a lovely time the next time I see Carnahan. I've done everything but spit in his face. Jim Todd'll probably hate me, too." Rush shook his head. "Can't be helped," he said.

"As I asked before," said Pappy, "what are you going to do now?"

"I don't know for sure, but something and damn fast. Carnahan's going to be looking for me and this Macy can take the

estate for a half a million bucks in cash and blow if we give him another twenty-four hours. He's going to bluff it if he can, but if he learns I'm alive he'll make a run for it this time. His string's running out and he knows it."

"Okay, but what are you going to do?"

"I guess I'll have to visit the Simon household again," said Rush slowly. "I don't want them to feel neglected."

"Alone?" said Pappy and Smoky together.

Rush nodded.

"I've got to. They've got Sheehan. He may still be alive and I'm the only chance he's got."

"Why don't you take a load of cops and blow the joint apart?"

"Carnahan wouldn't touch it with a ten foot pole now. Besides, that way Macy couldn't capture me."

Pappy looked at him as if he were crazy. Rush nodded.

"That's right. I'll let him capture me in the hopes that he'll take me to Sheehan. Merwin can follow us." He looked directly at Merwin. "Can't you, Merwin?" Merwin's nod was violent. "I'll call Sam and tell him that if Merwin calls him again that it's the McCoy. Then if Macy takes me somewhere you follow, Merwin, and call Carnahan when we go to ground."

Merwin got it. He nodded and at Rush's command repeated his instructions.

"Now, I'm going to lie low today. Tonight I'll bust in out there again. I'd like a chance to talk to the girl if I can before Macy takes over. Something keeps sticking in my mind. You say Sheehan's gimmick for identifying the girl was a scar on her leg?"

Merwin nodded again. Rush clamped his eyes tight shut and shook his head.

"I have a dim remembrance of something about that. Maybe if I take it easy today it'll come to me."

"Where'll you be today?" asked Pappy.

"In my office on the divan." Pappy turned to leave but Rush stopped him. "Say, about this new secretary of yours that you forgot to tell me about before I lost my memory. The one I lived with for a couple of days. I'd like to meet her again. Could it be arranged?"

"Next week," said Pappy. "She isn't seeing you till this is over. She hasn't been worth a damn to me for two days worrying over you already."

"Send her over this afternoon, Pappy. I might not be here next week."

Pappy looked at him for a long minute.

"You might not at that," he said. He walked over and shook Rush's hand. "Take it easy, boy. I'll send Marion over. Come on, Smoky. We've got work to do."

"None of those wild-eyed camera guys of yours," warned Rush. "When this is over you can print what you want but I don't want the *Express* making a pitch for an eyewitness account of my demise."

Pappy grinned and agreed.

He left. Rush took one lost drink from the bottle of rye and went to his inner office where he lay down and almost instantly was asleep.

XIX

RUSH SLEPT SOUNDLY, ONLY waking to half consciousness as a doctor came into the office and worked for a matter of ten or fifteen minutes on his head. Rush listened vaguely to his instructions to rest get a lot of sleep, and, smelling Rush's breath, no drinking. He nodded sleepily and went back to his slumber. At five-thirty the door of the inner office opened and Gertrude and Marion came quietly into the office. They stood silently observing the figure on the couch.

"He doesn't look different," said Marion.

"He isn't. You'll find he's just as hard to handle with his memory as without it."

"That isn't my problem," said Marion. "He isn't hard to handle. I can't understand it."

"Tactics, dearie," said Gertrude. "Tactics. Watch him. Just when he seems the most harmless, blooie."

"I can't wait," said Marion.

"You'll have to," said Rush. "What kind of a conversation is this? And who is this?"

"This," said Marion, "is your ever-loving wife. A hell of a husband you turned out to be."

Rush looked her over carefully.

"Hmmm," he said at last. "Not bad. I didn't lose my taste with my memory. How legal is our connection?"

"Not legal enough," said Marion. "Not very connected either. We've hardly had a minute together alone."

"That isn't the way I heard it. I heard we shared a bedroom for a couple of nights."

"Yes, it was very romantic. You snored all night."

"I did not." Rush was indignant.

"How do you know? You don't remember, remember?"

"I know I didn't snore. I never snore."

"Maybe he has changed," suggested Marion to Gertrude.

"I hope so," said Gertrude. "There was a lot of room for improvement."

"Blow," said Rush. "I want to talk to this woman and I don't need kibitzing."

"I thought I should stay for her protection."

"That won't be necessary," said Marion. "Protection is the last thing I want."

"Maybe you'd better stay for my protection," said Rush.

"Blow," said Marion.

GERTRUDE blew. Marion came and sat on the edge of the couch by Rush. She looked silently down at him for a long, quiet minute, then with slow precision she reached down and kissed him full on the lips. It was a long kiss.

"That," said Marion when it was over, "is a sample, in case you never regain your memory of when you lost your memory."

"That's complicated," said Rush, "but I get it. Thank you. It was a very nice sample. If the product stands up to the sample I'm in the market."

"It's only available in limited amounts and to a special clientele. I'll put you at the head of the list."

"I'll be ready to take delivery in about twenty-four hours."

Marion frowned at him.

"There's still more of this thing, then?" she said.

Rush nodded.

"Yes," he said. "I seem to have batted about five hundred while I was gone. I've got to tie up the ends and put out the fire."

"Can't you just forget the whole thing? Enough people have been hurt already."

"No," said Rush, "I'm afraid not. Macy would never rest till he got me if he knew I was still alive. There's a guy named Sheehan that I've got to get out of a hole, and a couple of people have been murdered. The place for murderers is in jail and I'm the only one who can put this one there."

Marion sighed.

"Okay," she said. "I'll wait. Are you sure you can do it all in twenty-four hours?"

"No," said Rush, "I'm not sure of anything. If I figure what I've been told right I may be able to bring it off, but I'm going strictly by Braille."

"All right," said Marion. "Now, let's talk about us."

Rush cocked an eyebrow.

"About us?" he asked.

"Of course. Our whole lives are ahead of us. We ought to talk about it."

"You're a forward wench. Do you make this pitch to all the boys?"

"How can you say that? After what we've been to each other."

"Just what have we been to each other, anyway? I feel like I'd had a romance by proxy."

"I think I'll let you worry about that for a while. What you don't know won't hurt me."

"This," said Rush, "is the kind of thing that could go on forever. Let's stop bandying words and do something important. Let's eat." He grinned at Marion's quick frown and yelled, "Gertrude!" Gertrude came in from the outer office. "Send Merwin for a bunch of sandwiches and some beer at Barney's. When he gets back, you can go home."

"I'm not going home or anywhere till you get back tonight. Do you think I could sleep? I'll have Merwin get me sandwiches, too."

They ate over Rush's desk with the conversation limited to requests for beer and more sandwiches. It was seven o'clock when they finished. Rush calculated two hours until complete darkness. He wanted

no more conversation, so Gertrude and Marion started a gin rummy game over the desk and Merwin returned to the racing form he had spent the afternoon examining. Rush himself returned to his couch and pretended to sleep. Actually he was reviewing what he knew, setting it in his mind, adding it together, completing his plan for the evening.

It was of necessity a kind of attitude toward the people he would be against rather than a plan. He was not even sure he would recognize them. He dug in his memory of that last second on High Street in Des Moines. Quite possibly he would recognize Macy. Macy would certainly recognize him. The girl was another matter. Nothing that anybody had told him gave him any picture of her. He had no idea of where she stood or what she knew of Macy's doings. For that reason he wanted to talk to her first. After that Macy could have him. He was pretty sure Macy wouldn't try anything very desperate in the Simon house. It was too much in the public eye, the police were too interested in it. He counted on Macy to take him to Sheehan.

BEYOND that he had no plan. I wonder, he thought, what kind of a detective I was while my memory was gone. Whatever had happened he still depended on action for the solution of a problem, on pushing people around till they did something that gave a hint. Quiet thinking solved very few problems. Quiet thinking this time brought sleep.

Marion woke him shaking his shoulder.

"It's nine-thirty, Galahad," she said. "Your horse is waiting."

Rush came to his feet, shook his head and blinked at the dim room, lit only by the desk lamp. Merwin was asleep in his chair. Gertrude yawned from behind the card-littered desk. Rush went into the washroom and completed his awakening with cold water. Back in the office he buckled on a shoulder holster.

"I want to give him one gun to take away from me," he said. Then he put a small flat twenty-five automatic in his pants pocket. Rolling up his sleeve he fastened a pliable leather sheath to his forearm inches above the cuff line. The sheath contained a knife with a razor-sharp, five-inch blade.

"I got this out of a book," he said. "A guy named the Saint uses one. It always works for him. I've never had to use it, but maybe it'll work for me."

He rolled down his sleeves and buttoned them, put on his coat, and stuck a roll of adhesive tape in his pocket and looked around the room.

"On your feet, Merwin," he said. "You know what you're going to do?"

Merwin repeated his instructions.

"Okay, get outside and get a cab. I'll take Marion's car. Be ready to follow me." He turned to Gertrude. "You'll hold the fort here?" he asked. She nodded. "That's a good girl. Now, you," he said, turning to Marion. He looked in her eyes across the room for fully thirty seconds. Then he walked across to her and put his arms around her. He kissed her with a kind of controlled intensity.

"That is also a sample," he said and turned and walked out of the office, closing the door behind him. Marion stood looking after him for a space of time. Then she reached her fingers to her mouth and touched her lips.

"Damn him," she said. "Damn him, why does he have to make his living this way? Why can't he be a plumber or a shoe clerk, or a ditch digger?"

She sat down on the edge of the divan and looked at the dent his head had made in the cushion.

"He's going to drive me nuts," she said.

"Sure," said Gertrude, "he always does."

Marion looked up at her slowly and grinned.

Marion's car took Rush to the vicinity of the Simon home in a very few minutes. It was ten o'clock when he parked and stepped onto the sidewalk a half block above the house. A few steps ahead he turned sharply through a hedge and cut across someone else's lawn to the back boundary of the Simon estate. His feet made no sound as he crossed the cement court in front of the garages. He had a feeling that he had done this before as he stepped to a dark back window and took the roll of tape from his pocket. He plas-

tered strips of tape crisscross on a pane of glass until it was in the form of a complete star. Then he pulled his coat sleeve over his knuckles and pushed his fist through the pane. The glass splintered but held fast to the tape. With little difficulty he took it completely out of its frame and felt for the window catch. Silently he levered the window open and stepped into the darkened kitchen.

In the light of a pencil flash he crossed the kitchen and eased the swinging door to the rest of the house open an inch or two. The outer hall was dark and silent. On the balls of his feet he walked unhurriedly to the foot of the stairs. There he stood listening for a full minute. Above him a dim light lit the hall, but no sound came to him. He tried the door of the library and found it unlocked. That room was also empty. Then, without hesitation, he crossed to the steps again and walked quickly to the second floor. Again, without hesitation, he turned right and walked to a door in the wall to his left. The feeling that this had happened before grew as he slowly turned the knob. The door was unlocked and he stood for a moment listening before he pushed it open. He heard no sound.

BOLDLY he pushed the door open, slid silently into the room and shut it behind him. Lying propped up in bed, reading by the light of a stand lamp on a table beside her sat Ruth Simon. He knew it was Ruth Simon. Suddenly he realized that he had known which door to come to, that he had had no advance information as to the layout of the house. His memory was returning, slowly to be sure, but returning. Ruth Simon looked at him quite calmly.

"We meet again, Mr. Henry," she said.

"Yes," said Rush, "we certainly do."

"I suppose there is some logical reason for you to break into my bedroom unannounced," she said. "But it escapes me. I'm not alone, you know. One scream will bring Mr. Macy."

"That will be fine" said Rush. "I'm quite anxious to meet Mr. Macy again. But I would rather spend a few minutes with you first."

"I'm quite complimented. I assume you are not a sex maniac, Mr. Henry."

"Not at the present," said Rush. "I merely want to talk to you."

"I'll give you five minutes. Then I call Mr. Macy."

"That should be enough, if you listen carefully and don't interrupt me unless it is necessary."

She nodded her agreement.

"Let's begin by taking it for granted that I know almost exactly how Simon was led to believe that you were his daughter and that I am cognizant of your connections with Macy. I was your chauffeur, remember. I know you'll deny any conspiracy but let's accept it for the purpose of this conversation."

Ruth Simon looked as though she would like to object but Rush silenced her with a hand.

"I'm almost willing to believe that your part in this whole thing had been comparatively innocent. I don't think you have a full idea of what has happened. First, Macy shot at me and almost killed me in Des Moines. Here is the scar." He pointed at his right temple. "He shot at me again in Oklahoma. He missed me, but he went back and killed Mark Pastor."

That shook her.

"Mark Pastor is dead?"

"Yes. He was murdered a couple days after Macy chased me through the woods and across the Arkansas River popping bullets at me. Next, Simon was murdered. Now, wait a minute. It looked like an accident, but the police know it smelled, the detective agency knew it smelled but they couldn't figure how it was done. I know. Take my word for it, it was murder. Then, last night I came out here with a man named Sheehan. Your fake Sheehan stabbed him and I got slugged. Macy took me to the lake in Lincoln Park, shot me" —he displayed the other scar on his head —"and heaved me in the lake. He thought I was gone. He still does. Call him in here and watch his face."

Rush rested his case. His listener was obviously shaken. She regained control with an effort.

"That's a very pretty story, Mr. Henry. About what I would expect from an un-

scrupulous private detective. You have absolutely no proof. It looks altogether too much as though you were trying to frighten me."

"Do these scars look like I was making it up?"

She disregarded them.

"Your five minutes are up, Mr. Henry. I'm going to call Mr. Macy."

Rush sighed.

"Okay," he said. "Call him."

He stepped back to stand beside the door, gun in hand.

"I'm not such a fool as you might suspect Mr. Henry. I'm not going to call him into ambush. This is entirely too melodramatic. I'm going to call him on the house phone. You aren't going to shoot me."

She pressed a button at the base of her telephone and picked up the instrument.

"Tom?" she said into the mouth piece. "Mr. Henry is in my bedroom. I thought you ought to know." She listened for a moment. "But he is." Again she listened and a frown furrowed between her eyes. She turned to Rush with a strange look.

RUSH smiled at her sympathetically. The doubt he had planted was now reaching full growth. In spite of herself the girl was beginning to consider the possibility of his being right and seeing at last what it meant to her. The look in her eyes was one of fear.

"I tell you he's standing right here by the door with a gun in his hand."

Again she listened for thirty seconds. Then she hung up the telephone.

"Mr. Macy said to tell you that he was coming to the room unarmed and that he hoped you would put down your gun. He wants to talk to you."

Rush marveled at the girl's naivete, but it fitted his own plans to play the fool. He put his gun on the table beside the bed and turned to face the door to the hall in total disregard of all rules about a room with two doors. As he suspected, the other door flung open and Macy stepped into the room, gun in hand. He had made the trip by the balcony as Rush had expected. This was as far as Rush's plan carried him. The rest was up to Macy.

"I never thought you could be so dumb, Henry. I hoped that it was just barely possible that I could take you from the rear, but I never even considered that you'd really put down your gun."

Rush shrugged his shoulders and turned slowly to face Macy.

"Put down that gun this instant, Tom," said the girl in the bed. "Mr. Henry was gentleman enough to meet your terms. Now you meet them. Put down your gun."

Macy's laugh was honestly amused. His narrow eyes became slits as the humor of the situation drew his mouth into a thin smile and pushed his cheeks up into a mockery of joviality.

"But I never claimed to be a gentleman, Ruth," he said. Then his face became grim. "This thing has gotten out of hand. You have more lives than a cat, Henry. If it weren't for you the whole thing would have been simple. You and that bloody Sheehan. I could have waited for old Simon to die. Ruth would have kept me. Then Sheehan stuck his nose in and Simon brought Henry into it and there's been nothing but trouble ever since."

Ruth Simon was looking at him with uncomprehending eyes.

"That wasn't an accident, when my father died? That wasn't an accident?"

