

JAMES HADLEY

025383

Panther

CHASE

CADE



Table of Contents

[chapter one](#)

[chapter two](#)

[chapter three](#)

[chapter four](#)

[chapter five](#)

[chapter six](#)

[chapter seven](#)

[chapter eight](#)

[chapter nine](#)

Cade
James Hadley Chase
1966

chapter one

As the aircraft circled Eastonville, Cade could see the pall of smoke covering the north end of the town. He had guessed it would be bad, but he hadn't imagined it was going to be this bad. The fear that had been gnawing at him during the three-hour flight sharply increased, turning his hands clammy and slowing his heart beats to painful thuds. He had an overpowering need for yet another drink.

The lighted sign above his head told him to fasten his seat belt and put out his cigarette. He knew without asking that the airhostess wouldn't bring him another drink now: he had left it too late. He knew too that she was pretty bored with him. She had already brought him eight double whiskies during the flight, and she had made the journey to the top end of the aircraft where he was sitting with increasing reluctance. Although his tense, frightened nerves screamed for more alcohol, he knew he would now have to force himself to wait until they landed.

There were only two other passengers travelling on this flight. With things the way they were in Eastonville no one unless he had to was visiting this day.

The twenty-odd passengers travelling with Cade from New York had left the aircraft at Atlanta, and these two men had got on: tall, beefy, red-faced men, wearing wide-brimmed panama hats and dusty city suits. They had sat a couple of rows behind him. He had been uneasily aware of their muttered comments as the airhostess kept bringing him drinks. Now, as the aircraft was circling to land, one of them said, 'Look, Jack, see that smoke? Looks like we're back in time for the fun.'

'Nigger bastards,' the other man growled. 'I hope they're roasting in there.'

Cade flinched. He glanced furtively at the well-worn Pan-Am overnight bag on the seat beside him.

It contained his camera and equipment. He had thought it wiser not to bring with him his fitted camera case. He would be crazy, he had told himself, to walk into a town as explosive as Eastonville advertising that he intended to take photographs.

'Think the Militia's arrived?' the man called Jack asked.

His companion laughed.

'Not if I know Fred. He won't let those schoolboys mess up our fun until he has to.'

'Maybe some nigger has put up a squawk'

'Not with Fred checking all out-going calls, and that's what he said he would do. No, this time, Brick, we are going to teach these niggers, and no son of a bitch from outside is stopping us.'

Cade took out his handkerchief and wiped his face. He had known as soon as Mathison had sent for him he was in for trouble. He felt instinctively as he walked into Mathison's small, untidy office that Mathison was going to give him the kiss of death. Not that he blamed him. There was no finer News Editor than Henry Mathison. He had leaned over backwards for three sordid weeks in Cade's favour. He had given him chance after chance. He had accepted Ed Burdick's assurance that Cade was still a genius and if given a chance, he was still the finest photographer in the world. He had had his chance, and what had he done with it?

Cade's sweating, shaking fingers dug into the overnight bag in a spasm of shame.

Well, for five months, he had proved Burdick had been right. He had given Mathison real value for his money. There had been times when Mathison, a hard man to impress, had stared with delighted eyes as Cade had dropped his glossy prints on his desk. That phase had lasted just five months, then Cade began hitting the bottle again. He had a reason; a very good reason, but it wasn't the kind of reason he could mention to a man like Mathison who was dedicated to his job. No excuse could ever upset this dedication. Cade knew he couldn't explain about Juana. Women were very unimportant to Mathison.

During the following three weeks, Cade had fallen down on four important assignments. So when Mathison had sent for him, Cade expected to get the gate. He had no idea what he would do when he left the newspaper office. He was ill. He couldn't sleep. He had to drink a pint of whisky a day.

That was the minimum. He could drink a lot more, but he had to have that amount of alcohol each day to stay alive. He was short of money. He was being pressed for payments on his car. He was behind on his rent. The only thing of value that he owned was his camera equipment and he would have rather died than part with that.

'Sit down, Val,' Mathison had said, pushing back his chair. He was a small,

bird-like man, some ten years older than Cade which made him forty-seven. 'You're not doing so good, are you?'

Cade rested his shaking hands on the chair back. The effect of his last drink was dying on him. His face felt hot, his head ached, and there was a gnawing pain in his belly that frightened him.

'Let's skip the lecture,' he said. 'I am right with you. It's been great knowing you, and I...'

'Sit down and shut up,' Mathison said mildly. He took out a bottle of Scotch from his desk drawer and two shot glasses. He filled the glasses and pushed one towards Cade. 'Sit down, Val.'

Cade looked at the drink. He resisted it for one brief moment, then he lifted the glass and drank carefully. He sat down, holding the glass with half the whisky now in it, hesitating, but he had to finish the drink, so he finished it.

'Something has come up. You can handle it,' Mathison said. He examined Cade sympathetically, then pushed the bottle across the desk. 'Go ahead. You look like you can use another.'

Cade made a show of ignoring the bottle. He said, 'What's come up?'

'Ace Syndicate has a hot tip. They want you to cover it. It'll be good for us, for them and for you.'

A syndicate job usually meant big money. It meant the photographer went after the pictures, the Syndicate arranged for world coverage, and there was a fifty-fifty split on the take.

'What's the job?' Cade asked, thinking that if he could only stay sober, this could get him out of his financial hole. He refilled his glass.

'There's a Civil Rights demonstration beginning tonight at Eastonville.' Mathison didn't look at him.

'The real trouble is expected to be in full swing by tomorrow afternoon. They want you to fly down there on the nine o'clock plane tomorrow morning.'

Cade slowly replaced the cap on the bottle. A chill crawled up his spine.

'Why not tonight?' he asked, staring hopelessly at the whisky in his glass.

'They don't want you there too soon. It will be one of these quick in and quick out jobs.'

'If I get out.' Cade said.

Mathison sipped his drink. He didn't say anything.

After a long pause, Cade said, 'The last time photographers from New

York tried to cover a caper like this three of them landed in hospital, five cameras were smashed and no one got any pictures.'

'That's why Ace wants these pictures so badly.'

Cade finished his drink. He tried to focus Mathison as he asked, 'You want them too?'

'Yes, I want them. Ace tells me they can fix a big deal with Life if the pictures are good.' Again a pause, then Mathison went on, 'I had the G.M.16 agent on the telephone. He asked if we would carry your car payments. I had to tell him your car payments weren't covered by your contract.'

Again there was a pause. 'It is up to you, Val. Alice will get your ticket. There's a hundred dollars for expenses: more if you want it. What's it to be?'

'This is a pretty rough assignment,' Cade said, feeling the clutch of fear at his heart. 'Who else will be going?'

'No one. No one else knows about it. If you pull this one off you will be back in business.'

Cade rubbed his hand across his face.

'And if I don't, I'm not?'

Mathison regarded him thoughtfully, then he picked up a blue pencil and began slashing at some copy lying on his desk. It was his well-known symbol of a finished conversation.

Cade sat thinking for a long moment. The Kiss of Death, he said to himself, but there was a small spark of self-respect still left in him and the whisky had fanned it alight.

'Okay. Got the ticket,' he said. 'I'll be ready to travel tomorrow,' and moving unsteadily, he walked with drunken dignity out of the office.

As Cade walked across the tarmac towards Eastonville's Airport building he could see the distant column of smoke fanning out against the cloudless sky. The light over the Airport was strange and rather sinister, like that from an eclipse.

The other two passengers who had travelled with him were ahead of him. They walked briskly, men with a purpose, in step, their thick arms swinging.

Cade didn't hurry. The day was hot and humid and the sling bag he carried over his shoulder was heavy. Besides, he had a fearful reluctance about leaving the airport. He knew he should go straight to the fire, but he flinched from this. He told himself that he would go to the hotel, and find out what was actually happening in the town. But first, he must have a drink.

He walked into the cool, dimly lit lobby of the Airport building. It was deserted but for the two passengers who now stood by the entrance across the lobby, talking to a tall, powerfully built man in a short-sleeved, open-neck sports shirt and faded khaki slacks.

Cade briefly glanced at the three men, then walked into the bar to his left. This too was deserted.

The barman, balding and middle-aged, was reading a newspaper.

Controlling the eagerness in his voice, Cade asked for a straight Scotch. The barman stared curiously at him, then poured a shot from a bottle with a White Horse label. He pushed the drink towards Cade.

Cade lowered his overnight bag to the floor. With an unsteady hand, he lit a cigarette. The effort he had to make not to pick up the drink brought him out in a heavy sweat. He compelled himself to smoke for a moment or so, to tap ash into the glass ashtray, then trying to be very casual, he picked up the drink and sipped it.

'You just got in?' the barman asked.

Cade looked at him, feeling himself cringe, then he looked away. He finished his drink before saying, 'That's right.'

'I reckon folks should have more sense than to come to this town today when they ain't wanted,' the barman said.

Cade needed another drink badly, but he sensed this bald barman was itching to make trouble.

Reluctantly, he put money on the bar counter, picked up his bag and started down the long room towards the exit. His heart skipped a beat when he saw the man in the sports shirt and faded khaki slacks standing in the doorway as if waiting for him.

This man was around Cade's age. His face was hard, red and fleshy. His eyes were steel grey, his nose chunky and his mouth thin. Clipped to the pocket of his shirt was a five-pointed, silver star.

When Cade finally reached him, the man made no move to get out of the way. Cade stopped, his mouth turning dry.

The man said quietly, 'I am Deputy Sheriff Joe Schneider. Is your name Cade?'

Cade tried to force himself to meet the steel-grey eyes, but he had immediately to look away.

'That's right,' he said and was horrified to see he was shuffling his feet.

'When a guy like you talks to me, he usually calls me Deputy,' Schneider said. 'That's the way I like it'

Cade didn't say anything. He was thinking now only of himself. A year ago he could have handled a situation like this with ease. In this moment of thought, he realised how far down the scale he had sunk. He was now so frightened that he couldn't think of anything to say. The realisation of this fact sickened him.

'Val Cade, the so-called ace photographer of the New York Sun,' Schneider said in an offensive, sneering voice. 'That right?'

'That's my name, deputy,' Cade said.

'What's your business in Eastonville, Cade?'

Cade thought: Tell him to drop dead. He can't do a thing to you. He's an official in this town. Even if he dared to start something, you could get him thrown out of his job. He's bluffing. He's trying to scare the hell out of you. Tell him ...

He was horrified to hear himself say, 'I'm here because I was told to be here, deputy. That doesn't mean a thing. I'm not looking for trouble.'

Schneider cocked his head on one side.

'Is that right? I heard the Sun looked for trouble.'

'Maybe, but you won't have trouble from me,' Cade said.

Schneider regarded him, his thumbs hooked in his belt.

'Tell me something, Cade. Why did they send a gutless lush like you down here? Tell me ... it interests me.'

Cade wished he had had the courage to have ordered another drink. He now really needed that other drink.

'Tell me, Cade,' Schneider said and reaching forward, he gave Cade a slight shove on his chest, sending him staggering back a couple of feet.

Cade recovered his balance. He ran the back of his hand across his dry lips.

'I guess they picked the wrong man.' Then before he could stop himself, he went on, 'I'm not taking any pictures, deputy, if that's what is worrying you.'

Schneider looked him slowly up and down.

'Don't you worry about what might worry me. Where are you staying?'

'Central Motor Hotel.'

'When are you leaving?'

'The next plane out. . . 11.00 hrs. tomorrow morning.'

Schneider brooded for a long moment, his eyes contemptuous, then he

shrugged.

'What are we waiting for? Come on, Cade. I'll see you fixed up.'

As they walked together across the lobby, Schneider said suddenly, 'What is in the bag, Cade?'

'My things.'

'Got a camera in there?'

Cade came to an abrupt standstill. A flash of madness came into his eyes as he faced Schneider who, startled, took a quick step away from him.

'You touch my camera,' Cade said in a soft, hysterical scream, 'and you'll have a goddamn war in your goddamn lap!'

'Who said anything about touching your camera?' Schneider said, his hand dropping on the butt of his gun. 'I didn't. So what are you yelling about?'

'Don't just touch it... that's all,' Cade said in a more controlled voice.

Schneider recovered from his surprise.

'Come on. What are we hanging around here for?'

Cade started unsteadily again towards the entrance doors. He felt suddenly sick and faint. This outburst of his had been so spontaneous that it frightened and shocked him.

Out in the smoky, humid air, Schneider signalled towards a dusty Chevrolet, parked across the way in the shade. The car was driven over by a young, alert looking man wearing a similar getup as Schneider's and a similar silver star pinned to his shirt pocket. His narrow face was deeply tanned by the sun. His dark little eyes were as expressionless as wet stones.

'Ron, this is Cade, one time ace photographer. Maybe you have heard of him. He isn't looking for trouble,' Schneider said. 'Take him to his hotel. He's leaving on the eleven o'clock plane tomorrow morning. Keep him company until he leaves.' To Cade, he went on, 'This is Ron Mitchell. He hates nigger-lovers. He hates troublemakers. He hates lushes... particularly lushes.' He grinned. 'Don't irritate him. He hates being irritated.'

Mitchell leaned forward and peered through the open window at Cade, then he glared at Schneider.

'If you think I'm going to sit with this stinking drunk until tomorrow morning, Joe,' he said viciously, 'you need your head examined.'

Schneider waved a placating hand.

'You don't have to sit with him. Lock him in his room if you like. I don't give a damn, but see he doesn't get into trouble.'

Muttering under his breath, Mitchell opened the off-side door of the Chevrolet.

'Get in,' he snarled at Cade. 'If you want trouble, I'll give it to you!'

Cade got into the car and rested his bag on his knees. Mitchell stamped down on the gas pedal and the car jolted off towards the deserted highway. By the time they reached the highway the car was travelling at seventy miles an hour.

Cade stared through the windshield. There was no traffic. They met only one police car during the seven-mile drive into town. As he drove, Mitchell kept cursing under his breath.

As they approached the outskirts of the town, Mitchell reduced speed. They drove down the main street. The shops were shut. No one walked the sidewalks. As they passed the main intersection, Cade saw a number of powerfully-built men standing in a silent group at the street corner. They were all swinging clubs and they had guns strapped to their hips.

Mitchell drove down a side street and pulled up outside the hotel.

The Central Motor Hotel was a modern, ten-storey building with a small grassed forecourt and a fountain. Balconies to every room overlooked the street.

As the two men walked up the steps to the hotel's entrance, the doorman nodded to Mitchell and then stared curiously at Cade. Passing through the swing doors, they walked to the reception desk. The clerk handed a registration card and a pen to Cade. Cade's hand was so unsteady he had trouble filling in the necessary particulars.