Macy looked at her and his own look was enough. She shut her eyes and leaned back on the pillow, her face barren of color, her lids clamped tight shut as if to shut out the world. Macy smiled his nasty smile again.

"Don't let it bother you, Ruthie. I'll take care of Henry here and Sheehan and we'll be sitting pretty. As long as you're good to me there'll be nothing to worry about."

Ruth Simon raised a little and her eyes burned as she looked at Macy.

"I'm going to call the police," she said.

Macy shook his head slowly with infinite menace.

"No, you're not. You're just as guilty as I am. The story I'll tell will put you in the same cell with me."

Her eyes turned appealingly to Rush.

"But, you'll tell them—"

Macy cut over her savagely.

"He won't be here to tell them." He smiled the tight-lipped smile again. "I give him about one hour to live. That's how long it'll take to get him where I'm going." He looked at the girl in the bed. "You're going, too. Get on some clothes."

Ruth started to protest, but something in Macy's eyes stopped her. With a very real dignity she stepped out of bed and stood before them in a sheer nightgown.

"May I dress in the closet?" she asked.

"No," said Macy. "I don't know what you've got in there. Put on the clothes on the chair there. I don't want you out of my sight."

Her head went high and she walked unhesitatingly across the room to the chair he had indicated. There was a flash of long, slim legs as she pulled brief panties under her night gown, then another as she slipped out of her nightgown and pulled a dress over her head. It was all over in a second. She turned defiantly.

"I'm ready," she said, in what Rush confidently felt was the tone Marie Antoinette had used on a somewhat similar occasion.

Macy gestured with his gun.

"Ahead of me, both of you. Downstairs and out the back door. No funny stuff. I've got fifty thousand dollars in cash in my hip pocket. There's two murders against me already. I'll shoot and run the minute you make a break."

XX

A BREAK WAS THE LAST thing Rush planned. He would be cooperative as hell till they got to Sheehan. Then he could move again. They passed the door of the library and the telephone shrilled. Macy motioned them into the room and skirted around them, the gun always pointed at them, to reach the instrument.

"Hello," he said in an undertone. He made several noncommital grunts, looking once at Rush. "Okay, see you later," he said at last and replaced the telephone.

Again he herded them ahead of him onto the cement paving before the garage.

"Get out the limousine, Henry," he ordered.

Rush had opened a garage door and was halfway to the door of the car when he realized that he had not questioned the order, that he had known which garage held the limousine. He wished he had more time to search his mind. His memory of the lost period was returning. But a review would have to wait. He had business at hand.

He backed the car out of the garage and Ruth Simon entered beside him. Macy was in the back seat instantly, his gun trained impartially on their necks. He directed Rush to an address on the south side, an address Rush placed among ramshackle rooming houses and apartments. He let the car in gear and gave it the gas. In the back seat Macy hummed a tuneless melody as he kept his eyes glued on the pair in the front seat. Rush turned once to look at the girl beside him. She sat straight in her seat her face set in a meaningless stare. He looked back to the road. The street unrolled toward him with only an occasional car to pass or meet. The night stretched ahead like the road and as unreadable in advance. He would meet it in the same way, as it came.

Rush drove at last down the dilapidated street, edging the car around chuckholes and past loose bricks in the street. On either side of them were buildings in the last stages of disrepair. The houses came to an end and on either side of the road was open territory for a block in each direction. At the end of the block stood a solitary house. Looking at it, Rush figured it was probably the only one of its kind in metropolitan Chicago. The moon came out from behind a cloud for an instant and he saw that the barren space was the result. of the buildings that had occupied the space being wrecked. The only building in a hundred yards being the one toward which they were headed.

At Macy's direction Rush pulled the big car around the corner and into the shadow of the building. Then, still at gun's point. he and Ruth Simon left the car ahead of Macy who got out behind them and nudged them toward a side door of the house. Rush opened it and a dank breath of dead air rushed out to meet him.

"Just turn to your right, Henry, and

open the door. You'll find a friend of yours in there. Two friends, in fact."

Rush felt in the darkness and found a door knob. He turned it and stepped into a small room that had once been a bedroom. There was an iron cot in the corner. On the iron cot lay Captain Sheehan, stretched out on the bare iron springs, his hands and feet tied fast to the corners of the bed frame. In the dim light of the oil lamp that was the room's only illumination, he could see that Sheehan was asleep. His color was ghastly in that light and Rush was instantly certain that it was not a natural sleep. His breathing was hesitant and hoarse.

Rush wrenched his eyes from Captain Sheehan and saw what Macy had meant by two friends. Stretched on the floor along one wall lay Merwin, an angry bruise above his left eye. The other door of the room opened and the bogus Captain Sheehan stepped into the room. Macy nudged Rush with the gun and pointed to a ramshackle chair.

"Sit down, Henry."

RUSH sat down, as did Ruth Simon from whom all spirit had fled. She moved as one in a dream.

"Nice place, eh, Henry?" asked Macy. "Quiet, too. I feel very lucky to have stumbled on it. The wreckers won't be back for some time since they are engaged in a very bitter strike over something or other. I have not rented the building, feeling it was much wiser just to move in. So you see you will be unmolested for a long time."

Rush looked at Merwin.

"What happened to him?"

"You remember the phone call we had just as we left? That was from Karn—whom you know as Captain Sheehan—and who had come upon your man loitering a block down the street. He passed him hurriedly, turned a corner, and bushwacked him. He knocked him out and phoned to tell me he was bringing him on here. Very fast thinking I call it."

Rush called it that, too. It was his ace in the hole, called and topped before he could play it. He settled back in his chair to think. Macy stood talking for a moment to Karn. He whispered a few instructions, and the bogus Captain left through the outside door.

"I doubt if any of your friends will be able to find this place, Henry, but if they do, we'll have ample warning, Mr. Karn is a very capable scout. Now, is there anything you'd like, like a final cigarette? Sorry I don't have any liquor."

"Stop it!" screamed Ruth Simon. "Stop it! I can't stand it."

Macy took one step toward her and slapped her viciously across the mouth. She looked at him in amazement for an instant and then her eyes faltered and lowered to look at the floor. She was quite silent.

Rush saw nothing for it but to stall.

"You're a smart man, Macy," he said. "But I think I've had you taped all the way along. I know everything you've done and I know something you think I don't know. Something you don't want anyone to know."

"Yeah," snarled Macy. "What do you know?"

"Let me start at the first," said Rush, "and I'll tell you."

"Make it quick, I can't last all night, here."

"When you shot me in Des Moines, you knocked my memory out. Until you shot me again last night in Lincoln Park I didn't remember a thing that had happened up to the second I awakened in a hospital in Des Moines."

Macy looked at him unbelievingly.

"You mean—?"

Rush nodded.

"Right. You knocked my memory out and then you knocked it back. As a matter of fact, if you had left me alone in Des Moines you'd have been almost in the clear. You could have pulled your fake Sheehan on Simon and nobody would have known the difference. I was just about ready to give the girl a clean bill of health. I was about convinced she was the McCoy. Of course you'd have had to kill Sheehan that way, but that would have only been one murder. You could have let Mark Pastor, and Simon, go."

"You can't hang either of those on me," growled Macy.

"I can't?" asked Rush. "I wish I could get the chance. I know how you got Simon. You put a piece of hose from the exhaust pipe to the front seat of the coupe. You knew he would probably drive with the windows closed. Then you trailed right behind him. You were the first one to the wreck and you took the hose off and threw it away or carried it away under your coat. I'll lay you two to one that there are still latent finger prints of yours on that exhaust pipe now, and don't think we couldn't find it. The car is still at the wrecking garage. A post mortem will show asphyxiation or carbon monoxide poisoning as the cause of death." Rush didn't know how firm his ground was but it was a good bluff.

MACY smiled a vicious smile. "Isn't it too bad nobody's gonna tell them to look for that exhaust pipe? And how do you figure me to have knocked off old Pastor?"

"That's a cinch. He knew something that you didn't want anybody to know."

"And what was that?"

"I'll come to that in a minute. I want to put in a little background. Maybe you can help me. You had read Simon's ads in the west coast papers for years. When you hit that island you knew you had something. When you got back in this country you wrote Simon a letter and started manufacturing a daughter for him. You found the old girl from the orphanage before Jim Todd did. She didn't remember anything about a girl baby being brought in the way Simon's daughter must have been, but you helped her memory a little. From her you got the name of several kids who had been adopted about the right time and ran them down. The girl you wanted had to be a true orphan with no traceable parentage. Preferably she should again be an orphan. She had to be dark-haired and blue-eyed. You found Ruth Carr. Then you fixed it up with the woman on the coast and waited. It must have been a hell of a long wait. It took Jim Todd almost two years to find the woman on the coast."

"You're damn right it was a long wait. I thought he'd never find her. There I was sitting on a fortune and it wouldn't hatch. I had to go out of the country every so often on ships and every time I'd come back the old dame'd say, nobody'd been there. It was hell waiting."

"You were smart though. You waited. If you'd started helping out with a phony clue Jim Todd would have caught it like a hound dog. He may be slow, but he's the most thorough man in the business. He finally made his contact. You'd moved the girl to Des Moines to get her away from people who knew her. Todd found her and it was a cinch from there on in. Almost."

"Almost is right. If it hadn't been for that fool in the corner I'd have had a cinch."

"How'd you get on to Sheehan, anyway?" asked Rush.

"Friend of mine in Frisco. I never made any secret of the fact that I'd helped Simon find his daughter and was going to get a reward as soon as I could get to Chicago and collect. He says he's going to write a letter. My friend wrote me and I started trailing Simon. When he came to see you I knew he had to go, but I had to get you first."

"You almost did. You'd have been smarter to wait and get Sheehan. But all at once something occurred to you."

"Yeah," said Macy slowly, "what?"

"All at once it occurred to you that you might have been a better detective than you knew."

"Yeah," said Macy in a flat tone. "Isn't that silly?"

"Yeah," said Rush. "It certainly put you on a spot. If you were right, everybody was against you and you were out in the cold. You'd done too much work to let that happen, so you did something about it. You killed Mark Pastor for fear he knew and would give the whole thing away. He knew the girl when she was a baby. He'd know if what you were afraid of was true. And you were more than afraid of it. You almost knew it was true."

"Go on, Henry," said Macy. His eyes were narrow slits. "Go on, dig your grave."

"You started checking on your own

then. I saw you. I didn't know what you were after then, but now I know you were checking. I was on the balcony behind you when you stood outside Ruth Simon's window and watched her undress. You had me for a while. That was a move I couldn't figure. Then I talked with the real Sheehan. It fell into place then." He turned abruptly to Ruth Simon who sat looking from one to the other of them uncomprehendingly. "Miss Simon," he said, "would you mind pulling your dress up over your right leg?"

She looked at him dully. Rush reached over and pulled the dress up to the hip. There, as Sheehan had described it, was the scar of what had been a nasty gash. It was now a jagged white line several inches long.

"That does it," said Rush. "Miss Simon, you don't owe Macy a thing. A double cross wasn't enough for him. He chiseled everybody and made it a triple cross. You really are Simon's daughter."

XXI

RUTH SIMON LOOKED AT HIM uncomprehendingly for a minute, then it began to sink in. A large tear broke in the corner of her eyes and rolled down her cheek. Then she clenched her eyes tight shut as full realization came. Her head went down into her hands and her shoulders shook silently. Rush patted her back.

"Don't cry," he said. "It'll be all right. We'll get you out of this."

"That," said Macy, suddenly terse and menacing, "you certainly will not. I may have to be satisfied with fifty grand but you'll never stick me for this. I've wasted too much time already. I should be on my way."

He raised the gun slowly to center on Rush. He sighted down the barrel carefully as though to make sure that this time he didn't miss. His finger whitened on the trigger and the gun went off.

The bullet went into the ceiling over Rush's head as Macy's feet flew out from under him. Rush dived with the shot, the knife from his wrist sheath in his hand. He grabbed the hand that held the gun and with his other stabbed viciously. The knife went through the fleshy forearm and stuck in the floor. Macy screamed in anguish, relaxed his hold on the gun and rolled over to tug at the knife.

"Nice work, Merwin," said Rush. "I thought you'd never get there."

"Thanks, boss. He should a known a bat on the head ain't gonna put me out fer long."

"No talk now, Merwin. Get out the other door. There's a guy outside we've got to get."

Rush stepped over to Macy a moment. Macy sat with his wrist pillowed in his hand groaning that he was bleeding to death. Rush looked at him a moment then calmly slugged him beside the temple with the gun butt. He stepped down to the dark hall beside the outside door and waited. The door opened and Karn came quickly into the hallway.

"What's the matter, Macy?" he asked.

"This," said Rush, and slugged him with the gun. Merwin came through the door behind Karn and caught him as he slumped.

"Inside with him, Merwin. Help me untie Sheehan and we'll tie these two up. I've got to get Sheehan to a hospital."

Rush paused only long enough to see that Macy was really in no danger of bleeding to death. They loaded into the limousine and zoomed away. Carnahan could clean up after him.

He grinned when he thought of Carnahan. He'd call him from the hospital, tell him to pick up the two men and hang up. Tomorrow would be fine for explanations.

IT WAS one-fifteen when Rush and Merwin left the hospital. Sheehan would live and Ruth Simon was asleep in a hospital bed registered as Jane Grossnickle. Rush thought up the name as a hedge against police and newspaper interference. He was on the books as next of kin. Her uncle, if his signature meant anything. Basil Grossnickle, he had signed himself. He had called Carnahan as soon as Sheehan was assured of adequate attention. That was a phone call that would haunt Carnahan till the end of his days.

"Sam," Rush said, "Rush. There's a couple of guys in a house. One of them killed Simon. He also killed a guy in Keystone, Oklahoma. The other is an accessory after some fact or other. Pick 'em up."

"What charges?" Carnahan had screamed.

"Murder, fraud, conspiracy, piracy, income tax evasion. They've broken all the laws."

"Where are they?" It was no longer a scream but a fervent plea. He had heard Rush in this mood before.

Rush gave him the address and hung up. It pleased him somehow to think of Sam Carnahan climbing out onto the end of a long limb on his bare word.

In the car Rush was silent as he drove toward his office. Gertrude needed relieving and if his instincts had not failed him someone else was waiting there. His instincts had not failed him, or rather they had short changed him. His office was loaded. The list of guests included Pappy, Smoky, Marion, Gertrude, who after all belonged there, and a delegation from the uniformed police. Pappy met him at the door.

"If you won't talk, blow fast, Carnahan's inside."

Rush sighed deeply. He had counted on at least twenty-four hours before he had to make up his mind what to tell Carnahan. There were several things he meant to insist on and Carnahan might need some handling. Putting it off, however, would only make it harder.

"Okay," said Rush, "I'll see him. You and Smoky might as well come in because the story he gets is the one you print."

Pappy started to argue but Rush stopped him.

"It's a good story. Better than you've had since the atomic bomb. Don't worry, just come along."

The three of them entered the door to Rush's private office. Rush first. Carnahan sat behind Rush's desk smoking a cigar. He was alone in the room. He looked up when Rush came in and scowled.

"A hell of a mess this is. I arrest two guys, book them on open charges, strictly on the word of a private eye. I have to come to his office to find out what the charges are because he hangs up on me. I oughta throw you in the can with them. Come on, give."

Rush sat on the divan and Smoky and Pappy found resting places around the room. Unobtrusively Smoky took out a blank pad and put it on his knee. He found a pencil in the pocket of his voluminous shirt and bit the end of it. All of them looked at Rush expectantly. He realized the dramatic value of his position and took his time about lighting a cigarette.

"Well, it's like this," he said slowly. "I lost my memory a month ago and I don't remember a thing until night before ast."

He waited then for the information to get to Carnahan.

"What?" sputtered Carnahan. "A month ago. Hell, you were in my office two weeks ago. What is this lost memory? You knew me."

Rush shook his head slowly.

"No, Sammy, I didn't. I got shot in Des Moines and I lost my memory. I can prove it with scars and medical testimony. So—" He let his voice trail off dramatically. "So, Sammy, let's not excite me too much or I might forget a lot of other stuff."

THE threat was not veiled. It was wide open. Carnahan would take the story he wanted to give him or none at all. Carnahan looked at him steadily for the space of a minute. His lips flattened into a thin white line with suppressed indignation but he gave up.

"Okay," he said. "I've got to have some kind of a story. Give it to me."

Rush gave it to him. He made it short and sweet. When he was through Carnahan had a case for the District Attorney. He had everything he had come for except the real story. The case was all very legal —it would electrocute Macy without a hitch, but it left Ruth Simon in the clear. She appeared in Rush's story as a much wronged young heiress who had been the victim of a particularly vicious fraud. Rush felt that she had suffered enough already. He was rather proud of himself when he was through. Carnahan sat look-

ing at him through a haze of cigar smoke.

"Well," said Rush, "what're you waiting for?"

Carnahan swore at him more in sorrow than in anger.

"I'll tell you what I'm waiting for," he said. "I'm waiting for strength to go on. I have no doubt that almost all of that is true, but I know damn well it's all guesses as far as you're concerned. It's the cops who'll check fingerprints on that car. It's the cops who'll check motive and opportunity on the gent in Oklahoma. It's the cops who'll have to rig your stuff so that the D.A. can make it stand up in court. And it'll be Rush Henry who's sitting on his fanny with a big check for fixing things up for the Simon girl."

"Oh, I'll be glad to help, Sam," said Rush. "There may be a few odd facts I've left out. If you get to a stalling spot in your case, call me up. I'll fix it up with proof." He wiped the smile from his face and the kidding note left his voice. "But don't ever doubt that Macy is as guilty as hell. And don't ever doubt that my story is as true as it ever needs to be as far as the law is concerned. Let's not have any trouble over that."

Sam stood up behind the desk.

"No, Rush," he said wearily, "I don't think we'll have any trouble. We never have had with your stuff. It's just that I get so damn sick and tired of working my head off and never knowing the whole story. Sometime will you promise to tell me everything?"

"You can count on it, Sam," said Rush. "Sometime I'll tell you the story of the prettiest triple cross you ever heard of. Come around after this has all settled down and I'll take an hour off and tell you."

Sam just looked at him for a minute. Then he puffed savagely on his cigar once and left the room. Pappy and Smoky looked at Rush.

"Okay," said Pappy. "It's a swell story. We'll have it on the streets in a couple of hours. And," he asked, "when are you going to tell us the story of this so lovely triple cross?"

"Tomorrow," said Rush. "I'm tired. I'm thirsty. I'm hungry, and I've got an appointment."

"An appointment?" asked Pappy.

"You heard me," said Rush. "An appointment."

HE KEPT his appointment. Twenty minutes later he and Marion were in Barney's. The place was deserted, Rush having let the pair of them in with his own key. He had gone behind the bar to mix drinks and they stood on opposite sides of the mahogany top talking. Rush had long since explained the evening to Marion, giving her an only slightly flavored version of the overall strategy. Marion had long since ceased to think about the affair of the Simons.

Being a very direct girl, she came directly to the point.

"Have you ever thought of getting married?" she said. "Not that it's entirely necessary, but I had a long talk with my mother once."

"I have dreamed of it," said Rush, "but only after eating Welsh rarebit. I'd make a lousy husband."

"You say that very easily. How much practice have you had?"

Rush was suddenly tired and suddenly through with fencing.

"Several times, Marion," he said. "Every time because I thought it was the only thing I could say that would get the job done without losing the light touch."

"You have no use for marriage then?"

Rush shook his head slowly from side to side.

"Not for me. Somebody else, fine. But not for me. Not now. I live the wrong kind of life to fit with anybody else's. Much as I want to, it wouldn't work." He looked straight into her eyes. "You know it as well as I do."

She nodded.

"Okay," she said. "But in the meantime—"

"In the meantime?" said Rush. "That's something else again."

He tilted the bottle of Old Overholt over both their glasses. He raised his own to his lips and toasted Marion.

"Here's to 'in the meantime'," he said.

PASSPORT TO HELL

By JOHN STARR

Big John Stanislaw wanted out. The heat was on—and he had the perfect set-up for a first-class lam. All he needed was three corpses to offer the gods of chance.

STANISLAW was never a gunman, yet he was packing a flat automatic now in an armpit holster. Stanislaw was not a nervous man—his calm was notorious—yet now the fingers of his hands twitched and he paced the room like a caged jungle cat. Stanislaw did not smoke or drink, but he would have paid ten thousand dollars tonight—ten grand, cash, on the line—for the solace that nicotine or whiskey sometimes bring to a man.

He paced the room up and down. Back and across. His hands kept twisting and his face was a tense mask.

Now he said, "Are you sure the money is safe—that it is there—that I can get it?"

And he said again, "Nobody knows. . . . Are you sure nobody knows?"

When his words died in silence, he cursed. He whirled, and his shaking hands were talons. He cried out, "Answer me, Marlock. You damned old buzzard, speak to me!"

Marlock did not raise his head from the papers over which his pen rasped. Saul Marlock was a lawyer—one of the greatest, they called him—and he had seen the mask stripped from many a man before. He growled in his deep and resonant voice, "Shut up, you fool, or we'll both be crazy."

Scratch, scratch, went his pen on the paper.

The blood of that inner excitement

drained out of Stanislaw's face, and he halted abruptly in his pacing. His dark eyes narrowed, and glared at Marlock's back hunched over the table, at the seamed buzzard neck under the fringe of Marlock's white hair. In Marlock's voice John Stanislaw had felt the bite of sardonic laughter, and to Stanislaw laughter was poison. Sneers he could stand for, and spoken insult, but the men who laughed at Stanislaw paid for their mirth in coin that was unpleasant.

But Marlock's mirth now was good poison. Stanislaw saw that he was indeed a fool—idiotic—a coward like a woman. His actions did not suit him. John Stanislaw's jaw tightened and he tore his eyes away from Marlock's bent back. He stalked to the window and stared blindly into a night pregnant with rain. His fingers drummed a tattoo on the pane. Then gradually Stanislaw came back to himself. The drum of his fingers slackened pace. His hand relaxed. He stood erect, chest out, and breathed deeply until the rage and blind fear had abated. Until he became John Stanislaw again—the Mr. S. that the Big Street knew, calm, suave, imperturbable.

He said over his shoulder, voice steady, "Thank you, Marlock."

Yet he did not forgive the lawyer for his unseen and silent laughter. Nor did his fear leave him, though now he had it safely hidden. His fear would not vanish until this night was safely over. Tonight John Stanislaw was shooting the works in the most daring, most heedless gamble of his dark and twisted career.

Tonight—within the hour . . .

John Stanislaw looked down on the lights of the city twelve stories below, and the thin, sardonic smile that many men knew touched his lips for a moment. That was the Main Stem down there—a winding, glowing snake in the misty dark. Over beyond was the deeper blot of the Park. Farther away, tall spires lifted their burning peaks into the dim sky. . . . New York—bright metropolis of the world! Broadway—the Great White Way!

Hot trumpets and strip dancers, Stanislaw thought to himself. Orange-drink stands and bus-loads of boobs. Four-flushers in full-dress—come-on men—song hawkers and hustlers. 50 dazzling dancing mates 50—a dime a throw and not worth a dime a dozen. No cover charge. . . .

"Sucker's paradise," Stanislaw muttered aloud, and his dark smile widened without mirth.

Marlock said, "Be with you in three minutes."

Scratch . . . scratch whispered the pen.

IN the dusky glass of the window Stanislaw saw that his tie was askew, and he adjusted it carefully. He smoothed his sleek hair, arranged the satin lapels of his evening coat. In the dark mirror he studied himself and the picture pleased him. He had not gone soft and fat as he once had feared. There were lines in his face, but handball and fencing had kept his belly flat and hard. His eyes were clear. At thirty-two he still had the prime of his life before him.

He jerked his vest down smooth, twitched again at his tie. The prime of life—and from this night on John Stanislaw would enjoy it.

Only three men knew it—three men in all the world—but tonight Mr. S. was quitting the racket. Breaking it off clean, once and for all. Stanislaw's eyes followed to the spot where his Casa Casenova added a red gleam to Broadway's glitter. Tomorrow somebody else would be grabbing the owner's cut on the society take up there. Somebody else would be paying off the bartenders at Tenth and Charles after tomorrow. Somebody else could have the cash and the grief, for Mr. S.—John Stanislaw of the onyx studs and the onyx eyes—would be dead.

The tabloid rags would be screaming the news in scareheads. *Death Trumps Boss Gambler.* Winchell would be wise-cracking about it—professing vaguely-told information. The boys would be loading up to muscle in on the floating dice take-off. Stool-pigeons and the plain-clothes squad would be running their tails off. There would be a funeral with plenty of swank. The Commissioner of Police would issue a statement.

Tonight John Stanislaw would die in the eyes of the world.

"Requiescat in pace!" murmured John Stanislaw. He smiled at the smiling image in the dark window. He bowed mockingly. "We who are about to die salute you."

From the street below taxis hooted a faint, sardonic echo.

SAUL MARLOCK was scrubbing the ink stains from his fingers with the damp edge of a towel. "I am doing this foolishness merely to humor you—understand that, Stanislaw." It was the third time he had made approximately the same statement.

Stanislaw nodded, staring down at the papers on the table.

"For the first time in thirty years I have been my own clerk," Marlock went on. He laughed. "It reminded me of other days. I aspired to be district attorney once, did you know that, Stanislaw?"

Stanislaw said, "You're getting paid for it. The fewer that know about this the less the chance of a leak. I'm taking the chances—what are *you* squawking about!"

Marlock lit a long cigar and sat down. He looked at his watch and yawned.

"I have made a list of everything for your information," he said. "The money has been transferred according to your directions as the records there will show. You have letters of credit on the best banking houses in Vienna, Liverpool, Hamburg and Madrid. You have deposit vaults in Oslo and Copenhagen. And if you follow the system I have worked out for you there can be no trace. That I will guarantee, Stanislaw—the rest is up to you."

John Stanislaw was studying the papers, adding rapidly on a pad. "These totals are screwy—or I can't count," he said after a moment.

"I told you I was taking my fee in advance," Marlock reminded. "I didn't note it there, but I have transferred the Trans Marine bonds to cover my—er—unusual exertions during the past two weeks. The transfer is there—predated, of course—for your signature."

Stanislaw turned to stare at him with narrowed eyes. "Those bonds are worth a hundred thousand," he stated flatly.

"Not quite that, but almost," Marlock admitted. He spoke casually.

Their glances met and held, and John Stanislaw was the first to turn his eyes away. He pretended to study the transfer form that Marlock pushed in front of him, but again he had to fight back the surge of rage that was rising. He realized suddenly that he had always hated the cold power of Marlock's voice—the grim certainty of Marlock's old and ugly face. Under the table his hand clenched and trembled.

Laugh number two, eh?

Okay, pal . . . *'Sta bueno,* you damn' old buzzard!

"Use that purple pen," Marlock advised calmly. "It contains a special ink that will dry to correspond with the date of the transfer. Even under microscopic analysis."

Stanislaw took the pen in his left hand and signed *N. S. Rogers* with smooth, swinging strokes. N. S. Rogers was one of five dummy names under which he concealed his finances. It had taken Stanislaw almost three months of practice before his other hand was trained, but Stanislaw had conquered that difficulty with the thoroughness that was typical of him. He blew on the signature until it was dry and passed the transfer to Marlock. The lawyer put it in his pocket and looked at his watch again.

"Well, I go to my righteous bed," he said. "Goodbye, Stanislaw, and good luck. You'll need it."

He ground out the glowing end of his cigar, but Stanislaw said, "Wait a minute, Saul. The Greek is calling me at twelve sharp—bringing Cameron up here. Why don't you take a look at him?"

Marlock shook his head. "I knew his father too well," Marlock said, and his voice was a slap in the face. "No, thanks. I aim to stay clear of that end of it, even if the kid's going to die anyway."

"Then have one drink to my success," Stanislaw invited. "Just one."

Marlock hesitated, shrugged. "Brandy and soda," he said.

He was humming tonelessly, chair tilted back, when Stanislaw returned from the kitchenette with a bottle and glasses and a siphon. Stanislaw went out again for a bowl of ice cubes. He had taken off his coat. He wore a heavy silk lounging robe, now, and the flat automatic had been transferred to one of its red pockets.

The clock on the dresser said it would be midnight in four minutes.

STANISLAW seemed more cheerful as he built the drinks. Brandy and soda for Marlock. Plain soda with lemon for himself. His voice had a new note in it as he talked.

"I'll make it clean, Saul," he said. "Wait and see. He's my size, my coloring. He'll be wearing my clothes—in my car—my watch—my silver-initial stick. . . ."

Marlock nodded, his seamed face inscrutable.

"Car total loss. Occupant burned beyond recognition," he droned, as if he read from a newspaper account.

Stanislaw shrugged. He went on talking, his words flowing more swiftly as if by convincing Marlock he added to his own conviction.

"Why should they doubt?" he asked. "How can they check?" And he went on to tell Marlock things the lawyer already knew. No dentist had ever made a chart of Stanislaw's teeth. The finger prints of John Stanislaw that had been taken six years before had mysteriously disappeared from Headquarters files. Three or four men—men of importance, beyond reproach—could truthfully testify that Stanislaw had been nervously apprehensive of some such thing for weeks. There could be no check on Cameron—an absolute stranger, spending his first day in town. No relative, and his coming to New York secret even to his few friends.

"It's a dream," Stanislaw said, his voice harsh with excitement. "A hundred to one shot. What else can anybody figure except that they've finally taken John Stanislaw for a ride?"

Marlock sipped at his drink before replying. "You still have your getaway," he reminded. "I have arranged it carefully—the plane, your passage on the *Siberia,* fake passports, all that. And yet . . . I don't think you'll make it. It's too much like a story book. Too fantastic."

He finished his drink and arose. He looked at Stanislaw standing there and smiled. Marlock understood what John Stanislaw was up against, and the feeling of one fighting man for another warmed his heart to the gambler for an instant.

Of all the carrion crew that lived by its wits from other men's work, Stanislaw was the gamest, he thought. For months now, this sleek, dark man facing Marlock had been waging a losing battle with overwhelming force. As Public Enemy Number Four—duly chronicled in the press—John Stanislaw had been a target for the Federal investigators who were ferreting out Income Tax frauds. And they had fastened their hooks in Stanislaw, even as they had in the other big fish of the underworld. Stanislaw had seen the careful cases of other bright-light moguls crashed on the rocks of inexorable law. He knew he was up against a game where all his bribery, all Marlock's legal tricks, were of no avail.

"Six years," the Judge had said to Haggerman's brilliant array of lawyers. Six years and a heavy fine. They had pronounced the same sentence in Chicago, in Detroit. And try and beat them! Publicity made it impossible that these raps should fail to stand up.

Others had fought and lost. Stanislaw was taking their lesson to heart—was running while there was still a chance.

Because the chance was so desperate, Marlock forgot for a moment the inherent antagonism that had always flourished between them. He put out his hand and Stanislaw took it.

"It's too bad you didn't get a better break, John," Marlock said. He was thinking of what Stanislaw might have been if the cards of Fate had fallen differently. "If you had something better than paper and watches to mark your grave you might get away with it. I—"

Stanislaw was still holding the lawyer's hand in his cold palm. "I have something better," the gambler said slowly. "Two aces in the hole. Besides those other

things, I'll leave The Greek there for them."

Marlock's fingers stiffened and he tried to draw his hand away.

"The Greek . . . ?"

The Greek was John Stanislaw's right-hand man—his one friend, his shadow from the early days. The man closest to the famous gambler. Rumor said they came from the same small town in the West. Men said the Greek was the one living thing—except for his well-known dogs—that John Stanislaw loved. . . .

The telephone shrilled like a brazen, shrieking voice in the silence.

"The Greek—" John Stanislaw said. "That will leave only *two* who know, Marlock."

He released the lawyer's hand as the telephone jangled again. "That'll be The Greek calling now," Stanislaw said. "Answer it, won't you?"