'Your room is 458,' the clerk said and put down a key. He had the embarrassed air of a man dealing with a beggar.

Mitchell picked up the key. Waving away a bellhop who was approaching, he led the way to the automatic elevator.

On the fourth floor, the two men walked down the long corridor until they arrived at Room 458.

Mitchell unlocked the door and entered a well-furnished, large room. He crossed to the french windows, opened them and stepped out onto the balcony. He looked down onto the street, then satisfied that Cade couldn't escape that way, he came back into the room.

Cade had dropped his bag onto the bed. His legs ached and he was dreadfully tired. He wanted to sit down, but he couldn't bring himself to do

this until Mitchell had gone.

'Okay,' Mitchell said. 'You stay right here until it's time for you to leave. I'll be around. Anything you want before I lock you in?'

Cade hesitated. He hadn't eaten since the previous evening, but he wasn't hungry. He ate very little.

'A bottle of Scotch and some ice,' he said, not looking at Mitchell.

'Have you got the money to pay for it?'

'Yes.'

Mitchell went out, slamming the door. Cade heard the key turn in the lock. He took off his jacket and sat down in the big, easy chair. He stared down at his shaking hands.

Some ten minutes later, a waiter brought him a bottle of Scotch, a glass and ice in an ice bucket. He didn't look at the waiter nor did he tip him. Mitchell who had come with the waiter shut and locked the door again.

When he was sure they had gone, Cade poured himself a big drink. He drank a little of the Scotch, then he went to the telephone and lifted the receiver.

A girl's voice answered.

He asked to be connected with the New York Sun, New York.

'Hold a minute,' the girl said.

He listened. He could hear the girl talking, but he couldn't hear what she said. After some minutes, the girl said curtly, 'No calls are being accepted today for New York.'

Cade replaced the receiver. He stared down at the carpet for a long moment, then he walked across the room to where his drink was waiting.

'Mr. Cade! Please wake up, Mr. Cade! Mr. Cade!' Cade groaned. Without opening his eyes, he put his hand to his aching head. He wasn't sure how long he had slept, but it couldn't have been long.

The sunlight coming through the french windows was strong and burned against his eyelids. 'Mr. Cade. Please . . .'

Cade struggled upright, slowly swinging his legs to the floor. With his back now to the window, he risked opening his eyes. The room came mistily into focus. He became aware of a man standing near him and he covered his eyes with his hands.

'Mr. Cade! We haven't much time!'

Cade waited for a few seconds, then lowering his head, he peered at the

man who was speaking. He turned suddenly cold when he saw the man was a Negro.

'Mr. Cade! The march starts in half an hour. Are you all right?' the Negro asked. He was tall and thin and young. He wore a white shirt, open at the neck, and a pair of neatly pressed black trousers.

'What are you doing here?' Cade demanded hoarsely. 'How did you get in?'

'I didn't mean to startle you, Mr. Cade. I am Sonny Small. I am the Secretary of the Civil Rights Committee.'

Cade stared at him, feeling the blood leaving his face.

'My girl works here, Mr. Cade,' Small went on, speaking in a low, urgent whisper. 'She called me. She told me you tried to get your paper and they wouldn't connect you. She said you were locked in here. As soon as she called I came over right away. She gave me the pass-key. We can use the service elevator. No one's watching that.'

Panic blanketed Cade's mind. He couldn't think; couldn't speak. He just sat staring at Small.

'We haven't much time, Mr. Cade,' Small said. 'Here's your camera. I got it ready for you.' He thrust the Minolta into Cade's shaking hands. 'Is there anything I can carry for you?'

Cade drew in a long, whistling breath. The touch of the cold metal of the camera snapped him out of his paralysis.

'Get out of here!' he exclaimed, glaring at Small. 'Leave me alone! Get out!'

'Aren't you well, Mr. Cade?' Small was bewildered and startled.

'Get out!' Cade repeated, raising his voice.

'But I don't understand. You came here to help us, didn't you? We had a telegram this morning saying you were coming. What's the matter, Mr. Cade? We are all waiting for you. The march starts at three o'clock.'

Cade got to his feet. Holding the Minolta in his right hand, he waved with his left to the door.

'Get out! I don't give a damn when the march starts. Get out!'

Small stiffened.

'You can't mean this, Mr. Cade.' He spoke gently. There was an understanding and a compassionate expression in his eyes that sickened Cade. 'Please listen to me. You are the greatest photographer in the world. My friends and I have followed your work for years. We collect your

photographs, Mr. Cade. Those wonderful shots of Hungary as the Russians moved in. Those pictures of the famine in India. That fire in Hong Kong. They were unique records of people suffering. Mr. Cade, you have something no other photographer has. You have a superb talent and a sensitive feeling for humanity. We are marching at three o'clock. There are more than five hundred men waiting for us with clubs, guns and tear gas. We know that, but we are going to march. By tonight, most of us will be bleeding, some of us in hospital, but we will have done this thing because we mean to survive in this town. A lot of us are frightened, but when we heard you would be with us to record this march in pictures, we were a lot less frightened. We knew then that whatever happens to us this afternoon, it will be recorded for the world to see in a way that will explain what we are trying to do. That's our hope: to make people understand what we are trying to do, and you can do this thing for us.' He paused and looked at Cade. 'You are frightened? Of course you are. So am I. So are we all.' He paused again, then went on quickly, 'But I don't believe a man of your integrity and your talent will refuse to march with us this afternoon.'

Cade walked slowly to the writing desk. He put down his camera and then poured whisky into the glass.

'You picked the wrong hero,' he said, his back to Small. 'Now get out, Nigger, and stay out.'

There was a long, pregnant silence, then Small said, 'I am sorry, Mr. Cade . . . not for myself, but for you.'

After the door had closed gently and the lock had turned, Cade stared for some moments at the glass he was holding, then with a shudder of revulsion, he flung the glass at the opposite wall. The whisky spraying off the wall splashed his shirt. He walked stiffly to the bed and sat on it, his hands in fists rested on his knees. He remained there for some time, staring down at the carpet, refusing to think, forcing his mind to remain blank.

A woman's scream, shrill and nerve-jangling came faintly through the closed window, bringing him to his feet. He listened, his heart racing. The scream came again.

Shaking, he jerked open the french windows and stepped out onto the balcony.

After the air-conditioned coolness of the room, the heat from the street rose up around him in a smothering, humid blanket. Gripping the balcony rail, he

leaned forward and looked down into the street.

Sonny Small was standing in the middle of the street, his body tense, his hands clenched in ebony fists. In the glare of the afternoon sun, his shirt looked very white and his skin very black. He looked first to his right, then to his left. Then he waved to someone that Cade couldn't see and he shouted in a thin, tight voice that floated up to Cade, 'Keep away, Tessa! Keep away from me!'

Cade looked down the street to his right. Three white men were running down the street towards Small: big, powerful men with clubs in their hands. He looked to his left. Two other men, also with clubs, were converging on Small, but moving more slowly. It was a classic design of fugitive and hunters and there was no way of escape for Small.

Turning quickly, Cade blundered back into the room. He snatched up his camera. With a quick movement, he detached the 5.8 cm lens, snatching up his overnight bag, he spilt its contents out onto the bed. Then grabbing his 20 cm telephoto lens, he regained the balcony. Years of camera handling experience made his movements sure, fast and automatic. The lens mount snapped into the body of the camera. He set the shutter at 1/125 and the aperture at f/11. The converging men and the lone white-shirted Negro made a pattern of sinister violence in the view finder.

Cade's hands became miraculously steady. The focal plane shutter snapped across.

Down below, one of the running men shouted in a voice turned hoarse and vicious with triumph, 'It's that Nigger sonofabitch Small! Get him, boys!'

Small, crouching, crossed his arms and covered his head as the men reached him. A club smashed down on his crossed forearms, driving him to his knees. Another club flashed in the sunlight. The sharp crack of wood against bone came clearly to Cade as he pushed forward the film winder and released the shutter.

The five men crowded around the fallen Negro. A bright ribbon of blood made a diagonal pattern with ten dusty, heavy boots.

Small made a convulsive movement as a club thudded down on his ribs. One of the men shoved another out of his way so he could get at the fallen Negro. His boot crashed against Small's cheekbone. Blood sprayed up, staining the man's boot and trousers leg.

The shutter of the camera four storeys above snapped again and again.

Then a slim Negro girl came running from the hotel. She was tall and her frizzy hair was disarranged. She had on a white cover-all, no stockings nor shoes and she ran swiftly and silently.

Cade's 20 cm lens picked her up. He could see through the view finder her stark look of terror, the determined set of her mouth and the glitter of sweat that framed her horror-wide eyes.

One of the men was getting set to kick Small in the face again as she arrived. Her finger nails like claws ripped at his face, sending him staggering back. Then she was standing over Small, facing the men.

The men drew back. There was a moment of tense silence. Then the man with the gashed face gave a yell and swung his club. The club smashed down on the girl's forearm as she jerked up her arm to protect her head. Her arm dropped limply to her side, the white teeth of the splintered bone breaking through the dark flesh.

'Kill the Nigger bitch!' the man bawled and the club swung again, hitting the girl on the top of her frizzy head. She went down on top of Small, her cover-all riding up to her waist, her long, thin legs spread wide.

At the end of the street came the shrill blast of a police whistle. The five men jerked around. Two deputies, their stars glittering in the sun, were watching them, wide grins on their faces. Then they began a slow march down the street towards the men.

The man with the gashed face bent over the unconscious girl and drove the end of his club between her legs with brutal violence. One of his companions caught hold of him and dragged him away.

Then the five of them, their backs to the slowly approaching deputies, began to walk briskly away.

By the time the deputies had reached the unconscious negroes, the five men had disappeared.

Cade stepped away from the balcony and lowered his camera. He was trembling, but he knew he had a set of pictures that would speak far louder than any pictures he might have taken of the freedom march.

Now he wanted a drink.

He moved unsteadily back into the room, then he stopped short, a cold surge of shock flowing up his spine.

His eyes like wet stones, Mitchell stood in the open doorway. The two men stared at each other, then Mitchell moved into the room, shut and locked the

door.

'Give me that camera, you sonofabitch,' he said.

Cade thought: Can it be possible that in twelve months, I could have so quickly and easily ruined my body and anaesthetized my mind so that now when I need my strength, it is certain to fail me? A year ago, this cheap thug would have been less than a joke to me. Now, he terrifies me. He's going to be too strong and fast for me to handle. He's going to beat me into a bloody, sodden rag, and he is going to get my pictures.

'Did you hear what I said?' Mitchell snapped. 'Give me that camera!'

Cade backed still further away. With shaking fingers, he removed the long 20 cm lens from the camera and dropped the lens onto the bed while he continued to back away until he reached the wall.

Mitchell advanced slowly towards him.

'I saw you taking pictures,' he said. 'Okay: now you're in trouble. I warned you, didn't I? Give me that camera!'

'You can have it,' Cade said breathlessly. 'Just don't touch me.' He lifted the camera strap from his neck.

Mitchell paused, watching him, a sneering grin on his face.

The camera hung at the end of the strap which Cade held in his right hand. Cade's face was bloodless. His breath came through his half-open mouth in uneven gasps. His expression was, of abject terror. He looked such a creature for contempt that Mitchell made a fatal mistake. He relaxed, sadistically anticipating the moment when his sharp knuckles would cut into the face of this man, trembling before him.

He snapped his fingers.

'Give,' he said.

Then something happened to Cade. He had always had this extraordinary protective feeling towards his camera. During the years as a photographer he had never had a camera smashed, although many had attempted it. Now, as he was about to hand the camera to Mitchell, this instinct asserted itself.

Before he knew what he was doing, his right arm stiffened and swung in a lightning arc. The camera, hanging at the end of the strap flew like a slingshot towards Mitchell's grinning face.

Mitchell had no chance to avoid it. The edge of the heavy metal camera smashed against his temple, splitting the skin and dropping him on his knees.

Blood poured down his face and into his eyes. Half-conscious, blinded, he

knelt before Cade, his hands flat on the carpet, his arms stiff, his chin resting on his chest.

Cade stared in horror at the kneeling man. The camera swung back, hitting Cade hard on his knee, but he didn't feel the blow. He let the strap slip out of his fingers and the camera dropped to the floor.

Mitchell shook his head and groaned. Slowly, he transferred his weight to his left arm, then his right hand groped upwards for the butt of the .45 on his hip.

Shuddering, Cade picked up the 20 cm lens. As Mitchell began to draw the gun, Cade stepped up to him and slammed the long lens down on the top of his head. Mitchell heaved up, then went limp, flattening out on the carpet.

Cade felt suddenly so ill he had to sit on the bed. He thought for one horrible moment that he was going to faint. His slow, irregular heartbeats and his quick, rasping breathing frightened him. He sat for several minutes with his head in his hands, willing the faintness to leave him. Finally, he forced himself to his feet. He picked up the camera and began to wind off the film. This took him some time because his hands were so unsteady and his fingers clumsy, but finally he got the film cartridge out of the camera.

Mitchell moved slightly. Cade went unsteadily across the room, picked up his jacket and slipped into it. He dropped the cartridge into the right hand pocket. He hesitated only for a moment about taking his equipment with him, but he knew he couldn't walk the streets of Eastonville carrying such a deadly giveaway. He stepped out into the long, deserted corridor. For a moment he hesitated, then remembering what Small had said about the service elevator not being watched, he walked fast down the corridor until he came to a swing door marked Service. As he stepped into the big lobby, he wished he had brought the half-empty bottle of whisky. He really needed a drink now and he was tempted to return to the bedroom, but he resisted the temptation.

He pressed the button by the elevator doors. While he waited, he tried to control his breathing. He wished he could think clearly. He had no idea how he was to get out of Eastonville. There were no more planes leaving today. His best bet would be to rent a car, but by the time he had done this, Mitchell would have alerted the police. They wouldn't let him escape if they could help it. They would set up road blocks. Perhaps he could get out by train.

The elevator doors swung open and he entered the elevator, pressed the button for the ground floor.

He looked at his watch. It was 15.10 hours. The freedom march had begun. That might give him a chance. The police and their deputies would be so occupied breaking up the march, they might have no time to come after him.

The elevator came to rest and he stepped into a dimly-lit passage that led to an open door and sunshine. He walked quickly down the passage and peered out into a narrow street that ran the length of the back of the hotel. The street was deserted.

He walked down the street as quickly as his shaking legs could carry him, keeping in the shade.

Before reaching the end of the street that led to the main road, he crossed and began walking down another narrow street, running parallel with the main road.

The word Garage picked out in neon lighting caught his eye. He increased his stride, arriving at the open garage, breathless and sweating.