Marlock must have known then what Stanislaw planned, for it was written in the madness of the gambler's eyes, in the crouching tenseness of his body, in that stiffened arm that hid its hand in the pocket of Stanislaw's dressing robe. Marlock was a criminal lawyer—a reader of men—and though Stanislaw had never killed before, had been known, indeed, to avoid violence—Marlock *must* have marked the murder lust that swept the man now.

Yet Marlock just stared at him, seamed face drained of color and loose-lipped jaw sagging in disbelief. As if some power beyond his will directed it, Marlock turned. His hand reached out for the clanging phone.

Stanislaw's gun had a silencer. He had intended to shoot the lawyer, trusting the ringing phone to drown out the sound. He had timed it all, arranged it all very carefully in his mind. Yet as their talk had gone on some instinct changed the gambler's plan. The silken cord that tied his dressing robe at the waist was loose. Now it dangled in his left hand, unseen. As Marlock turned, Stanislaw whipped up that cord in both hands and leaped. The silken rope jerked on Marlock's neck and the force of the spring bore them both to the lounge nearby.

Stanislaw had planned it so.

The cry of fear that had been choked up in Marlock's throat broke out now, but it was only a gasping whisper. His legs threshed, and he tried to claw with his hands. But Stanislaw bore him down. His knees pressed into Marlock's back. The tendons in the gambler's strong arms were rigid with the strain. His face was the fearful, lustful mask of a devil.

In the silence the clock ticked. One minute after twelve, its hand stated.

II

STEVE CAMERON rattled the dice in his hand. His eyes were fever-bright, and excitement made his voice shrill.

"Eighty bucks open," he said. "Hop on me, gamblers."

A coffee-brown dandy from Harlem dropped a yellow bill on the long, banked table. He picked up two tens and smoothed them as he waited for the roll. Steve breathed into his clenched hand and the dice chattered. He sent them galloping with a back-hand cast, and turned up an ace and a trey.

"Little Joe from Kokomo!" he cried, and he cradled the dice again in his hot palm. He flashed a glance at The Greek who was still standing behind him, but he could awaken no response to his excitement in that dark, saturnine face. Three hundred was probably small change to a big shot like The Greek. But it was heavy dough to Steve Cameron.

Little Joe. . . . Come out you Joe. . . .

Steve rolled a nine on the next throw; then four eights in succession. The man next to him offered three to two that he wouldn't, but Steve shook his head. On the sixth cast he rolled out a pair of deuces, and passed the dice.

"It's almost twelve," Steve explained, nodding toward the clock, "and I never could lay up a dime on Friday. My bad luck day."

No one listened to what he was saying. No one spoke, or seemed to notice he was out of the game. They'd have torn the roof off if he'd tried to ease out like

that down in Mercer County, Steve thought. But this was different—this was the Main Stem, the Big Place. . . .

"Small town boy makes good," he said to The Greek, tapping his newly won roll with the back of his hand. "Three hundred even, after givin' you your ten back."

The Greek grunted and moved back from the press of the craps-shooters. He tucked the ten negligently into an upper pocket of his white-piped vest. He made no sign to Steve Cameron, but there was a command to follow in the way he turned toward the door.

In the outer room were pool tables, at least thirty of them. There were blackboards for tomorrow's entries on the wall. Near the long lunch-bar was an array of phone booths. The Greek disappeared in one while Steve drank a glass of milk.

"No answer," The Greek said when he came out. He shrugged. Steve did not know what he was talking about.

They passed down a bright hallway, so narrow they had to walk in single file. An alcove opened at the end of it, where a man sat in a green chair near the thick, green ice-box door. This man rose as they came along the hall and nodded to The Greek. He tapped twice on the door, and waited a moment before he manipulated the series of bolts that made it secure.

There was another guard outside, and another array of locks for his attention. They could hear them clicking as they passed down the narrow, carpeted stairs that led to the street.

"You'd think it was the Mint back there," Steve said over his shoulder. He was feeling pretty swell.

"They cannot even open the place without twenty thousand in the box," The Greek said in his thin, dry voice. "On big nights their take will run fifty Gs. That is important money in these days. There are too many crazy kids on the make these days for a business man to take a chance."

He spoke with just the faintest trace of accent, spacing his words precisely as if he had to stop to think between them. Apparently the subject interested The Greek for it was the first time Steve Cameron had heard him string more than three words together.

Down on the street a legless beggar propelled himself through the thinning crowd. A beggar with a forced and sickly smile twisting his face. A leashed terrier pup beside him barked for attention at trained intervals. Steve Cameron dropped a quarter in the cup.

"For luck," he told The Greek.

The Greek blew smoke from his nostrils expressively.

A DRIZZLE of rain blurred Broadway now as the Yellow pulled up at the green-and-gold marquee of the Park Manor. A flunkey in green-and-gold opened and closed the taxi door. A bright electric clock marked the time as twelve-ten, but it seemed to Steve Cameron he had been in this town for months rather than the six brief hours since The Greek had met him at the station. He felt on top of the world. He had not coughed in a long time, and the dull burn in his chest was forgotten. All set. And he told himself that from here on in there would be no small-time stuff for Steve Cameron. Big shot or bust—blue chips or nothing. . . .

He felt The Greek's fingers clench on his arm, turned as a figure came toward them out of the doorway's shadow. This man was smiling, and he spoke to The Greek in a low voice. The Greek did not look at him or stop. His grip on Steve's arm tightened, and they spun fast through the revolving doors. But the man caught up with them before they had taken six steps across the lobby.

He said, "What's the hurry boys? Ain't gone high-hat, have you?"

He was tall and thin and swarthy. The collar of his light topcoat was pulled up around his chin, and his black, pull-down hat was dripping. His voice was unpleasant.

The Greek said, "Hello, Nick. Did not see you. How are tricks?" and tried to keep on moving toward the elevators. But the tall man blocked the way.

"Take it easy," he said slowly. "It's early yet." His eyes studied The Greek intently. "I came all the way in from Croton just to have a talk with you or Stanislaw. Nasty night, too, for driving."

He made a sweep with his hat so that a spray of water sprinkled on the tile floor. Steve Cameron saw hair that was startling in its whiteness above the man's dark face. A purple birthmark covered the left side of his forehead almost to the ear, but you couldn't see it when he had his hat on. He continued to smile pleasantly—a smile that was mostly a show of white, even teeth.

The Greek scowled. "Well—?"

The man with the white hair said, "Stanislaw's dogs are both dead. Poisoned. I got it straight and I'm curious. You know me, Hippolite. If there's something on why don't you deal the Old Colonel in from scratch? Make it easier for everybody."

The Greek said, "Drop that Hippolite stuff, Nick. The dogs are all right. You are utsnay. Lay off the tea."

"They're dead — poisoned," the white-haired man corrected. "They train those police dogs, too, not to take food from strangers. Stanislaw's place at Croton is guarded like a fort, and it must have been an inside job. Stanislaw treated them like they were his kids. Now they're wiped out. Who done it—why? Why ain't Stanislaw squawking about it? What's he going to do about it? What's up? . . . I want to know."

Steve Cameron remembered then. There had been pictures of those dogs in the roto section plenty of times. Worth thousands —prize dogs from Germany. He looked at The Greek and saw that The Greek was nervous.

The white-haired man said, "I've been trying to get Stanislaw since ten o'clock. His phone don't answer. The clerk says he ain't here, and he ain't at any of the other spots. I got a hunch and I'm asking questions. What's on the fire? Who gave Stanislaw's pups the works?"

The Greek growled, "Aw, lay off." and bit at his lip. "What is it to you, anyway?"

"It's my job," the white-haired man said. "The Commissioner's idea, you know is to stop crime before it starts. You read that in the papers. That's why he created this confidential little squad I'm on. Now, personally, I like to see you boys settle your own little troubles. It saves time and money. Every time one of you bites the dust, it's one less I got to worry about. But I got to see that Rongetti looks good. I want a promotion next year. So when anything breaks I want to be in on it. If somebody's after Stanislaw's hide I want to be on the inside. If Mr. S. is on the warpath I want to know what all the shooting's about. I sleep better when I got all the details. I ain't after anything on Mr. S. Them Federals have got him plenty and he knows it. You don't have to worry about me, so come on, Hippolite, let's you and me be buddies. What happened to the Big Shot's bow-wows?"

The Green cursed under his breath and his face was furious. His thin voice was barbed with anger. "Why don't you grow up, Nick?" he asked. "Get wise and roll your hoop in some other alley. Lay off me, see, or one of these nights . . ."

The man with the white hair nodded. "Yeah, I know. Some night like this one —some nice night for murder. But it won't be any dumb heel like you, muscle-bound, that will slip Rongetti his Mickey Finn . . . Who's the punk?"

The Greek said to Steve, "Never mind, never mind. Just Nick Rongetti blowing off his mouth. Just a dumb cop, kid, a clown flatfoot putting his act on." He reached out a hairy paw and moved the white-haired man out of the way.

Rongetti kept on smiling. Just before the elevator doors closed, Steve saw him sitting in a chair that covered the elevator exits. He was looking at them over the edge of a newspaper.

THE Greek knocked twice on the door of 1132, and knocked again before there was an answer. A voice asked, "Yeah—who is it?"

The Greek said, "It's all right—it's me. Open up, Joe."

A door chain rattled and a man looked out at them. He grunted and let them into a large, bare room. A bed in one corner —lounge near the windows—a table and chair under the center light.

Joe was a tall-blond man in shirt-sleeves. He nodded toward a closed door. "Been

waitin' for you twenty minutes. Old Man Marlock's in there with him now."

There was a bottle of rye on the table and the Greek poured a stiff one into a water-glass. Joe went back to his half-finished game of Canfield. Steve Cameron thought longingly of a cigarette. He sat on the arm of the lounge where he could look out the window.

Down there below him the lights of the park gleamed in the misty night. That long, gleaming snake winding through the dark was Broadway — bright lights and hot music, good-looking women and big money. Steve Cameron drank it in with his eyes, and again his hunch burned hot in him. He was going to get well—get some sun and burn those bugs out of his chest. He was going to be a big shot in New York—one of the biggest. He'd have money, plenty of it, and women, and fine clothes. The name of Lucky Steve Cameron was going to mean something.

Some day—some way.

Hard work? Sure, it meant hard work. But Steve Cameron was used to that. His life had been nothing else but hard work ever since he could remember. That State school, for instance, where they'd dragged him out at five to sweat in the tobacco bottoms. The endless day in the mines when he'd broken his back, almost, for thirty bucks a week. That sixteen-hour shift stuff at the garage . . . Hard work? Hell, Steve Cameron had been weaned on it.

But down there below him now was Broadway—the Main Drag. In that next room was John Stanislaw—better known as Mr. S., and still better known as the Big Shot. Mr. S. had sent for Steve Cameron. Mr. S. could use him because this job needed a man who was absolutely unknown to the gambling fraternity. And Steve Cameron could use Mr. S. John Stanislaw was passing him his big chance, and Steve Cameron wasn't going to fumble it.

The sign was right. His hunch told him that the Cameron luck was due to climb out from behind the eight ball.

He walked over to the table where Joe was riffling his solitaire deck. He smiled to himself as he saw the shoulder-holstered automatic that peeped out from Joe's unbuttoned vest. Steve Cameron had been taught to have little respect for gunmen. Men with brains—the big timers—hired guns; they did not wear them.

He said to Joe: "Don't you know it's bad luck to shuffle a deck endways? I can cut a higher card than you for a sawbuck."

Joe lifted a heavy face and went on riffling the cards. "Call your gambler off," he said to the Greek, and the Greek laughed. They started a three-handed game of blackjack, and Steve was exactly even when the adjoining door opened and Steve saw John Stanislaw for the first time.

His chair almost toppled as Steve Cameron leaped to his feet.

He saw a man of medium height, darkly handsome, dressed in immaculate evening clothes. A man whose face looked no older than Steve Cameron's own, but who held himself with the sureness and the poise that marks your man-of-the-world. Steve Cameron saw before him the kind of man he hoped to be some day.

Stanislaw held out his hand as he came forward. He said heartily, "I'm glad to see you, Cameron."

Steve mumbled something. He smiled as Stanislaw smiled. Steve liked the depth and warmth of Mr. Stanislaw's voice. He liked the cool and steady grip of the man's hand.

Stanislaw said to the blond man, "You can scram now, Joe. Everything all right out here?"

Joe nodded. "That phone's been clicking over there, but I wadded the bell and didn't answer. Everything's jake. Good night, boss. Good night."

The Greek double-locked the door after him.

"Come on inside here," Stanislaw invited. "My private office. We got a lot of things to settle and not much time to settle them."

He beckoned the Greek to follow after.

They went into the other room, a room lavishly furnished with leather chairs and a long divan. No bed. Steve wondered where the Marlock Joe talked about had disappeared to, but he asked no questions.

III

THERE never was a man like Johnny Stanislaw, the Greek thought to himself, and there never would be another. He was made out of a mould reserved for only the toughest clay, and then the mould was broken.

Smooth? There was none so smooth as Stanislaw. Listen to him now talking to that boy like a father. Look at that smile on him—like in a picture.

Tough? They did not come any tougher. See how calm he is—how nerveless. That man Stanislaw—aces, all aces!

Even when he was so young, Johnny Stanislaw was that way. He never worked in the fields like the others. He would laugh at their rough hands and their sweating and call them boobs. "A strong back and a weak mind," he would say. While the others worked he read books and fiddled on his violin. He was always better dressed, even though his father's farm was not big, and his father not as rich as the father of Hippolite Zenopolis.

But that was his fate. Hippolite Zenopolis, whom Broadway knew as the Greek, had never begrudged Stanislaw his little airs. They were part of the man, and the Greek loved them.

He kept his face stiff, like a mask, while the other two talked there in that room. He did not speak. He was content to watch Stanislaw in his greatest piece of acting. If he smiled now and then, the smile was inside where no one could see it.

Stanislaw's smooth voice went on: "Your father was my friend—the straightest man I ever knew. If I can help you I am glad to do it for the sake of his memory. And I want you to remember this: I am not acting in a spirit of charity. I am not charitable. You can be of real value to me out there. I need a man like you. You will earn every penny you get from me."

Hot stuff, eh? Believe you, that Stanislaw can talk to 'em!

The Greek remembered Steve Cameron's father—the thin guy who worked for Joe Madden. He was a good dealer, too, but a sap just the same. The dolls got him. And he was always having hunches on the gee-gees at Pimlico and Havre de Grace. Picking his horses because of their names—and him on the inside, remember!

"Hunch players sleep in the gutter," Stanislaw always said. Well, Old Man Cameron didn't miss it far. He was blind and broke, they said, when it came time to bury him.

Now the Kid's voice came, nervous and sincere:

"I won't forget. I'll remember it until the day I die. I'll make good for you out there. I'll get well. And some day I'll be a man like you are. I have had that in my mind since the first time I saw you."

The Greek shielded his face with cupped hands as he lit a cigaret. "Until the day I die. . . ." He did not want to look at Stanislaw with those words still in the air, or he might go soft. His eyes might betray him.

It was good to think now that this Cameron would have died in a couple of months or so, anyway, if Stanislaw had never met him. It was not really murder—just giving Fate a little boost from behind.

The Greek sniffed smoke from his nostrils.

They had come across this Cameron in a funny way. They had gone to White Sulphur for a couple of weeks when Stanislaw needed a rest. Down to some swell joint with stinking water and high-hat babies riding horseback and shooting golf. A sort of hick place, too—nothing at all like Miami.

They were driving back in the Hispano, and the detours were fierce. Terrible roads—no wonder they lost the way. They ended up next morning with a busted spring at one of those wide places in the road that was called a town. They were tired and hungry and sore.

"Bear down on that horn," Stanislaw growled when they came to the dinky garage.

The Greek bore down and the sound seemed to fill the mountain silence. This Cameron kid came out and looked at them. He recognized Stanislaw right off the bat and called him by name. And right then

and there, first thing, in the Greek's private opinion, Stanislaw got the idea they were working out tonight. It must have come to him hot, just like that.

For he didn't growl any more, even when they had to wait twelve hours for a new spring to be hauled in. He talked soft, and laughed. He ate with Cameron and pumped him. Learned his whole story about his father and all. The Kid even had clips of Stanislaw's picture and newspaper guff about him.

The fact that Cameron was sick was obvious. Stanislaw spotted it right off, and the Kid admitted the local doctor said he was in a bad way. He needed the dry air of the West—but try and get it with no scratch in your pocket. It was the old sob story, and Stanislaw went for it because the layout was made to order.

He told the Kid to stick it out until he could make a few arrangements. When things were right he'd wire enough jack for Cameron to come to New York. Just the money—no message. Cameron wasn't to say a word—it was big stuff, a secret job. The Kid was impressed. He promised. And you could tell he was the kind that kept a promise.

So—bang!—the money goes out. Sent from Chicago, too, by that smart Johnny Stanislaw. And here's Cameron with too bright eyes, laughing now with Stanislaw.

Brains—that's what does it!

THE talk, talk, talk was beginning to get on Stanislaw's nerves, but he held himself in. He must be calm, easy, suave—the genial Mr. S. that the Street knew. He must laugh, take things easy. Though he felt like shouting aloud and running—running to any place where it was dark and he could hide. Anywhere away from this room.

But he must go on. He was talking about his place in Reno, a sucker joint in which he owned a quarter share.

"You will register at some good hotel," he was saying, "and get out in the sun all day. Take it easy. Drop in at the place occasionally and keep your eyes open. Get to be known there. Never mention my name. Do not write to me. But get the figures on the average play—roughly, of course—and have them ready when I send for them."

Steve Cameron nodded. He understood.

"It may take you two months. Maybe longer. And if things are what I figure I may find a place for you out there until the doctors say you're sound again. But that comes later. Everything clear so far?"

Steve nodded again, for he did not trust his voice. Stanislaw's hand clapped him lightly on the shoulder, and the gambler smiled.

"Bueno, Kid. Then we're all set. I wanted you to come up here tonight because I thought we'd throw a little going away party for you. We'll sleep at my place tonight. Tomorrow we'll have my specialist give you a final once-over. Your train leaves in the afternoon. You feel good enough to step out a little—an hour or so at some of the clubs?"

Steve Cameron did what Stanislaw had expected. He glanced from the gambler's immaculate evening clothes to his own blue serge. His eyes fell. Stanislaw laughed and felt better. Now it was working.

In ten minutes—

"I thought of clothes," he said quietly. "You and I are about the same size, and I have a closet full of things there. You can get your own stuff tomorrow, but in the meantime—" He waved his hand toward the door of the closet.

Steve Cameron could feel the red flush of pleasure creep up in his cheeks. He mumbled something—words that were incoherent—and he saw Stanislaw look at the Greek with what might have been a smile.

Then they were all stripping clothes from wooden hangers. Stanislaw put the studs in a shirt—onyx studs—black as the eyes of Mr. S. of Broadway. The Greek was clowning with a too-small opera hat perched on his bald dome. All of them were laughing senselessly and Steve Cameron's laughter was louder than the rest.

John Stanislaw gave him one of his own cigaret cases to carry for swank. Gave him an opera cane with a silver knob for a handle. Stanislaw helped him on with a Chesterfield overcoat and adjusted the

dark, collapsible hat at the proper angle. The Greek tied his white necktie. Even the patent-leather shoes.

They stood behind him as he studied himself in the dressing glass, laughing as he laughed, bowing when he tipped his hat to them in the mirror. They were all acting as if they were drunk or something.

Then Stanislaw gave him the money. Out of a well-filled billfold he took crisp bills one by one. Ten of them, each one a hundred-dollar certificate.

"You may want to tip the entertainers," Stanislaw said. "Or maybe on the train you will need spending money. There'll be more where that came from in the morning."

He did not mention that he had asked for those particular bills at his bank that afternoon. The teller who passed them out had recorded their numbers at Stanislaw's request. The gambler had told a tale of an attempted trap for a blackmailer.

Now he reached down and took Steve Cameron's hand. He put the money in it.

Steve said, "Here—I can't—"

Stanislaw made a gesture, waved him down.

"But I can't," Steve said again. He felt like a heel. "It would be bad luck—make thirteen hundred—"

Stanislaw peered at him queerly and the Greek's face wore an odd grin. But Mr. S. did not argue the point. He clipped one of the bills into his coat and crammed the others into the top pocket of Steve's Chesterfield. He looked at his watch, glanced flashingly at Steve with a look that covered him from head to heel. Nodded.

"Let's scram," he clipped. "Let's go places."

Steve whirled the black opera stick. "Let's go down so I can give that dopey detective a look—the nutty one that asked about the dogs."

As soon as the words were uttered, Steve Cameron knew he had said the wrong thing. The Greek growled in his throat, and his lips twisted. Stanislaw looked at him with a blank face in which his eyes were dark and sinister pools. The pupils expanded until there seemed no white left. Then he whirled soundlessly and his stick lashed out at the Greek's face. Straight across the mouth it caught him, and a dark welt of blood sprang up on the Greek's cheek.

Stanislaw's breath rasped in the silence.

For a moment they glared at each other. The blood ran down the Greek's chin, ran down his neck to crimson his collar, but he made no move to wipe it away. Steve Cameron could see the stick in Stanislaw's hand quiver with little trembling jerks, yet when the gambler spoke his voice was quiet. The words came fast.

"Who was it?"

"Rongetti."

"Alone?"

The Greek nodded.

"What did he want?"

"He wanted to know why your dogs were poisoned."

The stick in Stanislaw's hand jerked and he swung abruptly away. He stared across the room blankly, then covered his eyes with his hand.

"All right—all right," he said. "I'll give him that information. You two go on out here—" he gestured—"and drag out the delivery entrance. Pack your stuff in that bag, Cameron, and take it along now. You can change at my place in the morning. I'll see you at the garage in ten minutes."

"Are the—did they poison the pups, boss?" The Greek asked in a clipped edged voice.

Stanislaw shook his head. "No." But both of them knew he was lying.

He unlocked a door in the inner room and Steve and the Greek went out into another angle of the hallway. They heard the click of metal as Stanislaw secured the lock behind them.

IV

RONGETTI liked to say, when he was out on a little party or shooting the breeze with the boys in the back room, that a guy with a single-track mind came to bat with two strikes on him and one foot in the water bucket. He liked to talk about his own method of keeping three

or four things cooking under his hat at the same time. If anyone had told him he was one of the most stubborn heads this side of Singapore he would have called that man a liar.

"Por Bacco!" he would shout, *"Diantre!* An open mind with no half-baked ideas. An eye to see quick and legs to jump quick. That's all a detective needs. And that's me—Nick Rongetti!"

He used the words of his mother tongue only when he was excited.

Now he sat in the glittering lobby of the Park Manor playing one of his favorite games. He had shifted to a seat that was partly shaded by a potted palm, but he still had his newspaper. With part of his consciousness he tried to keep a watch on the scattered passengers who came out of the down-elevators while his eyes read the type in front of him. Every now and then he would glance up hurriedly, then cast his eyes down again. Now he read:

New York, Dec. 12 (A. P.)
The startling theory that no woman attains real beauty until the age of 35 was expounded here recently by Mme. Helena Rubinoff, celebrated cosmetic stylist.
"I am not decrying youth," she said. "I love it. It is fresh, charming, gay, inspirational. It is always surrounded with the promise of beauty. But always that promise is in the future.
"A woman may be beautiful from 35 to 70, and I have seen many of them at each extreme. Before 35, she can be charming, pretty, promising; but only when Time has laid its softening hand on Youth—when experience, love, suffering has ripened the green peach—can there be completion and loveliness."

"Nuts, Madame Rubinoff," Rongetti thought to himself. "Give me the young ones."

More pep in them. . . .

He turned the page and looked up quickly as a square, dark figure hurried out toward the doors. Nope, false alarm. Too fat for the Greek. A salesman, most likely, trying to make the one o'clock from La Guardia.

He turned another page. "Hallowell's Ascot Superba IV Wins Kennel Club Blue" . . . Now who in the name of ten thousand devils would want to kill dogs like that pair of Stanislaw's? And how would they go about it if they wanted to? Maybe he was a dope for worrying about it—maybe not. It was a bad night outside and the Park Manor was as good a spot as any . . .

He became aware suddenly that someone was standing near him and he turned his head to look behind. He met John Stanislaw's dark, sardonic smile, and dropped the paper in his lap. His own grin matched the gambler's, though Rongetti was startled. Stanislaw had on a dark overcoat, white muffler, silk topper. He stood with his hands in his pockets.

"Looking for me, Nick?"

Rongetti shrugged.

"Heard you were. Something about my dogs, wasn't it?"

Rongetti said, "Why don't you give me a break? If there's nothing doing I can go home and grab some shut-eye. But I want to know first why your dogs was poisoned—who done it—what's it all about, Stanislaw?"

Stanislaw's hand came out of one pocket with a pair of white gloves. He began to put them on.

"Billy Rose did it—he and Cardinal Spellman. They brewed the poison in a graveyard in the dark of the moon. Joe Stalin flew them over my place and they squirted it down with eye-droppers."

Rongetti said, "You're just a barrel of boffs. Now go into your adagio." He was studying Stanislaw's face, but the gambler had him buffaloed.

"Why did they bump the hounds?" was all Rongetti could ask. He knew it sounded silly, but he figured to keep asking.

Stanislaw tapped his topper with two fingers.

"Taking a little trip on business, Nick," he said patronizingly. "Be back in half an hour. Stick around and maybe I can help you."

"How do I know you'll be back?"

Stanislaw smiled again.

"Why should I lie to *you?*" he asked. He tossed something that jangled into the detective's lap. "Here's the key to my place. There's some rye and cigars up there. Make yourself at home if you want to."

He turned, sauntered away. Rongetti saw him signal the taxi-starter, heard the starter's whistle shrill. He jingled the key

in his hand. On the metal tab he read the number "1132." He sat there for five minutes, thinking it over.

"What in the name of the devil?" Rongetti puzzled. The sensible thing to do was to hand the key in at the desk and pile into the hay. That dog stuff was screwy. But...

"Damned if I do," Rongetti muttered. "Mister Gambler, I just call your little bluff." Jingling the key in his hand, he headed for the elevators.

The key fitted 1132 all right, but the door would open only a couple of inches. An inside chain held it. Rongetti shouted "Hey!" but there was no answer. He tried to reach in through the crack but the bolt was too complicated and his fingers could barely reach it, although he spent five minutes trying. He broke a fingernail and cursed. He turned away indecisively and then he thought of Stanislaw's cocky smile. He lunged suddenly against the door and wood splintered. Again he drove with his shoulder and almost fell as it gave in. He felt along the wall for the light switch and snapped it on. He waited to see if the noise had aroused anyone in the hall, but no customers. Carefully he closed the door.

There was rye on the table in the first room, but Rongetti ignored it. He went through the whole place, turning on the lights, even in the closets and the kitchenette. There were two doors that seemed locked, but he was in no hurry. In the kitchenette he found Stanislaw's brandy. He took the bottle along with some ice and siphon of soda. He lit one of Stanislaw's cigars from a humidor on a carved desk and sat down comfortably on the lounge. He smoked, walked around some, looked out the window.

When he finished his cigar he went over and had another try at the two doors that would not open. Just for luck he peered through the keyhole of the first and saw the shaded lights of the hall. Okay, just a get-out in case of emergency. There was no keyhole in the second door, though. And Rongetti was puzzled. He worked the handle and nothing happened. Then he fiddled with a little latch below and tugged at the knob again.

The "door" almost fell down on him It was one of those in-a-door beds. It came down with a rush and something soft and yielding squirmed out at Rongetti. He struck blindly, instinctively, and his fist felt flesh.

He saw the body of Saul Marlock.

Dead....

Strangled!

RONGETTI growled into the phone, "And put some snap in it, baby. Rush—get it?" He waited a few seconds; then: "Rongetti calling from the Park Manor. Room 1132. Get 'em over here fast. It's murder—Saul Marlock's been strangled with a red silk sash. Better call all stations to pick up John Stanislaw and the Greek for questioning."

He jiggled the receiver, then asked for the desk. "Send the house detective up to 1132. Make it fast," he said and hung up quickly.

He was lighting another cigar when the house detective came in. Rongetti knew him, which saved argument. He said:

"Take charge here until Sergeant Farrell comes. He's on the way. Saul Marlock's been murdered and hell's to pay. Tell Farrell I'm on a hot trail. I'll call him."

He banged out the door. While he waited for the elevator he tried to figure it out, but nothing made sense. If Stanislaw had known that Marlock was dead up there he'd never have given up the keys like that. And why in the hell should Stanislaw bump his lawyer anyway? Marlock was the one man standing between the gambler and that coming Federal rap.

He got in the elevator and he thought, "Who poisoned Stanislaw's dogs. Why?" And no matter how he turned it over he always came back to that question. It was like an echo in his brain:

Who killed Stanislaw's police dogs?

Find that out, Rongetti, and you got something.

He hurried through the lobby and pulled the taxi-starter aside. "Who got Stanislaw for a fare half an hour ago?"

The starter looked bewildered.

"Shake it up. Think!" Rongetti growled. And he dug his fingers into the man's arm fiercely. They went together down the line of the hotel taxi stand, but the man who had picked up Stanislaw was out on another fare.

Rongetti stood in the rain and cursed in Italian while they all looked at him. One driver volunteered that it must have been just a short trip because Joe was back again in a few minutes. But that was all they had to offer.

A department car pulled up and Detective Sergeant Farrell got out. The police surgeon was with him and two or three others. Two reporters piled out of a taxi. Rongetti called, "It's a coroner's case, Doc," and pulled Farrell aside. He tried to tell him exactly what had happened that evening, but his words didn't give the right picture. Farrell asked if he'd had a drink too many and went on into the lobby.

Rongetti stood there in the rain.

The driver of the department car was still in the front seat, but he opened the door now and stood under the hotel marquee. Rongetti looked at him—at the car. He walked over.

"Tell Farrell I want this car," he said. "Put in a call for another."

"But—"

"Nuts," Rongetti said, and he scrambled in and banged the door. His own car was in a garage six blocks away. He threw the switch, whined the starter.

"What in hell will I tell Farrell?" the driver yelled at him.

"Tell him I've gone to find the guy that bumped Stanislaw's dogs," Rongetti shouted into the roar of the motor.

V

STANISLAW'S big black Hispano purred along through the drizzling dark. Its hooded lights cut the gloom of the road with twin white beams. The glare of the city was behind them. It was a bad night—late—and they had but little traffic on the Sawmill River Road.

The Greek was at the wheel, dark face set, narrowed eyes probing the murk ahead. The dried blood Stanislaw's lashing stick had drawn was still on his chin. He had not spoken since they left the Park Manor.

Beside him Steve Cameron sat. His arms were folded across his chest, and his eyes were bright, though he was beginning to feel a little tired. The train ride—the excitement—had taken something out of him. Yet he sat erect and hummed under his breath—a sonorous mountain-song. His father's good-luck song:

"Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble—
Was you there when they rolled that stone away?"

He kept the tempo by tapping his feet softly on the carpeted floor-boards.

Stanislaw was in the rear. He lounged in one corner, feet outstretched, staring blankly through the bullet-proof window. He had his collar pulled up around his throat though the car was warm. The darkness rushed by, rain splattered on the glass, and Stanislaw was as near the breaking point as ever a man can be.

Faces seemed to be charging at him out of the speeding gloom. Marlock's face, seamed and old and frightened. Rongetti's white grin and the purple blot on his forehead. The welted mask of the Greek. Steve Cameron's thin, boyish smile. They darted past and came back again. And voices whispered:

"Car badly burned. Occupant beyond recognition."

"Some day I'll be a man like you, Mr. Stanislaw."

"Who poisoned the dogs? Why? Let me in on it."

Stanislaw buried his face deeper into the white folds of his muffler. He was afraid—and for the first time in all of his planning he admitted it to himself. Marlock had been right. The whole thing was too fantastic . . . but there was no backing out now. His chips were in the pot and no matter what cards he held he'd have to play them.