A fat man was resting his body on the wing of a Pontiac, sunning himself and smoking a cigar. He straightened up as Cade came up to him.

'I want to hire a car,' Cade said, trying to steady his voice.

'Benson,' the fat man said, offering a moist hand.

Cade shook hands reluctantly.

'You want to hire a car?' the fat man said. 'Nothing easier. I've got plenty of cars. For how long?'

Cade suddenly remembered he had only eighty dollars and a few cents left of the hundred dollars Mathison had given him. He now regretted all the drinks he had paid for, and yet, he longed for just one more drink.

'Only for a couple of hours,' he said, not looking at the fat man. 'Just a short trip. It's too hot to walk.'

'Twenty bucks,' Benson said promptly. 'Mileage on top. Ninety bucks for deposit and insurance, but that's returnable.'

Because his mind had long ceased to be alert, Cade made his mistake.

'I have a Credit Card on Hertz,' he said, taking out his wallet. 'I'll pay twenty bucks, but no deposit,' and he handed the card to Benson.

As soon as the fat man started to examine the card, Cade realised his mistake, but it was too late.

Benson's face hardened into a fat, ugly mask. He shoved the card back to Cade.

'I don't rent my cars to nigger lovers,' he said. 'Beat it!'

Cade turned and began walking down the street. He wanted to run, but forced down his rising panic.

He turned left at the end of the street into a shabby alley that he could see led once again to the main road. Halfway down the alley he saw a sign that read: Jack's Bar. He forced himself to pass the bar, but a few yards further on, he stopped. He turned and looked back down the alley. There was no one watching him. He hesitated. He knew he hadn't a moment to lose, but he had to have a drink.

Without a drink he wouldn't be able to walk much further, already his muscles were aching and twitching. He walked back, pushed open the swing door and entered a small, shabby bar.

There was no one in the bar except an old Negro barman who stood very still, staring at Cade with panic showing in his bloodshot eyes.

'You don't have to be scared of me,' Cade said quietly. 'White Horse and ice.'

The old Negro put a bottle, a glass and a bowl of ice in front of Cade, then he moved away to the end of the bar and stood with his back half turned to Cade.

After a second drink, Cade got his breathing under control. He listened to the unnatural silence of the alley and he wondered about the freedom march.

'Would you know how I can get hold of a car?' he said suddenly. 'I have to get out of town.'

The old Negro hunched his shoulders as if expecting a blow.

'I know nothing about cars,' he said without looking around.

'Two of your people were attacked and badly hurt in front of the Central Motor Hotel,' Cade said. 'Did you hear about it?'

'I don't listen to anything I am told in this town,' the old Negro said.

'Don't talk that way about your own people! I am a New York newspaperman! I want your help.'

There was a long pause as the old Negro turned to stare at Cade. Then cautiously, he said, 'You could be lying.'

Cade took out his billfold and put his press card on the bar.

'I'm not lying.'

The old Negro came down the bar, took from his vest pocket a pair of bent steel spectacles and put them on. He peered at the card, then at Cade.

'I heard about you,' he said suddenly. 'They were expecting you to march

with them.'

'Yes. They locked me in a hotel bedroom. I've just got out.'

'Those two they caught outside the hotel. . . they're dead.'

Cade drew in a long, whistling breath.

'Are you sure?'

'I'm sure. You'd better get out of here. If they found you with me, they'd kill me too.'

'I took photographs,' Cade said. 'My photographs could hang the five men who did it. Can you lend me a car?'

'They don't hang white men in this town.'

'They'll hang them when they see these pictures. Can you lend me a car?'

'I don't have a car.'

The shrill blast of a police whistle cut the air outside making both men stiffen. Cade poured another drink. His mind was suddenly very alert. He tossed the drink down his throat, took from his billfold a five dollar bill and one of his business cards. He took the film cartridge from his pocket.

'They could catch me,' he said. 'They mustn't get these pictures. You've got to get them to the New York Sun. Do you understand? You may be old and poor and frightened, but it is the least you can do for those two kids they murdered. Send the film and my card to the New York Sun.'

He turned and walked to the entrance of the bar, pushed open the swing door and stepped cautiously into the alley.

The police whistle sounded again. The alley was still deserted. Cade began to walk towards the intersection. His heart was slamming against his ribs, but he felt strangely excited and elated. He was sure the old Negro would somehow get the pictures to Mathison. It didn't now matter what happened to him. He had done his job. He felt vindicated.

He didn't even break his stride when three men came running around the corner, clubs in hand and converged on him.

chapter two

Fourteen months preceding Cade's trip to Eastonville, he was in Acapulco, Mexico's fashionable, white-beached playground, completing a series of photographs for the coloured supplement of the Sunday Times.

At this period, Cade was at the top of his lucrative career. He was strictly free-lance, creating his own assignments, taking superb photographs which Sam Wand, his New York agent, promptly sold, crediting Cade's bank account with the considerable proceeds. At this period, Cade was very fortunate: he was famous, wealthy, sought after, in excellent health and his creative talent set him in a class of his own. Success hadn't spoilt him. But like most creative artists he had his failings: he was extravagant, he drank more than was good for him, and he was over-fond of the company of beautiful women. To off-set these failings, he was generous, unselfish, kind and a champion of the 'Have-nots.'

With no wife nor family, he was often lonely. He had no roots. Basically, he was a simple man with a brilliant talent. Much of his time was spent in trains, aircraft and cars. The whole world was his workshop.

He had recently returned from Santiago on the Lake of Atitlan where he had taken a series of sensitive photographs of the Indians' way of life. They were good pictures that made you feel the dust and smell the dirt and made you understand the continuous struggle the Indians were making to survive.

To put a frame to these photographs, Cade decided he needed contrast. Part of his talent was blending vinegar with oil in the exact proportions.

So he had come to Acapulco. With a 20 cm telephoto lens he had obtained comparison pictures of the fat and the suety, the old and the veined, the vulgar and the exuberant who lay like gas-inflated corpses in the sun. For Acapulco shares with all other expensive and exclusive sun spots of the world the spectacle of the too rich, the too fat, the too pendulous and the blind to ugliness.

He was staying at the Hilton Hotel. His pictures were on their way to Sam Wand. He now felt the usual let-down of his inner self which he always experienced after a difficult and exacting assignment. As he sat in the canvas lounging chair by the big swimming pool, a Tequila Collins in his hand, he

began to wonder about his future plans.

The American tourists, noisy, vulgar and near naked, splashed like amiable whales in the water.

Cade watched them bleakly. It depressed him that so many of the old and so few of the young had money.

He finished his drink, then picking up his Minolta, he walked over the bridge to reach the far side of the pool and made his way with easy strides to the public beach.

Without knowing it, he was about to keep a fatal appointment with his destiny. It was on this hot sunny afternoon that he first met Juana Roco, a woman who was to ruin him, reducing him to the wreck of a man who was later to be beaten nearly to death in a town called Eastonville.

Mexican women mature very young. Unless they watch themselves, and few do, they quickly become fat, overblown and unattractive. Juana Roco was Mexican and seventeen years of age: an age of twenty-six or seven for the normal American woman. She was slightly taller than most Mexican girls and her fine black hair reached to her knees. Her skin was the colour of the discreet blend of coffee and cream. Her eyes were large, luminous and black. Her nose small, but classically shaped and her mouth a promise of sensuous dreams. Her body was the most perfect sexually exciting feminine equipment a man could imagine.

She lay on her back on the sand, her hair making a frame for her face and body. Her eyes were closed and she was alone.

Coming upon her, his mind busy with future plans, Cade stopped short, involuntarily catching his breath.

A small strip of scarlet cloth covered her breasts. Another strip covered her groin.

Cade thought she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. So beautiful that he thought of her as a 'thing' and not as a woman. It was only a little later that he became aware of her sensuality.

His shadow fell across her face and she opened her eyes. They looked at each other and she smiled.

She had strong white teeth and her lips as she smiled were a temptation.

'All alone?' Cade said, standing above her.

'There's you.' She had an accent and it was attractive. 'I saw you last night. You are at the Hilton, aren't you?'

'Yes.'

She sat up and swept her mass of hair over her shoulders into a gleaming black rope.

'You are Cade, aren't you? The photographer.'

He laughed: delighted.

'How did you know?'

'I know lots of things.' She looked at him, so friendly, so beautiful. 'I've seen many of your photographs.' She shook her head. 'You must be very unhappy sometimes.'

He knelt beside her, intrigued.

'Why do you say that?'

'Aren't you?'

They looked at each other and he was a little worried by her eyes. He had a feeling they were seeing too much of him for comfort.

'Don't let's talk about me,' he said. 'Let's talk about you. Tell me your name.'

'Juana Roca.'

'Are you on vacation?'

'Something like that.'

'Where are you staying?'

'Room 577, Hilton Hotel,' and she laughed, running her slim long fingers through the strands of her hair.

For a moment it didn't jell, then he became abruptly alert.

'That's extraordinary! I am in Room 579.'

'I know. I changed rooms this morning.'

It was at this moment he forgot she was merely a beautiful thing and became acutely conscious of her overpowering sexual attraction. He felt his blood quicken and his heartbeat became uncomfortably fast.

'Did you?' His voice was a little unsteady. 'Why?'

She looked beyond him at the blue Pacific, an inscrutable smile on her lips, then she asked, 'What is the time, please?'

'The time?' For a moment he could only stare stupidly at her, then he hastily looked at his strap watch. 'It is twenty minutes to two.'

'Oh, dear!' She scrambled to her feet and snatched up the bathing wrap on which she had been lying. 'I must go. He hates to be kept waiting. I didn't know it was so late.'

'Who? Don't go! Wait...' But she was already running across the sand. Unlike most girls, she ran gracefully with the easy strides of a man. Her shoulders were set square, her waist narrow and her derriere was small, full and firm unlike the usual back pieces of Mexican women.

Cade remained kneeling in the sand. He watched her out of sight. He had been in and out of love with dozens of women, but this was a new experience. This was disturbing, even a little painful. He found himself suddenly unsure of himself. Changed rooms? Had she been joking?

He picked up his camera and returned to the hotel. Halfway across the bridge, he paused and looked towards the open-air restaurant, shaded under a canopy of straw. Nearly all the tables were occupied. The Mexican waiters, carrying trays of exotic food, were moving around the tables with the precision of oiled, well ordered machines. Fat American women, wearing grotesque flowered sun hats and in boned swimming suits bulged over in their chairs and across their tables. Hairy old men in swim trunks with bellies on their knees shouted cheerfully to one another from table to table.

Finally he saw her. She was at a table with a tall, lean Mexican: a man around sixty-five with a thin, aristocratic face, thick white hair and hard blue eyes. He wore an impeccable yachting blazer, white flannel trousers, a white silk shirt and a Club tie: an anachronism amongst the undressed flesh around him.

Cade stared at the man, then with a sudden feeling of depression, he continued across the bridge. He made a deliberate detour to avoid passing anywhere close to their table. He had planned to have a simple lunch, but now he was no longer hungry. Instead, he went up to his room.

On entering the room, he noticed for the first time that there was a communicating door between his room and the adjacent room. It was bolted on his side and he was sure it would be bolted on the other side.

She had told him she had moved into this adjacent room, so sometime tonight, they could have easy access if that was in her mind.

He lay on the bed, disturbed and excited.

Who was the man with her? Her father? Her husband? Her lover?

The telephone bell startled him. Frowning, he scooped up the receiver.

'Mr. Sam Wand of New is calling you, sir,' the operator told him. 'Shall I connect you?'

It could only be a new assignment, probably miles away from Acapulco.

Cade looked across the room at the communicating door. He thought of her long rope of hair, her full breasts and the way she had smiled at him.

'No,' he said; 'Please tell him I am away for a week. I have left no forwarding address. Would you do that for me?'

Because he was Cade and famous, the operator giggled excitedly. In a conspirator's whisper she said she would take care of it and broke the connection.

That evening, Cade drove in his rented Jeep to La Gama restaurant which faced El Morror beach.

He had arranged the previous day to have dinner with Ricardo Oroseo, the gossip columnist of the Acapulco News.

Oroseo had interviewed him on his arrival. Cade had liked him and had been happy to accept Oroseo's invitation to dinner.

He found the columnist waiting for him: a small, wiry Mexican of uncertain age who wore his white tuxedo with considerable dash and whose dark complexioned face was constantly wreathed in smiles.

They had a seafood meal. During the meal they chatted of this and that, and it wasn't until coffee was being served that Cade decided to make use of Oroseo's knowledge of the V.I.P. tourists.

'There's a Mexican staying at the Hilton,' he said, stirring his coffee. 'I was wondering if you know who he is. A tall, thin man of about sixty-five. He has thick white hair and blue eyes. When I saw him, he was wearing ... '

'I know who he is,' Oroseo broke in, and he regarded Cade with an amused expression on his face.

'So he interests you, amigo? Is that really true? Would it not be more honest and nearer the truth if you said his little companion is the one who has caught your eye?'

Cade grinned.

'You're too sharp for me. Anyway, who is he?'

'His name is Manuel Barreda. He owns a shipping line and he operates from Veracruz. He is extremely wealthy. He has an invalid wife, three sons in business and a daughter who is married to the President of the Bank of Yucatan.'

Cade was a little startled. He sipped his coffee while he digested this information.

'Is that his daughter with him?' he asked finally.

This question convulsed Oroseo with silent laughter. While he beat his knee with his brown hand and mopped his eyes with a handkerchief, Cade waited patiently.

'Excuse me,' Oroseo said when he had recovered himself. 'No, that is not his daughter. If you had seen his daughter, you would understand why I am so amused. Mr. Cade, his daughter is a very large woman; very respectable, you understand, but extremely large. They say she uses a melon net to support her bosom. Her derriere ...'

'Never mind her derriere. Who is the girl with him?'

'Ah!' Oroseo shook his head. 'If I were given a ten dollar bill for every time I have been asked this question I would be able to buy the Mercedes I long for. Every day, every hour, since she has been here, I am asked who she is.'

'That still doesn't tell me,' Cade said.

'Her name is Juana Roca.'

'That's something I have found out for myself. Who is she and what is she?'

'I know what she is,' Oroseo said and shook his head. 'She is the present mistress of Senor Barrera. There can be no doubt about that, but who she is becomes more difficult. I have made inquiries. Before she met Senor Barrera, she was a dancer at the San Diego Club in Mexico City. She is known to have been very friendly with the bull fighters. Or perhaps it would be fairer to say that the bull fighters are known to have been very friendly with her.' He tapped his short nose as he smiled at Cade. 'There is a subtle difference. It could mean that the bull fighters, although very friendly with her, did not get far with their intentions. I don't have to tell you about the intentions of bull fighters when they see a woman as beautiful as Juana Roca, do I?'