He saw his own mistakes, now. Saw them clearly. There was no sense in poisoning the dogs. None at all. Yet at the time he had thought it clever to leave

no one living thing behind that could betray him. Not even a dog to sniff at burned flesh and deny mutely that this was his master.

The idea was silly—childish. He must have been mad to think of it.

His hands clenched.

And the killing of Marlock was a madman's trick, too, though an hour before it had seemed logical. Stanislaw, of course, did not intend to make his escape by the route Marlock had planned for him. That was only a blind. He had made his own plans secretly—plans that involved a dark hop in a plane that was even now warming its motor ten miles away. A fast jump to a hidden hideaway in Maine where everything was all set for him. Then Canada, and later across the Pacific under papers that were fool-proof.

He clenched his hands. The game wasn't lost yet. He could still make it.

He growled, "Can that crazy singing."

The lights of a little town whirled by. Four miles to go.

Stanislaw felt reassuringly of the automatic in his pocket. His fingers searched to see that the safety was off. His toe tapped lightly against the tin of gasoline the Greek had provided. Four little miles. . . . Forget what's happened behind you, Stanislaw, and take care of the road ahead!

He rubbed Rongetti out of his mind. Giving that stupid detective the keys had been a desperate gamble, but no use to worry on that score now. He had made the play on instinct, because he wanted Rongetti out of the way for half an hour. Most likely the detective would just wait around until he got tired. Even if he did go prowling, it was a thousand to one against him spotting Marlock. And all trails would end with what they found in the ruins of Stanislaw's motor.

The big Hisso slowed as the Greek twisted her off into the dark and silent side road that led to the place they had planned. Stanislaw sat erect and straightened his shoulders. A pulse throb-throbbed at his temples, but his mind was clear and through his whole body flowed some emotion that made him keen and alert.

The drizzle of rain had ceased, but the night was still murky. In the lights of the big car, the roadside brush sparkled with moisture. Here came the upgrade that ended at the little bend they had picked. In a minute now the Greek would slow her down, would pull up and ask Cameron to take a look at the inner rear tire. Cameron would open the door and the Greek would do his stuff. And with the Greek's third shot Stanislaw would go into action.

The Greek would never know what happened.

Slam-slam—then open up the gasoline and toss a match in with them. Then over the hill a hundred yards to where the Ford was hidden. Down the old wagon road without lights. Then the plane, and it was all over.

The end of Mr. S. On to Canada. . . .

Stanislaw concealed his hands in a fold of his coat as he adjusted the silencer to the automatic. He leaned forward until he could see the Greek's face in the rear-view mirror. They were moving up the hill now, and Stanislaw, in the mirror, saw the whites of the Greek's eyes as they glanced to the right, then rolled up to spot him. The automatic was free in Stanislaw's hand, concealed in the dark. He crouched on the edge of the seat, muscles tensed. His eyes were wide, fixed as in a hypnotist's stare on the two heads that loomed in the faint glow of the dashlight.

The Hisso breasted the rise and the Greek twisted her, throttling down. Slowly the car rolled . . . slower. Stanislaw's hand gripping the automatic's black butt, trembled. His breath seemed frozen in his lungs. He saw the Greek look at Cameron, saw his bruised lips move—but his brain was humming and the words were soundless.

Cameron's hand reached for the latch of the door, twisted at it. . . .

And with the next second hell broke loose in the big, black, bullet-proof Hisso that was once the pride of John Stanislaw!

It is doubtful if Stanislaw ever knew what happened or why. He did not see the two black objects that were there in the headlight beam for his eyes and his mind were elsewhere. Nor did the Greek see them. With one hand he was clawing his hush-gun while his other groped for

the hand brake. The car was still rolling along.

Creeping slowly . . .

But Steve Cameron saw them as he turned the latch—both black, both alive. A mother cat with her kitten. Some farmer's cat, no doubt, carrying a weakling of her brood to a new hideaway. The silent car and the light swinging around the bend had startled her, made her as blind as the kitten she carried. She had whirled, back-humped, facing straight in the path of the slow-rolling Hisso.

Steve Cameron acted instinctively. He was a gambler's son. He had been reared in a mountain home where signs and portents were almost like a religion. "Black cat across our path," his mind flashed, and he lunged to spin the wheel from the lax hand of the Greek and twist it the other way.

The unlatched door flew open and things began to happen.

Steve Cameron's shoulder hit the Greek hard and the Greek's head slammed against the window. The car veered, and the Greek's foot, sprawling for balance, came down full on the throttle. A lesser car would have choked and stalled, but not the Hisso. She took the gas in a gulp and leaped ahead straight for the brush-filled gully opposite. The Greek's fist came up with a gun in it and that gun cracked twice wildly. The Greek shouted. Maybe, he thought, this was the double-cross. He lashed out in frenzy, striking, kicking. He got one foot in Cameron's chest and hurled him back. And then he saw Stanislaw.

Johnny Stanislaw who never wore a gun, with a long-nosed rod in his hand—

Johnny Stanislaw shooting!

Stanislaw was crouched there, his face gaunt and ghastly, his eyes like black buttons, his hair wild and awry. His mouth was screwed around as if he shouted in agony, but no sound came. With one hand clawed into the upholstery of the front seat he held himself against the dizzy sway and the awful lurch. His other hand —fingers glued to the butt of his gun—flashed up automatically.

The nervous reflex of blind fear and rage jerked against the trigger. The muzzle spat—bullets jumped . . . All his life Stanislaw had been a cool man, a man who kept his head. He could riffle the deck for a ten grand jackpot with nerveless fingers. He could sit on the Jockey Club veranda, calm and aloof, expressionless, while a colt he had backed to the hilt came fifth and pocketed into the home-stretch. The poise was part of him. He had trained himself so.

But now—

Now it was different. This wasn't a game of yellow bills and scheming brain against scheming brain. This was the raw stuff of life and death, black and abrupt, demanding an instant answer. And for the second time that night Stanislaw's taut nerves betrayed him.

He didn't know what it was all about. He saw Cameron lunge for the wheel; he was whirled headlong as the Hisso bucked and leaped ahead; he scrambled erect again as the Greek's foot catapulted Steve Cameron out the door. Treachery?—the double-cross? How could he know? He had one flash of the brush-choked gulley that yawned straight ahead, one vivid glimpse of the Greek's welted face leering at him—that was all.

His mind flashed that this was the end. He'd never see the Lido, never play at baccarat or *chemin-de-fer in Cannes* or Biarritz. No soft and lazy beaches under the sun. No silken, subtle ladies under a Mediterranean moon. Here was the end of Mr. S, even as it had been planned, in the ugly, yellow muck of a country road.

He did the only thing he could do—the instinctive, defensive thing. Under his senseless finger the trigger jerked. Again and again.

Instinctively the Greek fired back. He did not know that Stanislaw, tossed in a heap by the car's first swerve, was jerking that trigger for no human reason. He could not know that Stanislaw's nerve had broken, and that the iron Mr. S. was babbling in fear of the unexpected. Stanislaw was shooting—The Greek shot back. He saw something happen to Stanislaw's face, and then the car lurched and staggered sickeningly.

The Hisso was rolling over and the black skies were falling down on them.

RONGETTI was wet and tired. He was hungry and wanted a hot drink more than anything in Christendom. He was disgusted with himself, with the lousy detective racket, with the world at large.

Here he was, chasing the wind out in the sticks, running blind on the wildest goose-chase of a wild career.

"And if they ask me why," he thought, "I can't tell 'em."

What difference did it make about Stanislaw's dogs? Marlock was dead back there in the Park Manor, and there's where Nick Rongetti ought to be. Not out here chasing some crazy hunch in the cow pastures. He was close to Stanislaw's country place now, and the nearer he got the more he thought:

"I'm dizzy—punch-drunk on this dog stuff. They ought to have me tied up in Bellevue."

But he kept on driving. He was perhaps half-a-mile from Croton Dam when he heard the sound and saw the lick of flame glow up. It was over to the left and Rongetti twisted the wheel quickly. His hunch burned hot again when he came to the side-road and saw the size of the tire marks in the muck.

He bore down with his speed foot and burst upon the scene abruptly. The Hisso was on her back in the little gully and flame was roaring up from her. The crest of the hill round about was lit up bright as day. He saw a black figure sprawled at the edge of the road. He was limp when Rongetti turned him over, but his heart was beating. "Stanislaw!" the detective thought at first. But even though there was mud on the face, he saw it was the punk Kid, all dressed up like a lighthouse. His arm was twisted in an ugly way beneath him, and he was only semi-conscious.

Rongetti lifted him and felt that twisted arm. The Kid groaned with pain and his eyes fluttered open. He looked at Rongetti blankly.

"Where's Stanislaw?" Rongetti snapped.

Steve Cameron stared wildly at the spouting pillar of flame. He choked and covered his eyes with his uninjured arm. That was what Rongetti had figured.

"If they're down there," Rongetti said, "the war is over."

In a little while the farmers would start flocking to see what the flame was about. Cars would be piling up. Rongetti wanted to get this business straight before he was bothered. He helped the Kid to his own car and started asking questions fast. The Kid was weak but game. In six minutes Rongetti had his whole story.

Rongetti nodded. He knew when he was hearing the truth. He could see the lights of cars below twisting around to climb up to them. And the whole affair was still as dark as the inside of a derby.

"I see," he muttered. "Stanislaw smashed the Greek with his cane after they bumped Marlock, and the Greek picked this spot to get even. The car got away and smashed both of them. Yeah."

"But—" Steve Cameron protested.

"I know," Rongetti said. "But you leave this to me." The whole thing was as wide open as Swiss cheese, but what else was there? "Keep your trap shut about that money, Kid. I'll do the talking. If we can get a coroner to act fast we may be able to get you started West by Monday."

And maybe they could, at that. The wise thing to do was to get the kid out of town before some wise newspaper began to kick things full of holes. A check of Cameron's story would absolve him of implications in Marlock's murder. Pin that on Stanislaw and the Greek, down there in the Hisso's funeral pyre. If they dug too deep they'd have one of those mysteries with no answer—and mysteries are bad news for any police administration.

Steve Cameron was rolling his head on his shoulders, moaning, mumbling in a broken voice. "Oh, Lord—Oh Lord—to die like that . . . Why couldn't it been me? . . . He was the finest man in the world—Mr. Stanislaw . . . I'm goin' to get well—some day I'll be like him . . ."

Rongetti said absently, "Yeah. Yeah, a great guy. A sweetheart of a fellow."

He got out of the car as other machines began to drive up. People came toward

him, hollering already and asking dumb questions. He was dog-tired and his nerves were raw. He wanted a drink. But he'd have to stick it out until he could turn it over to someone in authority.

"Two murderers fall out," he muttered. "Go into a fight and skull each other. . . . Yeah. That ought to satisfy 'em. If they don't like that they can draw their own picture."

He fumbled for a cigaret, yawned.

The flame was dying down.

"But I wonder what it really was?" he mumbled wearily. "And why did they put the croak on Stanislaw's bloodhounds?"

He shrugged, moving away.

BLACKMAIL

By BETTY CUMMINGS

Morg Epherson figured he could make the old judge's secret shame pay off. He forgot his own, much deadlier secret!

JUDGE RICHARDS WALKED UP the street to his house with a singular sense of well-being. It was a warm summer evening, a nice night, and he had just eaten a good meal in a restaurant. But it was the reason for eating out that pleased him. He had gone to a restaurant because his daughter Jenny was off with a girl friend, someone she had known years ago, for supper and a movie; and that meant she was coming alive again. She was having fun.

The Judge stopped at the mailbox outside the house. He was a tall man, gray-haired, with a wide mouth and rimless glasses, behind which he squinted a little. His eyes were not good, but he was right about the mail box. There was something inside it—a sealed, unstamped letter that someone must have put in the box. The envelope was typewritten and addressed to him.

He went on into the house, tearing the envelope open. Then he read the typed slip of paper by the hall light; and more slowly, the lines of his face growing tense, he read it again.

Dear Judge,

This is very important. I advise you to do what I say. Meet me tonight around eight, near the hut by the quarry.

That was all. The letter was unsigned. Tom stared at it, with a cold, empty feeling going all through him. He glanced automatically at his watch, and saw that it was twenty of eight. The stone quarry was beyond the outskirts of the town, a good half hour walk, and he knew he had to go there; he could not ignore this letter. It might have something to do with Jenny. That was all he could think of. It was something about Jenny's past, from someone who knew had happened.

He stuffed the letter into his pocket, turned, and went out of the house again.

THERE were silver-edged clouds and a high-riding moon in the summer sky. It seemed cooler up here, on the grassy slope above the quarry, and quieter. The only sound was the vast, rhythmic background-song of the crickets, and an occasional swish of breeze through the trees.

The little hut showed black against the moonlit sky near the edge of the quarry, but there was no one in sight. The Judge was not surprised. Whoever had written the letter probably wanted to be sure he had come alone.

He stood near the hut, and after a moment or two he heard footsteps. He turned and saw a man emerging from a clump of trees into the moonlight. The man walked toward him over the grass, black-haired, black-moustached, perhaps forty years old, or a little younger; a slim man, with a thin, alert face. As he came closer, it seemed to Tom that he was dimly familiar, but very dimly, as though maybe he only looked like someone else that Tom had known.

"Judge Richards?" he asked politely.

The old man nodded, and said abruptly, "You the fellow wrote me that letter?"

"Yes, I wanted to speak to you alone. This seemed like a good place."

They stood facing each other. There seemed to be no place to sit down. His legs felt a little unsteady, and it had been a fairly long walk for him, with tiring, anxious thoughts rushing through his mind.

He was worried, almost frightened but he kept his voice firm. "What did you mean by that letter?"

The man shrugged deprecatingly, his dark eyes averted, the thin, moustached face expressionless. "Of course you know all about—your daughter's mistake," he said.

"Yes," the judge said. Everything in him seemed to tighten up, taut, and he felt suddenly sick. This was what he had expected, but his mind shrank from what might be coming next. He couldn't bear to have Jenny hurt anymore. He had hoped they would never have to talk about it again, or even think about it.

Nearly three years ago, at nineteen, Jenny had gone alone to Nevada for a couple of months of independence and sight-seeing. She had gotten a job there, and written home to her father ecstatically about all the fun she was having.

She had stayed on and on, still writing cheerfully; and then suddenly she had to write the truth, and it was the first the Judge knew of it. When she first went to Nevada, she had met a man who talked her into trying some gambling. She left out most of the details, but apparently she had managed to loose much more money than she possessed; and frightened, ashamed to ask help from Tom, she had stolen the money from her employer. In her confused panic, that had seemed the only thing to do.

When she wrote her father about it, she already had been arrested, tried, and sentenced. She begged him to do nothing, to keep out of the whole thing. "I couldn't stand it," she wrote, "if they found out that I'm your daughter. It would ruin you back home. Dad, and I'll be all right. Please don't come or try to help me."

So old Tom Richards, feeling helpless and stricken as he never had felt before in his life, waited at home and told the town how happy Jenny was in Nevada.

Now, after two years, she was back again; brown-haired Jenny, thinner and paler and terribly nervous. She been home for only a month. But she was getting better, happier. Tonight she was out with a girl friend at the movies. Tom Richards couldn't stand the thought of any more happening to her, any further guilt and shame piling up on her.

"Yes, I know all about it," he repeated. He looked at the shorter man who stood in front of him; and again it seemed to him that the man was vaguely familiar.

"Well, then she probably told you about

me. I knew her when she first came to Nevada. We tried our luck, Jenny lost—"

"Yes." Tom cut him short, with distaste. This was the one who had introduced his daughter to gambling, and started her off on three years of hell. He went on curtly, "Let's get down to the present. You wrote me that letter, and I'm here. What do you want?"

The man hesitated, and then said coolly, "Apart from yourself, I'm the only one who knows all about Jenny. Who she is, and what she did. In spite of all the people who might be interested, I'm the only one who knows."

Fury rose in Tom. "That must make you very happy," he said evenly.

The man's face twisted in a faint smile. "Oh, it does. In this town, I could be considered quite a fascinating conversationalist—if I started talking about it."

TOM'S blue eyes blazed behind the rimless glasses, and his whole body was trembling. "You want me to pay you to keep quiet."

"I think that would be a good idea, don't you? Jenny's a nervous girl. High-strung. If she found this town against her, your career cracked up because of what she did—" he shrugged. "It would be bad for her."

Tom's nerves crawled with fear and apprehension. He burst out against his will, "If you'll only leave Jenny alone, not go to her— I don't want her ever to know about this. She can't know anything about it."

"There's no reason to tell Jenny," the man said calmly, "if you and I work things out."

Tom sighed, shaking, almost unable to think coherently. His nervousness gave him a sense of unreality, so that he hardly could believe what he was doing. He looked down past the edge of the moon-drenched quarry that was only a few yards away, and the deep, rock-jagged place looked silvery and unreal to him, as though it were a huge floating thing in a basin of space. The dark grass seemed to melt away beneath his feet.

"Judge," the man said, drawing his attention back and using a falsely jovial voice, "You and I can get together on this with no trouble at all. Of course, I may have more to say about it than you will."

Suddenly the man laughed, as though he had everything figured out and was pleased with himself. At the sound of the laugh, Tom stared at him with complete concentration, caught in a swift current of memory. The laugh was strikingly distinctive, a peculiarly hoarse, yet resonant sound, incongruous to the man's smooth speaking voice; it was a laugh that Tom had heard before under strange circumstances.

All at once, he remembered. He remembered himself back in the city, as a young prosecuting attorney, arguing one of his first big cases. The defendant was a young man named Morg Epherson, a slim, black-haired boy of about twenty, who already had committed more crimes than most people even know about. Epherson had killed a man finally, and Tom's work in the case had sent him up for life.

The Judge stood blindly by the quarry, remembering. He remembered the presiding judge on that case reading the sentence; and then, a clear echo in his mind, he heard Epherson's laugh, an oddly shocking sound in the solemn courtroom. It was a laugh that said, "You can't hold me!" and two years later the murderer had escaped and vanished without trace.

Tom turned his eyes dazedly on the man before him. He saw the addition of twenty years and a moustache but he whispered, with growing certainty, "Epherson . . . Morg Epherson."

There was a single, suspenseful moment, taut between them, as the two men stared at each other. Then Epherson's face changed, first to dawning realization of who this lined, grey-haired judge had been so many years ago; then to a white terror that shone in the moonlight like a tangible thing.

Epherson began to move, and at that instant Tom knew what he had done. He had let this man, this killer, realize his terrible danger, a danger that was a thousand times worse than a girl's exposure in her home town; a desperate peril, feared for eighteen years, and now suddenly facing him.

Epherson knew that Judge Richards had more on the blackmailer than the blackmailer had on him; and he seemed to understand that, no matter how it hurt Jenny, the Judge would not allow an escaped lifer to go free if he could help it.

With a sharp stab of panic, Tom saw these things in the man's terrified face, and in the quick way he moved forward. Then Epherson had flung himself on the old man and they were struggling, with Tom stumbling backward.

Epherson's fists were jabbing at his face, and for a moment Tom's face was turned, sideways against a blow. In that moment, with a sense of unbelieving horror, Tom saw the edge of the quarry, much nearer than it had been before, only a few feet away. Struggling, he was being pushed sideways and backwards toward it,

and the jagged rocks swam down there in a wash of moonlight, nightmarish, deathly.

All the strength in Tom's body gathered in a spasm of horror. He was closer to the knife edge of space, terrifyingly close; he could see straight over and below, and the rocks gleamed, and the moon shone down, and he was struggling, struggling—

He looked around wildly, and saw the dark branch of a tree, as Epherson's fists smashed at him. The tree was farther from the edge . . . and Tom grabbed at it, caught it, felt the leaf and bark firm in his hand. He wrenched away from Epherson, holding desperately onto the branch, pulling himself away from the rocks and onto the firm grass. He was free of Epherson. . .

BUT, as he glanced back over his shoulder, a new horror held him. Epherson was there on the very edge, off balance, tottering—and then with frightful suddenness, he dropped off into space and was gone.

A long scream came up from the rocks. Then it was very quiet.

Judge Richards stood still, swaying hypnotized by the dreadful mental image of Epherson's broken body on the rocks. Finally he walked forward, and looked down into the moonlight, and then turned away again. He felt sick and desolate, incapable of any positive action. He went and leaned against the trunk of the tree, his mind aching and fogged.

After a few minutes the thought of the letter came to him, dimly as something that had happened a long time ago. He took it from his pocket, slowly, and burned it, scattering the soft crumbled ashes. He began to realize that nothing now could ever connect him with this night, this scene.

Judge Tom Richards was very tired, and he had a long, long way to walk home. He turned and started down the grassy slope, trying to think, but his thoughts still came numbly. It was as if everything had been decided by a judgement greater than his.

PORTRAIT OF A MURDERESS

By JOHN D. MacDONALD

Tigress-like, she moved along the trail —silent, beautiful and deadly. None knew whom she hunted—least of all the victim, who marked her coming with kindling eyes. To him she only seemed the lovliest prey ever to take his lure!

DURING THE ROAR OF THE early Manhattan evening, the corpse in the suite in the mid-town hotel had been very still—as is to be expected of corpses. Long after the heart stopped, tiny cells continued to live, dying at last of oxygen starvation. When the last of the cells was dead. it was after midnight. The heels of the polished shoes were on the neutral colored rug. The hips, shoulders and back of the head rested on the hardwood floor, the head nearest the window. The room was dark, and through the night a high advertising sign two hundred feet from the window clicked on and off, casting a faint sporadic gleam on the face and the open eyes.

All learning was gone, all memory, all of the intricate and half-understood mechanisms of the brain.

At four o'clock, when the city was most quiet, the body began to move.

For a long time it had been slack against the floor. The movement began in the fingers. It was not the fluid motion of life. Rather, it was slow and inevitable tightening that is a part of death.

At five o'clock the hands had become fists and had lifted partway toward the chest. The knees had lifted a little over three inches. The morning sounds of the city had begun.

In early death the face had no expression. Contrary to common superstition faces of recently dead have no expression. But, with the tightening of the body, the face also tightened, the corners of the mouth drawing down—and the ignorant would have said the face had assumed a look of terrer.

There is no terror in death. Only an unending silence.

At twelve minutes after seven the raised arms and updrawn knees had overbalanced the body so that it rolled over onto one side. In that movement, air, trapped in the lungs, made a wet sigh in the dead throat. It was as though the body had curled up with a sleepy sigh. It was in a foetal position, the position in which it had first come into the world.

Left alone long enough, the body would have once more relaxed. But hotels have maids and rooms must be cleaned and the odds against the body remaining there undisturbed were impossible. No, the body would relax in some other place—a place where they would be curious about the dried foam at the corners of the mouth, the corrosive sublimate that had caused death.

JIM BRANDER

We do one hell of a breakfast business and for guys behind the counter like me, the faces are just a blur. They come and go. You'd think that we'd never get so we'd know a "regular", but we do.

It helps if the "regular" sits in about the same place every morning, and that's what this dolly did. Maybe she perched on the stool six seven times before I see that she's been coming around before.

Then is when I start to smile at her and say good morning to her because that is good business, and besides she is easy to smile at.

Those guys who stand on the corners and drum up business for the excursion buses never try to put the finger on a resident. Somehow they can always pick the strangers in town. You live in New York long enough and you get so you can tell without thinking.

And I knew she was from out of town.

After I took her order a couple of times, I knew she was from out of the country. It was a nice voice. Soft and deep in her throat and it had a little accent on it. My guess was Austrian or Czech or Slav. Something from eastern Europe.

Also, dollies from there have a special look—that is, when they're right. This one was right. Her face was wide across the eyes, and they were grey. But her chin was pointed and she had the sort of mouth that most gals try to make theirs look like by smearing the goo where their lips aren't.

The clothes I don't notice much. They are quiet clothes. But I do notice that there are deep hollows in her cheeks and

at her wrist the bones jut against the white skin and it reminds me of the time my sister got out of the hospital after three months in there.

The eyes, though I like them, have a look in them as if she was all set to duck should I lean across the counter and try to paste her one with the flat of my hand.

A rabbity look, I call it.

Once she was trying to attract my attention. She had to, because on purpose I gave her the wrong order. Finally I looked at her and pointed to the blue embroidery on the lapel of my white coat. It says, "Jim."

She smiled, and it was a shy smile. "Jeem," she said, "Thees is nod whad I ordair, blease. My name ees Ingra."

Just like that. Lots of folks think that anybody working behind a counter is not really human. Just sort of a creature halfway between a dog and a man. They are the type that is chilly with the help. Not Ingra. She wasn't what the limeys call 'matey', but she was pleasant and talked to me as though I were a person.

After that she took to coming in a little bit later when the rush wasn't so bad, and from that I guessed that she wasn't working. She tipped a dime regularly, which is better than the big shots who give you a quarter on Monday and a big smile on Tuesday and Wednesday—coasting on their reputation.

I wondered about Ingra quite a bit. She was weak. She lifted the coffee with two hands she teetered a little when she walked away. But as the weeks went by she seemed to be picking up. She'd always return my smile, but when I looked at her quickly, she had a brooding look on her pretty face.

The figure was fine, I noticed. A shade too thin, but that was gradually improving. Her hair wasn't brown and it wasn't blonde. Something in between, cut quite short with soft curls that looked natural. Maybe they were.

I never got a chance to find out. One day she didn't show up. And she hasn't since. I wonder about her sometimes, and when I go out I watch the crowds hoping that I'll see her. Seems silly, doesn't it?

ARNOLD DONAVAN

When, after that trouble with Myra, the resident manager used it as an excuse to break my lease, I couldn't have been more upset. I offered the stupid little man five hundred in cash to forget the whole thing, but he became impertinent. He said a few unpleasant things about the character of men in their thirties who clip coupons for a living and make spectacles of themselves in the tabloids.

I would have struck him except that Gordon, my business manager, had warned me about any more police trouble. I had my things packed and put in storage and I moved into a hotel, telling Gordon that he *must* find me a place.

That was how I came to move into a completely horrid location on Ninety-seventh Street. I thought Gordon was out of his mind when I first saw the ground floor place he had rented and I'm afraid I was quite abusive.

I must admit that I was completely wrong. This is by far the finest place I have ever lived in. And it is miraculously cheap. Of course, the decorators charged a good deal for making the two apartments over into one, but here I have a privacy that I never had at the other places.

Also, it is enormously amusing. The upper floors are full of strange furtive little people who come and go at all hours. I find that my guests think the location is unique. Some of them are considering moving into the neighborhood, but I discourage them, as I think it would spoil the whole arrangement.

Since living here, I have found that in restricting my amatory interest to the women of my own class, I have been depriving myself of a very stimulating woman.

Now I am afraid that I find women like Myra, Beth Ellen and Constance, my ex-wives, creatures of tinsel and diamond dust. Quite brittle and altogether shallow.

Of course, it is rather easy to make mistakes when dealing with an unfamiliar type.

Netta was a mistake. A tall, buxom Italian girl who works in an office. She was great fun at first, and then she began to get quite proprietary, and of course I

can't stand posessive women. Poor Gordon had to handle the details of scaring her away.

One of the most interesting things I have discovered is that the male must sometimes confess failure even when delving into this rather improvident female stratum.

I noticed the second girl one day as I came in. She entered the building at the same time I did. I stood by my door and listened to hear her go up the stairs. She went up to the fourth floor, which is cheapest of all. There are only rooms up there and one kitchen for each floor where cooking is permitted. Until I had the exhaust fan installed in the hall, the cooking odors were sometimes frightful.

I was fancy free, as Gordon had gotten rid of Netta only a day or two previously, and the girl I saw gave me an odd sense of adventure.

Physically, she was not particularly attractive. Hair of no well-defined color. Too thin. A quite fragile look about her. I noticed that her heels were runover, and that her dark clothes had a cheap sheen about them. But I have noticed that I have always been stimulated by frail women. Something of the brute in me, I rather imagine.

Three days later I found out from the janitor, with the aid of a five dollar bill, that her name was Ingra Dvorek, and that she lived alone in room 414. That rather pleased me, as I had pessimistically thought of a husband or a lover.

I cancelled two cocktail parties which I had planned to attend in order to devote myself to a closer survey of the movements of Miss Ingra Dvorek. I soon found that I was not sufficiently adept at following anyone to be able to get away with it. And, of course, my tall and distinctive good looks were against me. Tailing should be done by neutral little men.

With a thrill of excitement, I talked Gordon into hiring an agency man to follow her for three or four days and turn in a detailed report.

WITH trembling hands I opened the report. It was disappointingly short. The man reported that she walked great distances each day, walked slowly

with her eyes on every face. She spent a great deal of time sitting in hotel lobbies, watching the people.

His conclusion was that she was looking for someone and he suspected that she might be a deserted wife who had come to New York in order to find her husband who had been seen by someone here.

Next I had Gordon get a man from one of the better shops. He reported back that the girl would probably wear a size twelve. The next day two suits and three dresses were delivered. I removed the tags and hung them in an empty closet.

Since she usually returned to her room at four thirty to rest for a time before going out again, I was waiting. When she came in, I smiled at her and said, "Miss?"

She stopped. "Yes" A very pleasing accent.

This is presumptuous of me. I realize. But you seem to be about the same size as . . . as a very dear friend of mine who has left me. There are clothes here that she wore hardly at all. New clothes. I was about to call up one of the charities to come and get them, and then I remembered seeing you and . . ."

She frowned. "You wish to give these clothes to me?"

"If you want them. Come in and I will show them to you."

She was hesitant, but I was confident in my knowledge that you can always buy the lower classes with gifts.

I took the clothes from the closet and brought them into the small study where she waited. She fingered the material. "These are very pretty. And they have not been worn. Yes, I would like to have them. You are very kind. I am certain they will fit."

There was no coyness about her. I will not try to duplicate her delicious accent. Close up her skin looked healthy and well-scrubbed. I can't abide unclean women.

Take them, then. I am grateful to get them off my hands," I said.

Her smile was shy and a little . . . frightened. "I can do nothing in return," she said softly.

"Oh, but you can, my dear," I said. "You can stay and have dinner with a lonely man. That is, if you do not have other plans."

I had previously alerted Clarence, my cook.

She protested at first, and then agreed.

She refused to drink more than one cocktail, and as I result I grew a bit vague when I drank both her share and my own. It was rather a silly thing to do right in the beginning of such a clever campaign. I knew, of course, that it might be quite possible to obtain her favors in a blunter fashion, but I preferred the delicacy of my approach.

I was quite astonished when, after a very pleasant and intimate little dinner, she went over to my piano and played Prokofieff with quite amazing vigor. One meets the strangest individuals in this neighborhood.

To test her, I switched to my rather shaky French, and she answered me fluently, in fact so fluently that I lost some of the sense of her remarks. French idioms have always defeated me.

At nine she said that she had to leave and I allowed her to go without protest after extracting a promise that she would have dinner with me on the following Friday.

Friday night I tried to pump her for information about the past, but she was very deft about changing the subject. She wore one of the new dresses, and looked quite well in it.

After a long silence I said, "Ingra, my dear, whom are you searching for?"

She jumped up and her face was white as death. The wine made a red stain on the table cloth. Her lips looked positively bloodless and she asked, "What do you mean?"

I shrugged and tried to pass it off. "Oh, you struck me as a girl who was looking for someone, that's all."

She sat down slowly, her clenched hands at her breast. She looked at me and said, "No, you could not be one of them."

"One of whom?"

"Nothing. Do not question me, please. I have had enough of questions in my lifetime."

I gave her a cigarette, held the candle so she could light it. Her lips were

quivering so that the end of the cigarette shook.

She smiled, but her eyes didn't smile. "I will not be able to look much longer, Arnold. There will soon be no more money."