'No.'

'Nor do I have to enlarge on the intentions of a brilliant, talented photographer who obviously is interested in her?'

Cade finished his coffee.

'Let's have some more of this. Mexican coffee is really excellent.'

'It is, isn't it?' Oroseo smiled happily. He snapped his fingers at a passing waiter. There was a pause while their cups were refilled.

Cade asked, 'What is Senor Barrera doing here? I would have thought he would have been too occupied with his ships to be in Acapulco.'

'Yes, you would have thought so, wouldn't you?' Oroseo looked reflective. 'But no one should jump to conclusions. Actually, he is recovering from a

heart attack. His doctors advised the sun of Acapulco. So he is here. His sons are dealing with the ships for the moment.'

'A heart attack?'

'Quite severe. There were distinct moments of acute danger.'

Cade turned this over in his mind. Oroseo anticipated his next question by saying, 'You are wondering how it is that an old man with a bad heart is staying at the Hilton Hotel with a beautiful, vigorous young woman like Juana Roca. Isn't that what you were wondering?'

'It did occur to me,' Cade said, smiling at Oroseo.

'But women as beautiful as this one inspire risks. It is really very simple and not unheroic. At home, Senor Barreda would be in difficulties. At Acapulco, no one pays attention to love affairs. It is obviously worth the risk to him.'

'I suppose it is,' Cade said and felt suddenly deflated.

If Barreda was prepared to risk his life for Juana Roca, Cade felt he had no right to intrude even though Juana had taken the trouble to change her room. He had a sudden admiration for the old man. He felt it would be in the worst possible taste to spoil such a dangerous honeymoon.

He shrugged his shoulders.

'Well, so much for Senor Barreda and his mistress. Let's go. How about a drive up to the mountain?'

Oroseo called for the bill. 'It is impossible. I have to return to the office.' He signed the bill with a flourish. 'Mr. Cade, may I give you some advice? I never give advice usually, but I like you. My advice is this: there are many women in Mexico, so be careful who you choose to amuse you. It is said in Mexico City that Juana Roca is fatal to men. She is our modern Carmen. Two bull fighters have already died because of her. You can't fight a good bull successfully if your mind is preoccupied with a woman. It would be better for you to look elsewhere. With that suggestion, Mr. Cade, I leave you. Be careful. Not tomorrow nor the day after, but now. If you are careful now, you will avoid trouble. Remember that a woman's beauty can often be the tempting bait that covers a barbed hook.' He shook hands with Cade. 'I have the greatest admiration for your work. Let us meet again very soon.'

Cade watched him walk briskly to his car. He now had the idea he wouldn't stay longer in Acapulco. But like most people who are too sure of themselves, he dismissed the advice that had been offered. When Oroseo had

driven away, Cade left the restaurant. He paused by the Jeep and looked up at the stars that shone with an intense blue light against a background of soft black velvet. The air was close and hot. He could hear the sound of the sea as the waves slid over the Band and retreated. In the distance he could see the mountain. Its lights formed the shape of a giant iguana. The headlights of the descending cars were like fireflies as they appeared and disappeared behind the screen of trees along the road.

He drove thoughtfully back to the hotel. He kept thinking of Barreda. He decided he would call Sam Wand and find out what he had to offer. He would leave Acapulco the following morning.

Once occupied with a new assignment, he was sure he would forget about Juana. He had absolutely no right, he told himself, to spoil such a honeymoon. Barreda wouldn't be risking his life unless he was fatally in love with this woman.

Arriving at the hotel, Cade went immediately to his room. He put through a call to Wand's apartment. Then, sitting on the bed and lighting a cigarette, he watched the moon's reflection on the sea while he waited for the connection.

He got Wand after a twenty minute wait.

'They told me you were away for a week,' Wand said in the usual bellow that he had cultivated to impress people that he was truly alive.

'Well, don't break my ear drum. I changed my mind. What is it, Sam?'

'What's the trouble?' Wand asked, slightly lowering his voice. 'Wouldn't she lie down for you?'

'Skip the comedy act. This call is costing money. What is it?'

'Bull fighting,' Wand said. 'There's a new rag coming on the market next month. It's called See For Yourself. It's very moral, very stuffed shirt and crusading, but they have lots of lovely money. They reckon they can stop bull fighting dead in its tracks with pictures taken by you. How simple can you get? But they are offering three thousand and twenty-five per cent if the pictures are reproduced outside the States which, of course, they will be. You know the stuff they want: the broken down horses, the panting bull, the cowardly toreador, the sadistic tourists. I don't have to tell you. There's a good fight this Sunday. I've talked to Creel. He says the bulls will be good this Sunday. Diaz is fighting: popular hero right now; big time; big wheel. Can you make it?'

This was Friday night. It suited Cade very well.

'Okay, Sam, I'll take care of it. Have Creel get the tickets. Two rows from the bottom and tell him to buy the seats either side of me. I need lots of room.'

'Okay'

'Tell him I want to talk to Diaz before he fights and after he fights.'

'That could be a little tricky. Diaz is a big shot now. Maybe he won't play.'

'That's up to Creel. You tell him I want it fixed.'

'Okay. Should I reserve a room for you at El Presidente?'

Cade hesitated. His eyes went to the communicating door.

'No. I'll take care of that. Did you get those last pictures I sent you?'

'Just arrived. They are sensational! Val, you are truly terrific. I mean that. I. ..'

Cade who had heard it all before gently replaced the receiver. He sat for some moments, thinking.

He was pleased with the assignment. It offered him a new challenge. He would have to work with a fast shutter and because the light wouldn't be good, with a large aperture. The depth of field would be tricky, but he liked tricky problems.

He picked up the telephone receiver and asked the Hall Porter about the planes leaving for Mexico City tomorrow. He was told that there was a plane leaving at 09.15 hours. There was no need to reserve a seat. The plane was never full. Cade thanked him and hung up. He then looked across the room at the communicating door. He got to his feet, went over to the door and putting his ear against the panel, he listened. No sound came to him. He walked out onto the balcony and leaning forward he examined the window of the adjacent room. The window was shut and no light showed. He returned to his room.

So it had been a joke, he thought, rubbing the back of his neck and frowning. She hadn't changed rooms. A stupid, rotten idea of a joke.

He took his Valapack from the closet and began to pack. He was angry with himself for being so angry. Hadn't he already decided that he wouldn't intrude? Then what was he getting so worked up about? His packing completed, he wondered if he should go down to the bar for a last drink. It was now a little after midnight. He decided to go to bed.

He stripped off his clothes, then before going into the bathroom, he again listened at the communicating door. Again silence greeted him.

'Oh, the hell with it!' he said aloud.

He remained under the cold shower for some time. And when finally he turned off the water and dried himself, he felt relaxed and no longer angry.

As he walked out of the bathroom, his telephone bell rang. He put on his pyjama trousers before lifting the receiver.

'Hello?' he said, wondering if Sam Wand had forgotten some detail of the assignment and was calling back.

'Hello. I saw your light was on.'

Her voice and accent were unmistakable. Immediately his heart began to beat very fast and he found himself suddenly short of breath.

'Oh, did you?' It was all he could think of to say.

'Yes. Have I disturbed you?'

'No ... no ... of course not.'

'That's good. I wanted to tell you my side of the door is unlocked.'

Even with this unbearably suffocating excitement, he did think of Barreda.

'I was just going to bed,' he said, aware that his voice was unsteady.

'I am in bed.'

He replaced the receiver and walked quickly across the room, slid back the bolt on the communicating door, opened the door and paused to look into the room.

She had shaded the bedside lamp with a blue silk scarf. There was just enough light for him to see her stretched out on the bed. Her gleaming black tresses covered her naked body. She was looking towards him and smiling.

He moved into the room and closed the door.

They had a mad rush to catch the 09.15 plane, arriving at the airport with only seven minutes in hand. There were only eight other passengers: a group of American tourists, festooned with cameras, flowered sun hats and enormous sombreros.

As they might have expected, the aircraft was late. Their furious drive now turned out to be a needless risk. The aircraft finally took off at 09.55 hours.

The adventure — it was the most exciting and unique adventure Cade had yet experienced — was slightly spoilt for him by his feeling of guilt.

It was when the dawn was lighting the night sky, and as they lay side by side, spent by their fierce lovemaking, that she said she was coming to Mexico City with him.

'Who told you I was going to Mexico City?' he demanded, startled.

'I heard you on the telephone. You are going to take photographs of the bull fights, aren't you? Well, I'm coming with you.'

'But you can't do that.' Desire for the moment satisfied, he was able to think of Barreda. 'Are you forgetting you aren't alone here? You must think of him. What will he say?'

She lifted one long leg and peered in the half-light at her small, shapely foot.

'My foot is pretty, isn't it?' she said. 'Look. Not many girls have such a pretty foot.'

He sat up abruptly.

'Now, listen. We shouldn't have done this! He is ill. He is in love with you. He . . .'

'He is old, and he bores me,' Juana said, lowering her leg. 'I have packed everything. My luggage is with the Hall Porter. I am going to Mexico City with you tomorrow'

'I can't let you do it! He didn't bore you before you met me. I'm not. . .'

'He has always bored me. I should never have come here with him. It was a mistake. What have I to do with an old man like him? I am going back to Mexico City. If you don't want me, say so, and I will go alone.'

'But what will you say to him?' Cade asked, worried. He leaned over her, trying to see her face in the half-light.

'I shall say nothing. He gets up late. By the time he is up, I shall be gone.'

Cade was genuinely shocked.

'That's no way to behave. At least you must send him a note.'

'There is no need to send him a note. The Hall Porter will tell him I have gone. That's all he needs to know.'

'You can't do a thing like that! It would be humiliating him. You must either see him or write to him. I'll help you write a letter. Let's do it now.'

'Now we will make love again,' she said, turning to him. She put her arms around him, her mouth seeking his, her body arching against his naked flank.

When next he woke, Cade saw it was 08.00 hours. In the rush to get dressed, to get his check settled and his luggage in the car, the letter to Barreda was forgotten.

It was only when they were half-way to Mexico City that he remembered and by that time it was too late. He thought of the old man and he felt a little sick. He looked at Juana, sitting contentedly at his side. Seeing her smile to

herself, so obviously happy, he found it difficult to believe she had this callous, hard streak in her, but her attitude to the old man left him in no doubt that she did have it.

'I know of a little house that we can rent,' she said, seeing he was looking at her. 'It is facing the Chapultepec Park, and it is very nice but a little expensive. We can rent it for a week, a month or a year. It would be nicer than staying at a hotel, wouldn't it? I am a fine cook. I will look after the house and cook for you. You would like that, wouldn't you?'

She was wearing an expensive sleeveless white dress. Her hair was piled high on the top of her shapely head and she wore flat gold ear clips and a gold collar around her throat. The very idea of such a beautiful, sophisticated woman running a house and cooking made Cade laugh.

She frowned.

'You don't think I can cook?'

'I didn't say that,' he said, seeing he had hurt her. 'I am sure you can, but how many servants will you want?'

'Servants?' She grimaced. 'I don't want any servants. If we have servants how can we make love when we want to — any time during the day? Who wants to share a house of love with servants?'

He was touched. All the women he had previously known had submerged him with servants.

'I think that's wonderful,' he said enthusiastically. 'Let us rent a house then.'

She stroked his hand, smiling at him.

'I will arrange everything. Have you any money for me? I shall need money to make you comfortable.' She opened her bag and looked inside. 'I have only six hundred pesos. Poor Manuel is very mean.'

'That reminds me. You really must send him a telegram.'

'I asked if you have any money to give me,' she said, withdrawing her hand. 'It bores me when you talk about Manuel.'

Cade sighed. He took out his billfold and gave her five thousand pesos bills.

'I will cash a cheque when we get to Mexico City. That's all I can spare right now.'

'It is enough. You will find I am very thrifty.' She began to stroke his hand again. She looked up at him, her luminous dark eyes expressive. 'I love you very much. We are going to be very happy together. I would like it very

much if we could make love now.'

'So would I,' Cade said, his hand closing over hers. 'But I don't think these other people would be too happy about it, do you?' She giggled. 'There is that,' she said. They arrived at Mexico City a little after 11.00 hours. Adolfo Creel, Sam Wand's Central-American representative, was there to meet them. He was a fat, balding man with a seedy air and a bland manner. He wore a panama hat with a curly brim and light brown suit that was a little too small for him and liberally sprinkled with food stains.

He made no attempt to conceal his admiration when Cade rather perfunctorily introduced him to Juana. Creel swept off his hat and bowed so low Cade thought he was going to fall flat on his face.

'Did you get the tickets?' Cade asked as Juana, flattered, gave Creel a dazzling smile.

'Certainly,' Creel said. 'You will be perfectly satisfied, senor. Everything is as you ordered.'

'When do I see Diaz?'

Creel lost his bland smile. He looked inside his hat, frowned, then sadly shook his head.

'That unhappily, senor, is impossible. A thousand regrets. Senor Diaz never sees anyone before he fights . . . not even the President. He is a very religious man. He prays and prays before he enters the ring. No, it is not possible.'

'I have to see him before he fights,' Cade snapped. 'I told Mr. Wand to fix it with you.'

Creel skipped from one foot to the other. He beat his fat leg with his hat.

'Senor Cade, I swear I have done everything possible. No one could have done more than I have, but Senor Diaz is very firm about this. He sees no one before or after the fights.'

'Diaz is a stupid blown-up frog!' Juana exclaimed, her eyes flashing. 'If you really want to see him, carifio, I will arrange it for you. You will find that there are many things in Mexico that I can arrange for you. Now I leave you. I must arrange about the house. We will move in tomorrow. Let us spend tonight at El Presidente. Wait for me there. I will be with you late this afternoon.'

'Hey, wait a minute,' Cade said. 'You really mean you can fix Diaz for me?'

'Of course. I never say anything unless I mean it.' She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on the mouth. 'I love you, carino. Look after

my luggage,' and she was gone.

Cade looked at Creel who was simpering into his hat. Catching Cade's eye, he said, 'You are very fortunate, senor, to have such a beautiful lady who is able to achieve the impossible.'

'Yes,' Cade said, and picking up his overnight bag, he walked to where the luggage was waiting.

Since Cade was basically a simple and decent man, he had never ceased to wonder at and be grateful for his continuous success. He still often recalled his first overwhelming excitement when at the age of ten, he had won the one thousand dollar prize for the best amateur photograph in a World competition. From then on, he had led a charmed life. He had never had a serious illness. He couldn't remember when he hadn't owned a car. He had never been short of money. He had never been hungry. He had never been seriously unhappy and he had never been without some glamorous woman who was willing to share his bed.

Perhaps because of all this, Juana Roca's abrupt appearance in his life hadn't utterly surprised him as it might have surprised a less fortunate man. But that didn't mean that Cade wasn't a little dazed and didn't fully appreciate this extra lavish gift from the gods.

As he sat in the bar at El Presidente hotel with its lighted waterfall and its big swimming pool, a Cinzano Bitter and ice on the table before him, waiting for Juana, he tried to put the past twelve hours into perspective.

The girl herself was an enigma. She had admitted that as soon as she had seen him as he was checking in at the Hilton she had fallen in love with him. She had made inquiries and had found out who he was and also his room number. According to her, it was the most natural thing in the world for her to change rooms so that when he wanted her, as she knew he would want her, she would be within discreet and easy reach. They had had no time up to now to get to know each other, although she did seem to know much more about him than he did about her. That wasn't surprising since he was famous and a public figure.

Their lovemaking had been the most explosive, satisfying and exciting experience he had had with any woman. Her sexual technique was at once tender, professional, abandoned and devastating.

Thinking about her now, he realised, not without a pang of fear, that life would be utterly unbearable without her. He had never felt this way about

any other woman. Previously, he had always warned himself to be careful and not to get permanently hooked. Now, the thought of setting up house with her, having her constantly with him filled him with a burning excitement that chilled only when he remembered how she had treated Manuel Barreda. But then, he assured himself, Barreda was a man of sixty-five. How could such a sick, old man possibly hope to match her vigorous, demanding passion? Cade was sure, as he remembered the way she had looked at him, had kissed him and had held him, that she was as much in love with him as he was with her: and, he told himself, that kind of love lasted.

Finishing his drink, he went into the restaurant and had a lonely lunch, wondering what she was doing, what the house would be like and missing her. Then he forced himself to think of the bull fight the following afternoon.

Creel had promised to telephone that evening for instructions. He had a car which was at Cade's disposal. He would be happy to act as Cade's guide and chauffeur. Cade had explained that he would be using three cameras, and he would want Creel to sit beside him and hand him whichever camera he called for so that he would be sure of continuous shooting with whatever lens he might need. He liked Creel. The fat man was so willing and anxious to please that no one could fail to like him. It had been Creel who had suggested that he should buy a large bunch of carnations for Juana's room which communicated with Cade's room. It had been Creel who had hurried out of the hotel, bought the flowers and had instructed the maid where they were to be placed.

After lunch, Cade went up to his room and lay on the bed. He had eaten well and was relaxed. He was also tired after the exertions of the previous night. He slept.

When he woke it was dusk, a little after 19.00 hours. He got up, feeling fine. Stripping off his clothes, he took a shower and as he came from the bathroom, the telephone bell rang.

It was Juana.

He could hear over the open line the sound of men's voices, a lot of laughter, guitar music and a man singing. His falsetto voice set Cade's teeth on edge.

'Where are you calling from?' he asked, suspicious and worried.

'From a cafe Juana said. 'The noise is driving me mad! Listen, carifio, Diaz will see you tomorrow at half past two. He will be at the Hotel de Toro. Is

that airtight for you?'

'Yes, of course — wonderful! How did you manage it?'

'Renado is a very good friend of mine. He is the manager of the Toreros. He is very flattered that the great Cade wants to photograph one of his fighters. Now, Diaz is also flattered ... the puffed-up frog!'

A very good friend of mine. What exactly did that mean?

'That's wonderful!' Cade repeated, 'but what are you doing in a cafe, darling? Why aren't you here with me?'

'Renado is here. I am leaving now, but I won't be back until ten o'clock.'

'But why not?'

'There is still so much to arrange. I have the house, but now I have to see the agent and pay him some money. It will take a little time because he is a thief and I will have to bargain with him. The house is beautiful. You will love it. It will be ready for us to move in after the fights tomorrow. Let us go tonight to the Restaurant Negruí. It serves fine food. Do you know it?'

Cade said he didn't.

'Then it will be a small experience for you. Will you book a table? I must go. I have still so much to do. Do you still love me?'

'If you were here I would demonstrate the strength of my love,' Cade said.

She laughed happily.

'I would like that very much. Adios, carino,' and she hung up.

A little later Creel telephoned. Cade told him about Diaz. The fat man said it was the most remarkable thing he had ever heard.

'You do not know, senor, you cannot imagine how I tried to arrange this interview for you. Diaz is a sonofabitch. It was brilliant of the lady to have thought of Renado. He is very important and also very difficult. She must know him very well to have persuaded him to help you.'

This did not help to reduce Cade's worry and growing jealousy.

Creel said he would call for Cade at 14.00 hours and would take him to the Hotel de Toro.

A few minutes after 22.00 hours, Juana came rushing into the bedroom where Cade was waiting.

After kissing the whole of his face with gentle nibbles, she lingered on his mouth until his hands began to move over her body. Then, laughing, she pulled away, shaking her head at him.

'Not yet, carino. I am terribly, terribly hungry, but not for you. I want a big,

beautiful steak. Later...'

He was astonished how quickly she showered and changed. By 22.25 hours she was ready to go.

The meal at the Negrui Restaurant was excellent. While they ate, she chattered. Everything was now arranged. The house was perfect. She had paid a week's rent. They could have it for as long as they liked. Was he pleased about Diaz? This man was stupid: a vain frog, but she had heard he was very good with the bulls. Renado was very enthusiastic. It took a lot to make Renado enthusiastic.

He had handled many fine matadors.

Finally, when she paused for breath, Cade said, 'Creel tells me Renado is important and difficult. Just how did you manage to persuade him?'

She was cutting into a creamy pastry. She looked at him, then she smiled.

'This is good. You are a little jealous. It is good for a man to be jealous of a woman. It proves he loves her.'

Cade pushed his plate away.

'Never mind the wise talk ... please answer my question!'

'You are angry?' her eyes sparkled.

'Not yet, but I could be.'

'I like men who become angry. It shows character. Without character what is a man?'

'Will you please tell me how you persuaded a man like Renado to grant me this favour?' Cade said in a scarcely controlled voice.

'Of course: there is no mystery about it.' She finished her pastry and sat back with a little sigh of content. 'My father was Tomas Roca, one of the greatest picadors who ever lived. He was starting his career with the novilleros when Renado was trying to become a manager of toreros. My father hired Renado to look after his affairs. It was because of my father's rise to fame that Renado has become as rich and as powerful as he is now. So it is natural that he should wish to help me when I ask for help.'

Cade relaxed. He touched her hand.

'What happened to your father?'

'He became too old to be a picador. He now owns a shop in Taxco. He sells silver. There are many shops in Taxco selling silver, but because my father is who he is, he does very well. He is a dull, hard, boring man. He wanted a son. That I can understand, but it cannot excuse his treatment of me. When I was

fifteen, I ran away. I have not seen him since. Nor have I seen my mother. She too is a dull, hard and boring woman.'

'How old are you?' Cade asked, caressing her hand.

'I am seventeen.'

'And for two years you have been living away from your family.'

'Yes, it is good to be independent.'

He stared at her.

'But how have you earned a living?'

'You are very curious, carino.' Her eyes became anxious. 'Men don't like to hear about such things. They imagine they do, but they don't really.'

Cade sighed, then signalled to the waiter and asked for the check.

'Let us go back to the hotel.' He smiled at her. 'I love you.'

She became gay immediately.

'Finding you is the best thing that has ever happened to me,' she said.

'Yes, and for me too.'

They left the restaurant arm in arm and drove back to the hotel.

chapter three

Pedro Diaz was short and compact. His square-shouldered body seemed to be constructed of steel and concrete. He radiated power and brutal strength. He was unusually dark for a Mexican. His features were regular. He was distinctly handsome, arrogant and proud.

When Cade walked into the big, tawdry sitting-room of Diaz's hotel suite, he found Diaz standing by the open window, staring with bleak, cruel eyes at the wall of the bull ring across the road, obviously posing for Cade's entrance. With him was Regino Franoco, his sword handler, who was fussing over the four swords in their scabbards and the fighting capes that lay on a moth-eaten settee.

Regino Franoco was a small, lean beautiful youth with a dark, vicious handsomeness. His eyes were restless and suspicious, his movements exaggerated: the movements of a fussy, neurotic woman.

Cade had been warned about him by Creel.

'He amuses Diaz and he is good at his work, but he is a gossip and dangerous. Diaz is his god. There is no scandal between them because everyone knows that Diaz is a bull with women.'

Sitting in his armchair, smoking a strong smelling cigar, was a large, cheerful-looking man with an immense belly and a straggly moustache. He was the famous Renado, manager of the toreros. He pushed himself out of the chair and shook hands with Cade. He said he was very proud and happy to meet such a famous artist. In his halting Spanish, Cade repaid the compliment.

Renado then took him over to Diaz who waited by the window like a king granting an audience. It was part of Cade's talent to break down the most difficult barriers, and in less than five minutes he had Diaz relaxed and actually smiling. He realised that this man was susceptible to flattery and he unashamedly laid it on with a trowel.

Creel who had been waiting in the open doorway, now unpacked Cade's equipment. A few minutes later, Cade was taking pictures. He was always prepared to waste a lot of film. He knew sooner or later his subject would betray himself in a moment of forgetfulness. He had fired off more than

seventy shots before he got the picture he was waiting for.

By now, Diaz was more than willing to pose. His ideas of how best he looked were of no interest to Cade although he agreed to everything Diaz suggested. The great picture came when Franoco who had been watching all this with a sneering, hostile expression of the unsuccessful watching the successful accidentally touched the swords propped up against a chair and brought them clattering to the floor. Diaz turned on him. His face was ablaze with rage and cruelty as he screamed, 'You clumsy oaf! Can't you keep still for two minutes!'

The focal plane shutter snapped and Cade knew he had his picture although he continued to take twenty more before saying it was enough.

'You are coming to see me fight?' Diaz asked. He now seemed sorry the photographic session was over.

'Of course,' Cade said, signing to Creel to repack the equipment.

'It will be a great experience for you,' Diaz said. 'You will be able to tell your grandchildren that you once saw the great Diaz kill a bull.'

His face expressionless, Cade said he was aware of the honour. He promised to let Diaz have a set of pictures. The two men shook hands. Renado also shook hands. With his back turned to Diaz, he winked at Cade.

As Cade and Creel walked across the street to the bull ring, Creel said, 'He is stupid, but he is a great fighter of bulls, senior. He has a lot of courage. One can forgive a man much if he has courage. This afternoon you will see him at his best. In a year or so, he won't be much. There are too many women in his life. He is as successful with women as he is with bulls. It is a combination that writes defeat.'

Cade wasn't listening. He was thinking of Juana. She had left the hotel early in the morning. He had asked her to come with him to the bull fight, but she said bull fights bored her. She had seen too many. Besides, she had the house to prepare. As soon as he had taken his pictures, he was to come to the house where she would be waiting.

Diaz had the first bull. It was big, fast and brave. Creel said Diaz was lucky, for nowadays, few bulls were any good. The breeders had lost touch. Now the bulls were small, lively, but without courage. No matter how good, how clever a matador was, he couldn't do much with such animals.

Although Cade knew nothing about the art of bull fighting, he quickly realised that he was witnessing a great performance by a superb, courageous

artist and a fine bull. He took three hundred photographs, working swiftly and expertly with Creel acting like a gun handler, giving him the cameras he called for so quickly that Cade had scarcely any interrupted shots.

The final kill was something that remained vividly in his memory for many days. Here, Diaz demonstrated his brutal strength. His sword thrust, driven in with all the power of his muscular arm sank into the bull up to the sword hilt. It was like stabbing chiffon with a needle. The bull was dead before it dropped to the sand.

While Diaz walked slowly around the ring, arrogant and proud; acknowledging the screams from the crowd, Cade nodded to Creel and they both left the bull ring.

Creel had already made arrangements for a photographic shop to remain open so that Cade could process his films, and they drove at once to the shop.

Two hours later, Cade emerged from the darkroom with a big stack of damp prints in his hands.

Creel and the owner of the shop were talking and drinking beer. They got expectantly to their feet.

'These are all right,' Cade said and began to lay the prints on the counter.

This was an understatement. As the three men examined the prints, the shop owner, a fat, balding Mexican who hated bull fighting, drew in a hissing breath.

'Yes,' he said. 'I have always felt it that way, but this is the first time I have seen it that way.'

Creel said uneasily, 'Diaz won't like this, senor.'

Cade gathered up the prints and put them in a big envelope.

'Who cares? Now take me to the house.'

As Creel started the car, he said, 'Diaz is a dangerous man. He is rich and popular. Have you thought of that? You haven't flattered him. Somehow, and I don't understand how, you have made his art ignoble.'

'That is what it is,' Cade said, relaxed and satisfied.

'Perhaps, but Diaz doesn't think so. He could make trouble for you.'

'If I worried about people making trouble for me, I wouldn't be in this business.'

'Yes, senor, but I thought I should mention it.'

'Thank you. We'll see what we will see.'

Creel lifted his fat shoulders in a resigned shrug.

'I understand, senior. Like Diaz, you have courage.'

'Oh, shut up!' Cade said irritably. 'Drive faster! I want to get home.'

The house surprised and delighted him. It consisted of a large living-room, two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a fitted kitchen and a double garage. There was a garden full of flowers, a small fountain and shady trees. The furnishing was modern and comfortable.

After he had been over the house with Juana and they had returned to the living-room, she looked expectantly at him, her eyes sparkling with excitement. Up to this moment, he hadn't said anything, now he took her face in his hands and kissed her mouth.

'You don't know what this means to me,' he said, and he was moved. 'It is wonderful, darling. It's the first decent place, the first real home I have ever had, and all thanks to you. After you, this is the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to me.'

She hugged him.

'I was hoping you would say that. I am so happy. This is ours, carifio, for as long as we like. You and me and this, and no one else.'

It wasn't until they had returned from a good dinner they had had in a nearby restaurant — Cade wouldn't listen to her protestations that she should cook for him that night — that he showed her the photographs.

They sat side by side on the settee, the french windows leading into the garden open, the sound of the fountain making a soothing background noise as she examined the pictures.

She made little comment until she reached the close shot of Diaz shouting at Franoco, then he heard her catch her breath. Pushing aside the other photographs, she stared with fixed concentration at the savage, cruel face so sharply produced in the print.

'Does he really look like this?' she asked.

'I had to wait some time before his guard was down. Yes, that is Pedro Diaz. Not as he sees himself nor as most people see him, but as he is.'

She turned and stared at him. Her dark eyes uneasy.

'I wouldn't like you to photograph me, carifio,' she said, then seeing his surprise, she forced a laugh.