It seemed crude to talk of money. I did not show my disgust. I said, "I have a great deal of money, Ingra."

"What are you trying to say?"

I watched her eyes. She did not seem too angry. "Ingra, why don't you move in here with me?"

She butted the cigarette, stood up slowly, put her napkin on the edge of the table. "Goodnight, Mr. Donavan. You have been very kind to me."

She walked toward the door. I caught her at the door, took her quite roughly by the wrist and spun her around. Her eyes flashed.

"Wait," I said. "Apparently I have made a mistake. I am sorry." Then, to my surprise, I heard myself saying, " I know that this search of yours is important to you. I know that you will not come back here. I want to help you. I demand the right. It will make up for . . . my rude assumption."

She looked at me for a few moments. "If it were not so important to me, I would refuse. Yes, I will take any money you wish to give me. If I am ever able, I will return it. But there will be no strings attached. I am a game that you tried to play, Mr. Donavan. You did not happen to know the rules. It is not your fault."

I cannot understand why I felt ashamed. I went to my desk and wrote out a check for five hundred dollars. Without looking at the amount, she slipped it into her purse and said, "Thank you, Arnold."

After the door closed behind her, I sat down. When the man came in to clear the table I fairly snarled at him. Finally I had the answer to my inexplicable action. I had merely been playing a part. Also, it had been the graceful way out of a rather difficult situation.

Though I knew she had slammed her personal door in my face, I sat and began to plan how to recoup the ground I had lost.

The next day Gordon gave me the very devil for giving her a check, saying that it could be photostated and used against me. I assured him that she would do no such thing.

I planned for about a week without finding a scheme that seemed satisfactory. It was near the end of the week that I met Anita, and of course after that I forgot all about the odd little Dvorek woman.

ARTUR KARRIL

Some days it seems to me that never will I become accustomed to life in this entrancing and frightening country.

As it was a pleasant day last Thursday, and the thought of returning to my rather drab little room was unpleasant, I went from my eleven o'clock class over to one of the benches near the river and sat watching the tugs, the warm breeze pleasant on my face.

It was the sort of day when all women are beautiful.

I saw her walking slowly toward me, and there was something faintly familiar about her face. Just faintly. She did not look entirely well. As it would be rude to stare longer, I looked away.

To my astonishment she stopped by my bench. I looked up and her eyes were wide, her mouth trembling.

"Are you Artur Karril?" she asked, her voice hoarse. And she asked in the language of my homeland.

"Who are you?" I demanded. "I am Artur Karril."

She sat heavily on the bench, swaying, her eyes almost shut. I had to support her so that she would not topple off. When she could speak, she said, "I am . . . Ingra Dvorek."

I gasped with astonishment. It seemed beyond belief that here, in this great city, in this foreign country, I should meet one with whom I had played as a child.

Her home had been but two doors from mine, in the small community which was a satellite to the great university. Alas, it is no longer great. Her father and mine had taught at the university. Dr. Dvorek had taught philosophy. My father had been a mathematician.

In 1938, when the threat of war put fear in the hearts of all the little people of Europe, Ingra had been thirteen or fourteen. I was sixteen. She had been a fat child, sun-browned, sturdy and laughing, giving but small promise of womanhood.

We had had the good years of childhood. The happy years. Those who were born in 1938 were not so fortunate, those that lived.

For a time we sat very still, my hand tight on her cold hand, looking out to where the busy tugs hooted in the river.

Between us there was the memory of the happy years, and the memory of the black years.

"I thought you were dead, Ingra," I said softly.

"And I thought the same of you, Artur," she said.

War had come into our childhood. The country had been conquered with pathetic quickness. But the war did not end there. You will do only these permitted things and you will say only those permitted things and you will think exactly as we tell you. We encourage you to betray each other.

"What of . . . your family?" she asked.

I had thought the tears were gone and that I had become a man. But they stung my eyes once more. There had been five of us. Two sisters. My sisters had not died easily. I was the only one left. We had been secure for seven months after the country had fallen. My father had thought he was working for the good of all men when he had joined the secret group established among the faculty called Friends of Democracy. I remembered that Ingra's father had been a member too. When the secret police obtained a copy of the membership list, our false security collapsed.

Each member was shot. The family of each member was sent to the great camp which brooded on the meadows where the cows had once grazed. For a short time Ingra and her mother had been in the same camp. Then I had been moved to a labor camp.

In weak and hesitant voices we began to talk of the black days—and the words which were not spoken meant more than the words we spoke. I could smell the stench of the tall chimneys that rose from the cremation ovens. I could hear the angry chatter in the night of the gun that smashed the bones and flesh of those who tried escape as a quick way to die.

At last she told me that she was legally in the United States, having been admitted under the quota. I explained about the courses I was taking at Columbia and about my efforts to become a citizen.

"We do best when we forget those times," I said.

Her eyes were suddenly cold. "There are some things you cannot forget," she said. She gave me an odd look, and laughed in an artificial way. I began to wonder if she were slightly mad. She said, "We will talk of the funny things of the old life. Whatever happened to Gustaf Lehar?"

I smiled. Gustaf had been funnier before the invader arrived than he had after they had elevated him to a high position in the university.

He had been a figure of fun. A pouty little man with a great voice and a habit of combing his hair down over his forehead in a way remotely like that animal who roared in Berlin.

Gustaf had a minor position in the physical geography department, and he had adopted all the tag words of geopolitics, which he roared at all occasions.

In the small faculity community, one of the favorite sports was to poke fun at Gustaf Lehar. Gustaf was eager for promotion, but the rules of the university required that all promotions had to be approved by a committee. Both Ingra's father and mine were on the promotion committee. They regularly denied the promotions, and it was well that they did, as men of the type of Gustaf Lehar can only bring ultimate discredit on reputable institutions of learning. As Ingra mentioned him, I remembered his great voice, his sparkling fanatical eyes, the fat clumsiness of his body and his expansive gestures.

During the quiet seven months Gustaf flourished as an ardent National Socialist, even wearing the uniforms of some ob-

scure branch of the civil service as set up by the invader. We heard much later that the purge of the members of the Friends of Democracy had so denuded the faculty that Gustaf rose with great rapidity.

He was no longer a figure of fun.

After the successful invasion of Europe, Gustaf Lehar began to make statements that must have been offensive to the ears in Berlin. But his timing was good. Germany fell before he could be punished.

When the Russians advanced, Lehar vacated his post as president of the university and fled to the U. S. zone of occupied Germany, and was received as a fighting liberal who had labored against the Nazi pack, thus once more becoming a funny spectacle to those who knew of his previous history. Of course, there were not many of those persons left.

I smiled with Ingra and said, "Yes, the Herr Doktor Lehar is now finally in New York."

Her smile was something that had been painted on a wooden face. Her eyes looked quite mad.

I talked quickly, not looking at her face. "Yes, he has anglicised his name, you know. He does quite a bit of lecturing. Rotary Clubs. That sort of thing. His new name August Lewis."

It was time for my twelve o'clock class. I explained that I had to go, and I gave her my address. She wrote it down. She had become a lovely woman, but there was something odd about her. Something . . . savage.

We agreed to meet that evening at the same bench. I hurried away. I looked back once and saw her sitting quietly on the bench, almost as though she planned to remain in that spot until I returned, sometime.

But when I went back there in the evening, she was not there. I waited for nearly three hours. I cursed myself for failing to get her address.

Every day I go to the same bench and wait for her, both at the time of day when I met her and the time of evening that we had set.

Somehow it has become the most important thing in the world to me that I see her again. Soon.

AUGUST LEWIS

This personal journal is the focal point of the conflict within me. I recognize that to trust my innermost thoughts to the written page constitutes an incredible danger. Yet without this catharsis of self-expression, without this laying bare of my soul, not only will I fail to find peace, but I will also fail to leave with posterity any coherent record of my life as necessity has often forced me to act in apparent contradiction to my innermost motives.

I reaffirm here my shining belief that we live in an area where the strong man survives and the weak fall. The temporary victory of the decadent democracies in World War II, which they foolishly eblieve to be over, is but a momentary setback. The survival of ruthlessness is one of the few truisms on which we can depend.

Ruthlessness must often be secretive.

Yesterday a young woman called on me. Her face meant nothing, but her name brought back the stupid and childish fears which I have never been able to discard.

I fear that I am too soft, too sentimental. Many men have died bravely on the scaffold during these last two years. They caused thousands upon thousands of deaths. I caused but a few. They died without fear, died with their hand upraised, palm outward in salute to our fallen Leader.

Yet I cringe because of the death of a few miserable little academic minds, minds steeped in the traditional conservatism of those years prior to my assumption of control of the university in which they worked. No man should feel remorse at having taken life from their sneering souls, taken the breath from the mouths that laughed at me—Gustaf Lehar. I sometimes wonder if laughter was not their greatest sin—and their most effective weapon.

For a time I was afraid. I, Gustaf Lehar, afraid of a girl! For she bore the name of Dvorek. I had thought that none of that brood escaped.

I received her in my study, the desk drawer open a fraction of an inch, the dark gleam of the Luger close at hand. For one never knows the depths of violence possible to those shattered minds

which survived the barbed wire, the starvation, the cannibal hunger.

But, of course, I was wrong. It was stupid of me to assume that since my coup had gone undiscovered nine years ago when she was but a child, there had been any way for her to discover the truth.

After fear faded in the glow of her warm humility, after I had pushed the drawer shut, I saw that she was quite attractive, though much thinner than I would have liked to have had her.

Her eyes were enormous and quite luminous.

"A long time has passed, Herr Doktor Lehar," she said softly.

I advised her that my name had been changed to August Lewis and that I used the name Gustaf Lehar only for my lecture tours. I did not explain that I had thought the change of name advisable because of the remote possibility of any of my enemies escaping from that mad dog cauldron which is post-war Europe.

She sat and smiled at me and for a long time we talked quietly of the things that had happened before the great conflict. She told how she hated so badly to be sent to bed early when the faculty parties were held at her father's house.

I had attended those same parties, treated always with condescension and mild amusement. Would they have altered their attitude toward me had they known the future? Of course. All of them were shallow opportunists.

My native tongue fell pleasantly on my ears as spoken by her soft young lips. By mutual unspoken consent, we did not speak of the years that came later. They were good years for me, but bad for her.

She spoke to me as though I were one of her country's great patriot. Her admiration was flattering, and for a little time she had me wishing that I was in fact what she believed me to be.

She is utterly charming, and while I talked to her, I slowly made up my mind that here would be the final sweet for me at the end of the long meal of life. I have many years to go, and they will be pleasant if I provide them with the warm young flesh of a girl of my own country.

A dish which is entirely sweet would

grow tiresome. But I will not tire of her, because her beauty will be spiced with an old betrayal. I will have this woman, and she will never know that it was I, Gustaf Lehar, who added the name of her father and the names of the other stultified greybeards to the list which fell into my hands the list of the foolish young instructors in the Friends of Democracy.

In adding those names I cleared the air of the great university, made vacancies which I was later able to fill with the names of strong young men of brave political faith.

It amused me to have her looking at me with such evident admiration, and I must confess that I enjoyed listening to her flattery.

Once she startled me by mentioning the name of a man who was once a friend. Then he became politically unreliable and was, of course, sent to a concentration camp. When I saw that I could not help him, I tried to have him killed instead, as he knew something of the false list. But I was unsuccessful.

When she mentioned his name, I asked her where she had seen him.

She said that she had held his hand as he died. I then asked her if this man had talked of his past life, of the days of freedom. She said that certain things had been done to his mouth and his brain that made it impossible for him to talk.

I tried not to show my relief.

One would think that after all these years, I would feel more confident of my ability to conceal my feelings.

I must continually keep in mind that I am one of those trusted few in whom the Leader confided. It was he who urged me to speak out against him, thus guaranteeing myself immunity from the reprisals of the victorious governments. To the Leader I owe this life in America, this chance to continue his work.

Yes, this Ingra Dvorek will resist me very little. It pleases me to think that I will own, utterly and completely, the child of one of those men who for so many years kept me in the darkness of obscurity.

She promised to return here tomorrow night at nine. There will be wine, music, memory . . . and love.

LT. WILLIAM C. O'DELL

Joe:

This is the informal report you wanted on the Lewis case. Since you can get most of the dope from the official reports, I'll keep this fairly short. I wouldn't want to put this sort of guff in an official report.

I worked with Sergeant Arnelli, the district man.

It was three days before we got a line on the Dvorek girl, and we were lucky to get that far. August Lewis had scribbled her name on a scratch pad on his desk, but he had used a pencil and we got the impression of the blank sheet.

Steve Arnelli and I found her mooning around in a room way uptown (address in official report) and we put the pressure on her.

In short she had heard from a fellow named Artur Karril that this August Lewis, real name Gustaf Lehar, was in town. Seems like this Lehar came from the same town as Karril and the girl. Lehar had taught at the university along with the fathers of both Karril and the girl.

We picked up Karril and he backed her up a hundred percent. We took her to the hotel and she was identified. She admitted going to see August Lewis-Lehar twice. The night he died was her second visit. She had an appointment at nine to "talk over old times."

The Dvorek woman claimed that Lewis-Lehar acted nervous and upset and jumpy. She said he kept glancing at his watch. He gave her wine out of the glasses we found on the table by the window. She said she left because he seemed so nervous.

I let Steve Arnelli work her over and you know how good he is at that game. He has such a soft way about him that they spill twice as fast.

Steve didn't break her down worth a damn. Then Steve went to work on Artur Karril, who is a clean-cut young guy and nobody's dummy. I guess by the time Steve got through with the two of them, he knew as much about that little town as if he'd lived here all his life. Both the Dvorek woman and Karril had a pretty rough time during the long years of the war before they were liberated.

Arnelli was working himself into the ground. You knew, didn't you, that his brother was OSS working with the partisans in North Italy during the war? His brother is buried up there.

Well, we weren't getting anywhere and then Steve found that diary you mentioned over the phone. It was in a trick compartment in Lewis-Lehar's desk. Steve found it late at night and spent the night reading it, with the help of a foreign language dictionary.

I guess it was tough work because when Steve brought the diary in to me the next morning he looked like hell. When he gave it to me he said that the last few pages of it were missing, and that he hadn't been able to find them.

As you read in the papers, Joe, that diary proved Lewis-Lehar to be one of the biggest Nazis of them all. The diary was turned over to the War Crimes Commission because it incriminates a lot of other characters.

That gave me the revenge motive. I figured that this Karril and Dvorek had been evening up an old score. But Steve told me that I was wrong as hell. After all, he had questioned them, and he was willing to state that the two of them had nothing but admiration for Lewis-Lehar—nothing but respect.

His theory was that Gustaf Lehar had committed suicide because of fear of the past catching up with him. And from the diary, he had plenty of reason to fear it. The diary starts after he was made president of the university.

There was no real reason to think of murder, any more than there was to think of suicide. Steve Arnelli suggested that the pages torn out and destroyed carried some record of somebody about to catch up with him.

Anyway, we got together and made our suicide recommendation and it was accepted. Even that new smart punk from you-know-which office went along with the boss on it.

Now I come to the sixty-four dollar question you asked over the phone. And I guess I'll have to answer it by saying I don't know. I really don't know if there was any connection between the Lewis case and Steve Arnelli's resignation.

But I'm sure you did the right thing. Steve may be a little sensitive and he may get too wound up in all his cases, but he is one hell of a good cop. I would be a loss to the department.

I'm pretty certain that by the time the three months is over, Steve will be willing to come back on the cops. He'd be lost anywhere else.

By the way, he's looking better the last couple of weeks. He's gotten rid of that hollow-eyed look he had after he found that diary.

And you'll never guess where I saw the joker. At a wedding! Yep, old Stevie was right there. I had a hunch that Artur Karril and the Dvorek girl would get married, so I wasn't too surprised when Steve picked me up and took me over to the church.

But you could have knocked me over with a pinfeather when they lined up and Karril turned out to be best man. When they get back from the trip, I'll put the pressure on Ingra to get her husband to come back on the cops when his leave is up.

She's a pretty nice gal, Joe. I want you to meet her.

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