'I am not serious. He won't like this.' She dropped the photograph onto the settee and stood up. 'Let us go to bed. It is our first night in our new home. It must be an important occasion.'

'You haven't looked at the fighting pictures,' Cade said. 'They are good too.'

'Yes, everything you do is good. I know that. Let's go to bed.' She smiled invitingly. 'Don't you want to?'

Cade got to his feet.

'This will be the christening of our house,' he said.

They walked together to the door, his arm around her shoulders. They paused while he turned off the light, then in step, they mounted the stairs.

The following morning while they were drinking coffee, Cade asked Juana if she could drive a car.

'Of course,' Juana said. 'Why do you ask?'

'You need a car here. I'll look around. I should be able to find some kind of second-hand bargain ... a run around.'

Juana gave a squeal of delight and threw herself on him, covering his face with kisses.

'Hey! You're smothering me,' Cade said, pulling her onto his lap. 'So you would like a car?'

She drew in a long ecstatic breath.

'I have always longed for a car of my own.'

'Well, fine, I'll get you one.'

'But can we afford it, carino? This house . . .'

'Of course we can afford it. Now I have to get off. I'll be back by four o'clock. I have a lot to do. If you want me I will be at Olmedo's photographic shop. I have enlargements to make. I must get these pictures off on tonight's plane. Will you be all right until I get back?'

She laughed happily.

'Of course. I have the house. I will prepare a wonderful dinner for you. Tonight I will prove to you what a good cook I am.'

Cade took out his wallet and placed a wad of five hundred pesos bills on the table.

'When you want more, ask for it. This is your own money, Juana. Buy yourself a dress or something. From now on, we share what I have.'

Lifting her off his lap, he dumped her on the settee and ran from the house where Creel waited in his Pontiac. Cade had never felt happier. He was utterly in love and like all lovers, he was in the mood to give what he had.

As Creel after a smiling greeting, started the car and drove down Reforma,

Cade said, 'I want your help, Adolfo. First, I want a car. What's the market like for a Thunderbird?'

Visibly impressed, Creel thought for a moment, then he said, 'That could be arranged, senior. I have a good friend in the car business.'

'I want it by three o'clock this afternoon.'

'If I can't get it by then, I will never get it.'

'Okay, so you get it. Now another thing: I want a bracelet. .. something in diamonds. What can you do about that?'

Creel's eyes opened wide. He nearly hit an overtaking taxi. The exchange in Spanish between the taxi driver and himself was lurid and obscene.

'Diamonds?' he said when the taxi driver, worsted in the exchange, had sped away. 'But, senior, diamonds cost a lot of money.'

'Never mind about the money,' Cade said. 'Can you do something about diamonds?'

'Anything can be arranged in this City providing there is money,' Creel said. 'A bracelet? Well, I have a friend who deals in diamonds. Leave it to me.'

He pulled up outside the photographic shop.

'Meet me here at three o'clock,' Cade said. 'With the car and the bracelet.'

'Certainly, senior,' Creel said, lifting his panama hat.

Cade grinned at him.

'You are a good man, Adolfo. Thank you.'

'She is beautiful,' Creel said. 'But I am a practical man. I am happy to be of assistance, but I am also aware that when dealing with gold, the gold rubs off a little.'

Cade laughed and walked into the shop where the owner, Tomas Olmedo, was waiting for him.

By 14.30 hours. Cade had finished his prints, had packed them ready for mailing to Sam Wand. He had also completed a carefully selected and flattering batch of prints for Pedro Diaz. Olmedo said he would send his assistant around to the Hotel de Toro with the prints.

While waiting for Creel, Cade sat in Olmedo's office and picked up the morning newspaper that was lying on the desk.

A photograph of Manuel Barreda brought him upright in his chair.

The caption under the photograph read: Manuel Barreda, the well-known ship owner, died early yesterday morning from a heart attack. Senor Barreda

had been recuperating from a previous heart attack at a luxury hotel at Acapulco. He. . .

Cade let the newspaper slip out of his hand. He felt cold and sick. This man would have been still alive if Juana hadn't left him. Of that he was sure. He had stolen her from him ... he was responsible for his death. He put a call through to Juana who answered after a little delay.

'Have you seen the paper?' Cade asked.

'Carino! I am too busy to read newspapers. Why?'

'Barreda had a heart attack yesterday morning. He's dead.'

There was a pause, then she said, 'Is he? Something is boiling over. I must go and look after it. You will be ...'

'Did you hear what I said?' Cade demanded, his voice rising. 'Barreda is dead! We probably killed him!'

'But, carino, he was old and ill. Old men do die. Why should we, more than anyone else, have killed him? What is the matter? You sound upset?' Cade rubbed his sweating forehead as he stared at the big photograph on the opposite wall of a girl in a bikini. Her body was insipid in comparison with Juana's.

'Aren't you upset?'

'Well, I am sorry, of course, but. . .'

'We shouldn't have done this to him, Juana.'

'But he had to die some time,' Juana said briskly. 'So don't worry about it. I must go or your beautiful dinner will be spoilt,' and she hung up.

We all have to die some time but not in this way, Cade thought, depressed and unhappy. This could happen to me! Some man could appear in her life tomorrow, next month, next year and she would have every right to walk out of my life and into his.

Immediately, he became aware of a suffocating feeling of fear. Now he had found her, it was unthinkable that he might lose her. What was he waiting for? Why was he fooling around with her like this? He loved her. He was as crazy about her as she was about him. The obvious solution was for them to get married.

A little after 16.00 hours, Cade, driving a glittering scarlet Thunderbird, drew up outside his house.

Juana came to the door as he got out of the car.

A little after 18.00 hours, they were sitting in the garden side by side on the

terrace swing. She had driven the car with an expertise that surprised him around the outskirts of the city; she had cried a little with sheer happiness; she had kissed him until his face felt bruised. Now, he took her hand and snapped around her wrist the diamond bracelet he had chosen from the five Creel had found: a perfect thing that had cost twenty thousand dollars.

At 20.00 hours they were clasped fiercely in each other's arms, naked, coupled and moaning their pleasure, the sounds of the City a background to their passion.

At 22.00 hours they were sitting down to a candle lit meal of Turkey Mole, the festival Mexican dish that Juana had somehow found time to prepare between lovemaking and half-hysterical tears.

When they had finished the meal, Juana looked expectantly across the table at him, her diamond bracelet sparkling in the candle light, her eyes like stars. 'Am I a good cook? Please tell me.'

'You are truly wonderful,' Cade said, moved. 'Everything about you is wonderful. The finest cook in the world.'

She jumped to her feet.

'Let us leave all this. I will attend to it tomorrow. Now, we will drive to the Pyramid of the Moon. By moonlight, it is fitting for us to look at the Pyramid after the way we have loved.'

A half-hour's fast drive brought them to San Juan Teotihuacan where the impressive archaeological ruins stretched over an area of some twenty miles.

At the base of the vast Pyramid of the Moon, the most ancient building in the valley, by the figure of the kneeling woman who is supposed to represent the Goddess of Water, Cade asked Juana to marry him.

There could have been no more romantic and dramatic background to this challenge to his future happiness, and he was conscious of the solemn occasion.

'Are you really sure?' she asked, holding his hands in hers. 'No man has ever wanted me permanently. No man has ever asked me to be his wife. I want it, but do you? It will make no difference to my love for you if you don't. Are you really sure?'

It was what Cade wanted. He had a child-like belief in the security of marriage. Once they were married, he thought no other man could take her from him.

They arranged to be married at the end of the week.

His work finished for the moment, free and light-hearted, he was content to let Juana who knew the City by heart, show him the places of interest.

Neither of them mentioned Manuel Barreda, although there were times when Cade thought uneasily of him.

Discussing the plans for their marriage, Cade was relieved when Juana said she wanted no fuss, no party, but a honeymoon in Cozumel.

This suited Cade very well. He had a horror of ostentatious weddings, having photographed so many in the past. Juana said she had a girlfriend to act as her witness and Cade decided to ask Adolfo Creel to act as his. The fat Mexican was over-come with the honour. He even wept a little as he wrung Cade's hand, wishing him the happiness he deserved.

Cade was more than happy. Juana not only proved herself an excellent cook, but an efficient housewife. She seemed to take the greatest pleasure in running the house, keeping it clean, marketing in her Thunderbird and providing restaurant-standard meals which Cade began to regard with concern as he was putting on weight.

It was while they were packing for their honeymoon, the wedding to take place the following morning, that Sam Wand came through on the telephone from New York.

'They are raving about the bull fighting pictures,' he boomed. 'And I must say, Val, this tops anything you have ever done. What are you doing now? You coming back? Do you want me to dig up something here or do you want to go someplace else?'

'I'm getting married tomorrow,' Cade said, wishing he could see Wand's face. 'I be out of circulation for at least a month.'

'Sweet suffering snakes!' Wand exclaimed. 'You're not serious are you? Married? I don't believe it!'

When Cade had finally convinced him and had told him something about Juana who by now was standing in the open doorway, listening, Wand said, 'I would never have believed it. Anyway, congratulations. Are you sure you know what you're doing?'

'I'm sure. I'll be back by the tenth. I'm going to stay in Mexico, Sam. I want you to find as many good assignments as you can covering Central America. Will you do that?'

'Sure, sure. I'll have something for you by the tenth. What's wrong with taking some shots of the bride if she's as good as you say she is? With your

name, I could get you a big coverage.'

'No.' Cade couldn't bear the idea of Juana's picture decorating the walls of those pin-up addicts whose name is legion. 'She's my own very personal property, Sam, and she is remaining that way.'

'Just an idea,' Wand said hurriedly, aware he had stepped out of turn. 'Have a good time. I'll be in touch with you on the tenth,' and he hung up.

'I want to be your own very personal property,' Juana said, coming to him. 'Forever and forever.'

And at that moment, as he held her close to him, he believed her.

The honeymoon was only a partial success. Cade was worried most of the time by the attention Juana received from most of the male American tourists whether accompanied by their wives or not.

At every opportunity and with the flimsiest of excuses, they were around her like ants after honey.

This amused Juana and irritated Cade. There was no privacy on the crowded beaches; no privacy in the dining room where the American male was constantly pausing at their table for a chat. There was no privacy on the dance floor. The continual cutting-in, leaving Cade without his partner infuriated him. It finally got so bad that he insisted that they should spend most of the day in lounging chairs on their private balcony, and this quickly bored Juana. She began to talk wistfully of her Thunderbird and her home, and finally at the end of ten days, they decided to cut the honeymoon short and return to Mexico City.

Cade discovered that although marriage was a wonderful thing, he wasn't now as free as he had been. When he wasn't working, he liked to wander the streets, exploring alone, his eyes searching for new material, interesting faces, new angles, tricky challenges of light. But this wasn't possible with Juana constantly with him. She disliked walking, and it was difficult to persuade her to leave her Thunderbird at home. Although Cade patiently explained that it was impossible for him to create images for future photography while flashing down the trunk roads at eighty miles an hour, Juana still insisted on using the car.

So five days after their return, Cade decided it was time to begin work again. While Juana was preparing an elaborate lunch, he put a call through to Sam Wand.

'Hi, fella!' Wand shouted when he came on the line. 'I've been wanting to

talk to you. Did you enjoy yourself?

Cade said he had enjoyed himself.

'All still roses and turtle doves?'

'Got anything fined up for me?' Cade was in no mood for Wand's hearty banter. 'I'm all set to go.'

'Well, you said the tenth. It's only the second, but there is a job you might care to do. It's no great shakes. Three hundred and expenses, but the way things stand, it looks to me you could use a fast three hundred.'

'What the hell do you mean by that?' Cade demanded.

'You have me worried, Val. I had your bank manager onto me. You're in the red for four thousand dollars. I told him to sell some of your bonds. He tells me you haven't any bonds to sell!'

Cade stiffened. He had always been careless with money. At one time he was continually getting into trouble with his bank manager until Wand had suggested he should look after his account.

'The thing to do,' Wand had said, 'is to buy a parcel of bonds, and to keep a float of a thousand dollars in your account. When you have used the thousand, you sell a bond, and when you sell a photograph you buy a bond. That way, you'll keep out of the red and your money will make money. I'll fix it for you if you like.'

Cade had agreed.

'What the hell's going on?' Wand demanded. 'You had forty thousand dollars' worth of bonds about a month ago. Don't tell me you've cashed them?'

Had he? Cade ran his fingertips through his hair. He had got into the habit of scrawling on the back of his cheques: if no funds available, sell bonds. He had never bothered to keep an account of his spending. He knew he had plenty of bonds, so there was no need to bother. Now, a little alarmed, he thought of his recent spending. There was the Thunderbird, the diamond bracelet, the month's rent in advance for the house, the mink stole he had given Juana, the ten days' honeymoon at the most expensive hotel — and it was expensive! — in Cozumel. But forty thousand dollars!

'You there?' Wand said impatiently.

'Shut up a minute,' Cade snapped. 'I'm trying to think.'

He finally decided that he must have spent forty thousand dollars. The shock made him sweat.

'Listen, Sam, did those people pay for the bull fighting pictures? That was three thousand, wasn't it?'

'It was, and they paid ten days ago and you've spent it,' Wand said. 'What's going on down there for God's sake?'

'Did you say I was in the red for four thousand?'

'That's what I said. Now listen ...'

'Hold it a moment.' Cade was figuring with pencil and paper. There was the car and motor boat he had hired in Cozumel. There was the skin diving outfits he had bought when he could have hired them. Oh, God yes! There was that silver tea service that Juana had wanted and he had bought it.

Who the hell wanted a silver tea service? He should have talked her out of that one! They were never likely to use it. It was just a goddamn status symbol!

'Look, Sam, you'd better sell some stock,' he said. 'I'll need around ten thousand dollars in the bank to take care of the overdraft and to live on. Will you do that?'

'The market is lower than a snake. It's not the time to sell: it's the time to buy'

'It always is when you want money,' Cade said. 'Sell something. I want ten thousand.'

'Well, okay. I'll look through your list and see what I can do.'

'My royalty statement will be through in a couple of months, won't it?'

'Yeah. At a guess it should be worth eight to ten thousand.'

Cade brightened, 'So what am I worrying about?'

'You tell me,' Wand said. 'Now about this job. The Archaeological Museum of Boston wants a new set of pictures of the ruins of Chichen-Itza and Uxmal. I'll send you all the dope with copies of the old pictures. They want your angles and lighting. How about it?'

'I've just got back from Yucatan!'

'That's not my fault, is it? You didn't tell me where you were going.'

'Three hundred and expenses?'

'Yeah, but they aren't paying double fares. So if you want to take your wife, you pay for her. It's a week's work, Val.'

'A week's work for three hundred? To hell with them!'

'Look, Val, be your age. You need this money.'

Cade couldn't remember Wand ever saying that to him. He didn't like it.

After hesitating, he said, 'Well, okay, you have yourself a deal. Cash on delivery?'

'You bet. So long, and put a padlock on that wallet of yours.'

Cade went into the kitchen where Juana was occupied in cutting up red peppers.

'I've been talking to Wand,' he said. 'There's a job come up. It's a nuisance really: means going back to Merida.'

She grimaced.

'Do you have to do it, carifio?'

'Well, it's a job. Yes, I guess I have to do it.'

'When?'

'At the end of the week.'

'That's all right. We won't be long, will we?'

Cade rubbed his jaw.

'I have to do this alone. It's tricky. I'll have to concentrate.'

She looked at him, surprised.

'Oh. You mean you don't want me with you?'

'It's not that. It's the way I work. I just have to be alone.' He put his arm around her. 'I'll be away a week. What will you do with yourself?'

'I think it would be better if I came with you. I promise not to be in the way. We'll have the nights together. Don't you think it would be better if I came with you?'

Cade hesitated.

'The trouble is they are only paying my expenses,' he said finally.

Her dark eyes became alert. 'I thought you told me we had lots of money'

'We have, but we don't have to throw it away. Right now I am a little short, but in a couple of months, my royalty statements will be in, and then we will be fine again.'

'You are spending too much money on me. That's it, isn't it?'

'Now, look, you do the cooking and leave me to look after our money,' Cade said firmly. 'I know what I'm doing. Just be patient and stay right here while I'm away. In two months, we'll have another vacation.'

The telephone bell rang and relieved, he kissed her and went to answer it.

It was Sam Wand again.

'I've checked your holdings,' he said. 'You'll take a thirty per cent loss if you sell now.'

'Like hell! Let's ask the bank for a loan.'

'Don't you ever read the papers? There are restrictions on loans right now. You won't get a loan.'

Cade felt a wave of irritation run through him. He hated having to think about money.

'Okay, okay, what's a thirty per cent loss among friends? Sell the damn things. I need the money Sam.'

'You don't need all that amount. Pay off the overdraft and make do with two thousand until the statements come in.'

'Sell the damn things! I'm not in the mood to make do,' Cade said and hung up.

Now conscious of his present lack of money, Cade became worried by the constant drain on his wallet. Small items that he had never considered became red flashing lights: gasoline for the Thunderbird, the refrigerator had to break down, a bill for a dozen bottles of White Horse he had ordered as a house warming present, a nerve-shattering bill for a pint of perfume called Joy he had been reckless enough to have bought without inquiring the price, a bill from Olmedo for the use of his dark room, a bill for four pairs of shoes he had bought for Juana. For the first time in his life he began jotting down figures, subtracting but never adding, a cold clutch of uneasiness gripping him when he saw how quickly the six thousand dollars he had left after paying off his overdraft was melting away.

Juana drove him to the airport for his plane to Merida. She seemed to have caught his depression for they drove most of the way in silence. As they were nearing the airport, Cade made the effort and said, 'Well, what do you plan to do with yourself while I'm away, sweetheart?'

She shrugged.

'I'll find something. I wish I were coming with you. I shall miss you.'

She pulled up at the Departure entrance.

'I'll call you every evening,' Cade said. He hated the parting. 'Look after yourself.' They kissed. 'Don't wait. You get off. I'll call tonight around eight.'

On Cade's second evening at the hotel at Uxmal, he had a telephone call from Creel. Cade was now wishing he hadn't been so money conscious as he was missing Juana badly. He found the evenings, after the light had faded and he could no longer work, dull and lonely. The previous evening he had spent over an hour talking to her on the telephone, and he was about to make

another call to her this evening when Creel came through.

Impatient to talk to Juana, Cade curtly asked him what he wanted.

'I thought I should tell you, senior, that the magazine with your bull fighting pictures reached Mexico City this morning,' Creel said.

'So what?' Cade looked impatiently at his watch. Juana would be waiting. It was already a few minutes after 20.00 hours.

'They have been badly received, senior. I told you Diaz was a popular hero. His fans think you have shown him in a very bad light. The pictures have been received very badly'

'What am I supposed to do, Adolfo? Put ashes on my head?'

'I thought I should tell you. This afternoon someone slashed the four tyres of my car. Someone who knows I helped you take these pictures.'

Cade stiffened and frowned.

'I'm sorry about that, Adolfo. Do you know who it was?'

'No, but I can guess. I told you Regino Franoco regards Diaz as a god. I think he did it.'

'Well, I am sorry.' Cade hesitated, then went on, 'Buy yourself a new set and send the cheque to me. After all this hasn't anything to do with you.'

'I wouldn't expect that. I am just warning you, senior. If he does this thing to me, he might do worse to you. I think he could. You must be on your guard.'

'To hell with that fairy!' Cade said impatiently. 'If he tries anything with me, I'll twist his dirty neck for him! You get those tyres and send me the cheque. I insist.'

'Well, thank you very much, senior, but you must be careful. It is a good thing you are not here. By the time you return, all the fuss will have died down.'

Cade suddenly thought of Juana.

'You don't think anything could happen to my wife, Adolfo?' There was a sudden tight feeling across his chest and he found himself gripping the telephone receiver unnecessarily hard.

'No, senior. This, I can assure you. Senora Cade is perfectly safe because she knows very well how to look after herself. Besides, she is a Mexican and very beautiful.'

Cade relaxed.

'You are sure?'

'I wouldn't tell you if I were not positive, but you — that is different. Be careful, senor.'

'I too can look after myself, Adolfo, but thanks... I'll be careful,' and he hung up.

He lit a cigarette, then he called Juana. There was some delay before she answered.

After greeting her, Cade told her what Creel had said.

'It doesn't worry me, honey, but you being on your own worries me a little.'

'There is nothing to worry about,' Juana said. 'But I will speak to Renado. He will know how to deal with this. He will bring that filthy little queer to heel. Think no more about it. How are things with you?'

Cade suddenly became tense. He was almost sure he had heard a man's voice say something: as if the man was in the room with Juana and had called to her. He felt a rush of blood to his head.

'Carino? Are you there?'

Cade listened intently. He could hear nothing now except perhaps Juana's light breathing.

'Carino?'

'Sorry. Yes, I am doing all right. It's a dull job, but it's coming along. Have you anyone with you, Juana?'

'With me? Why, no. What makes you ask such a thing?'

'I thought I heard a man speak to you just now' Juana laughed.

'It was the radio. I have just turned it off. I was listening to a play. It wasn't very interesting.'

Cade drew in a long, deep breath. 'Oh... I thought I heard a voice. What have you been doing with yourself?'

He listened to her harmless recital. Finally, she said, 'We must not waste any more of your money. Good night, carino. I will dream of you.'

Reluctant to lose her company, Cade talked some more, then finally hung up.

As he went downstairs to the restaurant, he realised he was quite lost without her. Several tourists nodded to him, but he was in no mood for their company. He asked the waiter to get him an evening paper, then having chosen his meal, he hid himself behind the paper, reading and eating at the same time. Towards the end of the meal, he came to the radio and TV programmes. Interested to know what play Juana had been listening to, he

tried to find it. Only light music and a concert were advertised.

There were no plays on the Mexican network that night.

He sat still, staring across the big room, his mind suddenly crawling with alarm and jealousy. He was now sure he had heard a man's voice. Could she be cheating so soon? He tried to still the rising torment, trying to reassure himself that he could have imagined hearing the voice, but why had she lied about the programme?

Returning to his room, he decided to call Juana. The time was 22:00 hours. He had to wait ten minutes and then the operator told him there was no answer. Angry now, Cade told her to try again.

He paced up and down until the operator called him and said there was still no answer.

He asked the girl to keep trying. He felt a sudden urgent need for a drink. He rang the floor waiter and told him to bring a bottle of Tequila, ice and limes and to hurry.

He crossed to the open window and sat down, feeling the hot night air against his sweating face.

There had been a man there, he kept telling himself, and now they had gone out together. Maybe they were still in the house, upstairs on the bed, listening with guilt to the ringing of the telephone bell.

A little after midnight, with the bottle of Tequila now half empty, Cade, drunk and coldly angry, asked the operator what was happening. She said she was ringing the number every ten minutes, but there was still no reply.

At 00.45 hours, the bell rang. Cade lurched across the room and snatched up the receiver. The Tequila had partly anaesthetized his mind. He was no longer frantic, but murderously angry.

'Hello?' he heard Juana say. 'Yes? Who is it?'

'Where the hell have you been?' Cade shouted.

'Carino! How lovely! I was only just this minute thinking of you.'

'Where have you been?'

'Been? Oh, have you been trying to get me?'

'Yes, I've been trying to get you. Where have you been?'

'Ana looked in. We went to the movies.'

Ana was the girl who had acted as witness for Juana at the wedding: a fat, giggling girl who Cade had disliked.

'Don't lie! You went out with some man... who is he?'

He heard her catch her breath.

'Have you been drinking, Val?'

'Never mind if I've been drinking. Who was the man?'

'There was no man. I went out with Ana. If you don't believe me, then call her. I will give you her telephone number.'

'I'm coming back. We'll have this out tomorrow,' Cade said and slammed down the receiver.

With a shaking hand, he splashed two inches of Tequila into his glass and swallowed it at a gulp.

For a moment, he stood shuddering, then the glass slipped out of his hand and he flopped face down on the bed.

The following morning, he woke with a splitting headache. He stumbled into the bathroom and washed down four aspirin tablets, then he forced himself under a cold shower. Later, when the ache in his head had subsided and he had drunk three cups of strong coffee, he considered what best to do.

Juana had lied to him. That was an indisputable fact. He had to make her admit her lie and explain why she had lied. To hell with the Museum job! What was three hundred lousy dollars compared to his peace of mind? He would go back and have it out with her.

He packed, paid his check and drove to the airport.

During the flight, he wondered a little uneasily what Sam Wand would say about all this. He remembered suddenly that he would now have to pay for the two days stay at the Uxmal hotel and his air fare. That was so much money wasted, he thought bitterly, just when he needed his money.

He found Juana, white faced, with dark smudges under her eyes, waiting for him. She was sitting in the garden. She didn't get up as he strode across the patio.

'Let's get at it,' he said curtly, standing over her. 'I heard a man speak to you last night. I heard him distinctly over the telephone. You said you were listening to a play on the radio. I checked the programmes. There was no play last night so that makes you a liar!'

She regarded him, her eyes expressionless.

'Then if you think I am a liar, why have you come back?' she asked in a cold, flat voice.

Cade felt a clutch of fear at his heart.

'Come back? What do you mean? I'm your husband! I want an

explanation!'

Her direct stare made him lose confidence and his anger became uncertain.

'There is no explanation. Why should there be? I was listening to a play so what have I to explain?'

'There was no play! Now look, Juana, it is no use ...'

She got to her feet and faced him. Her eyes now were dark and angry.

'The play was "You Can't Take It With You." It was broadcast on the short wave from New Orleans. Ask Creel to check for you. I think you have been very stupid, very suspicious and very unkind. I don't love a man like that!'

She walked quickly into the house and he heard a door slam.

Sick with fear that he had gone too far and had lost her, Cade ran after her, frantically calling her name.

chapter four

It took Cade until late evening to win Juana back to him. He spent more than an hour outside the locked bedroom door, trying to persuade her to let him in. When she finally did unlock the door, she refused at first to listen to his abject apologies.

'I am a liar. You don't trust me. Therefore you can't love me,' she said, her back turned to him.

'Please try to understand,' he pleaded. 'You are the first woman I have ever loved. I can't help it if I am jealous of you. You said yourself it is a proof of love. Now, didn't you?'

'That doesn't mean you can call me a liar.'

And so it went on, until finally, he began to wear down her resistance.

'You hurt me very much,' she said, close to tears. 'I didn't sleep all night. You were drunk. You shouted at me. You were horrid.'

'Yes, I was all that, and I am sorry. I promise it won't happen again.' Tentatively he put his arm around her, and after hesitating, she relaxed against him.

'You made me so unhappy,' she said, clinging to him, 'I have never been so unhappy.'

In a few more minutes, she began to smile and Cade, relieved and delighted, insisted that they should go out to dinner to celebrate. They went to the Negru Restaurant where Cade ordered champagne, unmindful of the cost since he had a Diner's Club card and he hadn't to pay for the meal for some time to come.

On their return, they went to bed and made love. But Cade was quick to find she wasn't so ardent, and he guessed she was still resenting his treatment of her.

He decided before he fell asleep that he would get her a present the following day. An Omega self-winding watch was certain to put things right, he told himself. Never mind the cost. He still had some stock left, and in another twelve weeks, the royalty money would be in.

So when Juana, still a little cool, went off to the market, Cade called up Adolfo Creel and instructed him to find him a watch, explaining just what he

wanted. Creel said he would have a selection ready for him by the afternoon. Then, slightly uneasy, Cade called Sam Wand. He said that he had changed his mind about going to Yucatan and was returning the photographs supplied by the Museum.

'It's not worth the journey, Sam, What else have you got?'

'I hope you know what you are doing,' Wand said, obviously annoyed. 'They'll be pretty sore. I told them it was all fixed.'

'Then tell them it is unfixed,' Cade said impatiently. 'Have you dug up anything else?'

'There's nothing your way for the moment, but I was talking to Harry Jackson and he is raving about those bull fight shots of yours. He's trying to set up a deal with Life to do an article on the Dixie Bands in New Orleans. If he pulls it off, he'll want you to take care of the photographs. This could be a nice slice of money, Val. I'll know tomorrow for certain and I'll call you.'

'Fine. Oh, another thing. Sell some more stock for me, will you? I'll need around five thousand.'

'For God's sake! Didn't I...'

'Sam! This is my money, remember? Keep your remarks to yourself!'

'I know it's your money, but do you imagine you'll have all that amount? Right now, you are worth only twenty-one thousand dollars: that's all! If I sell stock at the present market price, you won't be worth fifteen thousand.'

'I have those royalties coming to me, so what?'

'Now look, Val. . .'

'I want five thousand dollars, so get it,' Cade said and hung up.

The watch, when it arrived, was perfect and set with diamonds. Cade couldn't resist it. Creel assured him it was a bargain. Cade was sure this would please Juana as nothing else could, and he was right.

He was immediately out of the dog house and their lovemaking that night was as abandoned and explosive as it had ever been.

The following morning Sam Wand telephoned to say that the New Orleans deal was on and he had sold stock at a forty per cent loss to give Cade the five thousand dollars he had asked for.

Cade felt a moment of uneasiness, but he had told Wand to do it, so this wasn't the time to squeal.

'Jackson will be at the Fontainebleau Motor Hotel, New Orleans on Friday,' Wand went on. 'He's expecting you. This will be a syndicate job.'

Could be worth nine thousand dollars to you in the long run. Okay?'

Cade grinned happily.

'More than okay. I'll be there,' and he hung up.

He rushed to tell Juana they were leaving for New Orleans on Friday. She was as excited as he. He then called Creel, asking him to fix the plane reservations and to call the hotel for a double room.

After dinner, Cade said it would be nice to take a drive. How would Juana like to visit the Pyramid of the Moon again? Always delighted for an excuse to drive the Thunderbird, Juana agreed.

Together, they left the house and walked around to the garage. They walked arm in arm, and they were completely off their guards. Three shadowy figures rose out of the bushes near the garage and converged on them.

Juana was the first to realise the threatening danger.

'Look out!' she cried, jerking her arm free. She swung her heavy handbag at the face of one of the running men, and then she began to scream.

Two small Mexicans were on Cade before he could get his balance. They all crashed down in a struggling heap on the concrete path. Cade kicked out, feeling his shoe sink into something soft and some of the pressure went away. He received a stunning blow in the face, cursed, hit out blindly and connected with a jaw bone.

Juana's piercing screams were suddenly cut short. Cade was half up as he saw another shadowy figure come charging at him. He straightened and was knocked sprawling. Gasping, he began to scramble to his feet when he saw two men standing over him, their arms raised. He threw up his arms, but he was too late. Something that felt like a bar of iron crashed down on his head and the night exploded into a sheet of blinding flame, and then darkness.

Later, he vaguely became aware of great heat and the smell of burning. He made a feeble effort to open his eyes, and again darkness closed over him. Later still, he became aware of voices and movement, but he was beyond caring. His head felt as if it had been split in two. He heard himself groaning. There was a sudden prick in his arm, and he drifted away once more into blessed darkness.

The young Mexican surgeon whose name was Jose Pinto came into the hospital waiting-room where Juana, Creel and Sam Wand stood in an uneasy group by the window.

Wand, a tall, fat dynamo of a man in his middle forties, had flown down as soon as the news of the attack had reached him. Juana whose beauty had made no impression on him, could tell him little of the attack. She said five men had been involved. Before she could go to Cade's help, a blanket had been thrown over her head and she had been held while the brutal beating had been in progress.

The neighbours, alarmed by her first screams, had telephoned the police who had arrived with their usual indifference of all Mexicans to an emergency some time after the attackers had gone. They found the garage in flames, the Thunderbird a charred wreck and Cade hovering between life and death. He had been rushed to hospital. Three days later it had been decided to operate.

'He's come through very well,' Pinto said as the three turned expectantly. 'He has a very thick skull. There is a fracture, of course, but it will heal. I am optimistic. In a month or so, he will be as well as he has ever been.'

'Can I see him?' Juana asked.

'Tomorrow, but not before.'

Later, at a cafe, sitting opposite each other, Juana asked Wand for money.

'The operation has to be paid for,' she explained. 'There are also many other expenses. I need a new car.'

'He hasn't much money now,' Wand said, regarding her coldly. 'He has been spending his capital recently like a drunken sailor.' He tapped a fat finger on her diamond wrist watch. 'If you want money, sell that. The insurance will take care of the car. What he has left, he will need when he comes out of hospital.'

Her face expressionless, her eyes suddenly hard, Juana stood up.

'He has always told me you are a good friend of his,' she said. 'I don't think you are. He wouldn't want me to sell my watch. It is the last thing he would want.'

Wand smiled at her, not bothering to get to his feet. To him she was a beautiful whore; nothing more, nothing less.

'It is because I happen to be a good friend of his that I am telling you to sell the watch and all the other expensive toys he has given you. I am holding onto whatever money he has left and you, dear lady, are certainly not getting it!'

She shrugged her beautiful shoulders, turned and with swinging hips, she

walked out into the sunshine.

The following morning Wand was Cade's first visitor.

Dr. Pinto had already told Cade that Juana was unhurt and that in a month or so he would be up and about again, but as Wand came into the small, white room, he could see Cade was troubled.

'Good of you to come, Sam,' Cade said as the big, fat man lowered his bulk onto the chair by the bed. 'Have you seen Juana?'

'I saw her yesterday. She's all right.'

'Did she say when she was coming to see me?' Cade's sunken eyes were anxious.

'No, but she'll be along today. How do you feel?'

Cade grimaced.

'This is a curse, Sam. It means I have lost the New Orleans job, doesn't it?'

'Jackson couldn't wait. He got Lucas.'

'I don't know how Juana is off for money, Sam. If she wants some, let her have it.'

'She'll manage. I had better hold on to your last stocks. You'll need money when you come out.'

'I guess that's right, but... oh, well, I'll talk to her.'

'What's all this about anyway?' Wand asked. 'Any idea who these thugs were?'

'They didn't like my bull fighting pictures. Adolfo warned me, but I didn't pay any attention. I'm not good at taking advice. The car's gone?'

'Yes.'

'She'll have to have a new one.'

'The insurance will take care of that. Don't worry about her. She can more than look after herself. Look, Val, I have to get back to New York. I just wanted you to know that I'll have a mass of work lined up for you as soon as you're fit. You take it easy, and leave it all to me.'

When he had gone, Cade closed his eyes. His head ached and he felt depressed. He couldn't understand why Juana hadn't been the first to visit him.

She came in the late afternoon. Cade who had been dozing, opened his eyes to find her by his bed; Although his head was aching, he was able to smile. He caught hold of her hand and she bent and kissed him.

'It is lovely to see you. How are you? Are you in pain?' She sat down.

'I'm all right, but how about you? Miss me?'

'Of course,' she said, paused, then went on, 'There is so much to do. The insurance people are being difficult about the car. They say the coverage was for accidental fire and this was deliberate. I've had to consult a lawyer. He doesn't think they will pay. Then there's the garage. The owner of our house wasn't insured. He is claiming from us.'

Cade wished his head didn't ache so badly. He forced a grin.

'Don't worry about it, sweetheart. Let them all wait. I'll fix it when I am up.'

'But in the meantime I haven't a car. Taxis are almost impossible to get. Could I buy a car?'

'Sure ... of course. I don't know how much I have in the bank, but there should be enough. My cheque book is in that drawer. I'll sign a blank cheque, but watch it, baby, don't put me in the red.'

Her face lit up as she gave him a flashing, heartwarming smile. She got the cheque book, found a pen and stood over him while he signed.

'Ask Creel to find you something cheap, honey. Until I'm earning again we'll have to watch our money'

'I have a friend in the car business. I won't bother Creel. My friend will find me something quickly.'

She looked at her watch. 'Dr. Pinto said I was only to stay a few minutes.' She put the cheque in her bag. 'Don't worry if I don't come tomorrow, carifio. I'll be looking at cars. I'll come as soon as I can.'

'Wait a minute, Juana.' Cade's head was aching so badly he was white and sweating. 'Did you speak to Renado about Franoco? It was Franoco who staged this attack, wasn't it?'

'I don't know. It could have been anyone. There is much bad feeling about those photos.'

'But did you speak to Renado?'

She hesitated, not looking at him.

'No ... I forgot, but it could have been anyone.' She bent and kissed him. 'Adios. Get well quickly. I miss you,' and she was gone.

Her visit upset Cade. Dr. Pinto wasn't pleased with him when he saw him later.

'No visitors for a few days,' he said. 'No, don't argue. It's for your own good. I'm going to give you a sedative and you're going to have a nice sleep.'

Cade didn't protest.

'Will you telephone my wife? I don't want her to come all this way if she can't see me.'

'I'll telephone,' Pinto said.

Before Cade took the sedative, he thought of what Juana had told him. He was going to have to face a financial mess when he left the hospital. He felt a qualm of uneasiness about giving her a blank cheque. He hoped she wouldn't clean out the account, but of course she had to have money. Then he remembered he had still to pay for the watch; there was this garage business. Would he have to compensate the owner? He felt suddenly as if his safe, easy comfortable world was falling to pieces: He welcomed sleep when eventually it came.

A week slid by. Cade was kept under sedation. His head ceased to ache, he was relaxed and he could feel his strength returning. What pleased him and helped him more than anything was the daily bunch of flowers that were delivered with a card always bearing the same message: My love, Juana, written in a small, untidy hand and the first time Cade had seen Juana's handwriting.

On the eighth day, Cade asked Pinto if he could see Juana.

The doctor shook his head.

'Not yet. People bring trouble. You're in no state for trouble. I'm not saying your wife would upset you, but she must have her own personal problems. That is only natural. So if you want to get well quickly, be patient. In another week, the fracture will be healed. You'll be surprised how quickly you'll be up and about once it is healed. But get a setback now, and you could be here for another month or more. So no visitors for another week.'

'Tell her, please.'

Dr. Pinto looked at him and then away.

'I'll tell her,' he said.

At the end of the second week, Cade was sitting in an armchair by the open window. He was feeling pretty good, a little weak still, but he hadn't had a headache for three days and he was determined to see Juana without further delay. He told Dr. Pinto so when he came in for his daily visit.

'Yes,' Pinto said, his face expressionless. 'I think you are out of danger now. All right, I'll telephone. How about tomorrow afternoon?'

'This afternoon,' Cade said firmly. 'I've waited long enough. I can't imagine

why there is no telephone in this room. What kind of hospital are you running?'

Pinto shrugged.

'This is where we treat head injuries, Senor Cade. People with bad head injuries don't need a telephone.'

'How much longer am I staying here?'

'Another week. I'll need to see you from time to time just to be sure you're going along all right.'

'All this cost money,' Cade said, frowning. 'I'm feeling fine now. Frankly, doctor, I have to get back to work.'

'You will in another week.'

Cade picked up the pile of cards and flicked through them: each bearing Juana's simple message.

There were fifteen of them. A new one with a bunch of carnations had arrived that morning.

'My wife's got to stop this,' he said with a sudden grin. 'We can't afford it.'

Dr. Pinto looked down at his finger nails, hesitated, then said, 'I have to get along. I'll see you tomorrow,' and he left the room.

Cade stared after him, suddenly a little uneasy. What was the matter with the man this morning? he wondered.

Visiting hours at the hospital began at 15.00 hours. Cade sat by the open window, waiting impatiently, his eyes continually going to his watch. During that waiting period, he thought of Juana. He thought of their first meeting on the hot sands of Acapulco, their first lovemaking, his proposal at the foot of the Pyramid of the Moon, the wedding and the house. He drew in a deep breath. With her he had found the one great thing that had been missing in his life: love and the security of a background. In a few minutes, she would walk in, and they would be together. With her, he wasn't scared of the future nor of his debts. He could always earn money. They would have to go slow at first, but that didn't matter. What did matter was they would be together again.

A tap sounded on the door.

'Come on in, sweetheart,' Cade called, his face flushing with excitement.

The door opened and Adolfo Creel came in. He looked a little more seedy. There were fresh food stains on his light suit. His fat face had a fine film of sweat on it. As he moved into the room, he didn't look at Cade. He closed the

door and stood hesitating, a soiled handkerchief screwed up in his sweating hand.

'Why hello Adolfo, I wasn't expecting you,' Cade said, staring at him. 'What are you doing here?'

Creel looked at him. His black eyes were sad and moist. He didn't say anything.

'I am expecting Juana, Adolfo,' Cade said a little impatiently. 'Could you come back tomorrow?'

'She won't be coming, Senor Cade,' Creel said.

Cade stared at him. A chill began to grow around his heart.

'Is she ill?'

Creel shook his head.

'Well, what is it?' Cade demanded. 'Don't stand there like a goddamn dummy! Why isn't she coming?'

'She is not here.'

'Of course she is! I had her flowers this morning!'

Creel stared down at his dusty shoes. He didn't say anything.

'If she's not here ... then where is she?'

'She's in Spain, senor.'

'Have you gone mad?' Cade's voice rose. 'Spain? What is she doing in Spain?'

Creel licked his lips.

'The bull fighting season in Madrid has begun.'

Cade tried to keep calm. He felt a nerve jumping by his temple. His body was cold and damp with sweat.

'What has bull fighting to do with Juana? Will you please tell me what you are hinting at? Has Juana left me?'

Creel nodded dumbly.

Cade picked up the fifteen cards and shook them at Creel. They flew out of his hand and scattered on the floor.

'You're lying! You've gone crazy! Only this morning she sent me flowers, damn you!'

'I sent them, senor. I am very sorry to have deceived you, but the doctor said you weren't ready to hear such bad news.'

'You sent them?'

'Yes, senor. I wanted you to get well quickly. That is my writing on the

cards. I thought it was unlikely you would know Senora Cade's handwriting. I took a chance.'

'But there are fifteen of them,' Cade said, his voice beginning to shake. 'How long has she been gone?'

'She went the day after her first visit to you, senor.'

Creel shut his eyes. She had come only for his money, he thought. He began to shake.

'Well, go on. There's more, isn't there? Who is she with in Spain?' He knew without asking. It had suddenly become clear and horrible: like a nightmare that had materialised into three dimensions.

'Pedro Diaz,' Creel said.

Cade slowly clenched his fists.

'Thank you, Adolfo. Now please go away.'

Creel began to say how sorry he was, but the expression of agony on Cade's face silenced him.

Moved to tears, for he had come to love Cade, the fat man went out of the room and eased the door shut.

Alerted by Creel, but delayed by a patient for some thirty minutes, Dr. Pinto hurried as soon as he was free to Cade's room.

He found Cade dressed and putting on his jacket. Cade looked briefly at Pinto, his face white, his eyes stony, then began to put his personal things into his pockets.

'What do you think you're doing?' Pinto said sharply. 'You are in no condition to get dressed. You must get back to bed!'

'Shut up!' Cade said. 'I'm leaving. Do you want me to sign anything?'

'Senor Cade, I know what has happened. I am truly sorry, but you must act like a responsible person. You are not fit to leave.'

'Shove your sorrow,' Cade said. 'I'm leaving. You'll get paid. Send the account to my agent. Now, get out of my way!'

Pinto saw by Cade's desperate expression that it was hopeless to try to reason with him.

'You are taking a considerable risk,' he said quietly, 'but, of course, I can't stop you. Will you please wait here until I get the necessary forms for you to sign.'

'I'll give you fifteen minutes,' Cade said, sitting on the bed, 'then I walk out.'

Twelve minutes later, the form signed, Cade walked unsteadily down the steps of the hospital towards the traffic-packed street.

Creel appeared out of the shade. He was still a little unnerved by his mad rush to reach the hospital after Pinto had called him,

'The car is here, senor,' he said. 'Where may I take you?'

Cade had a nightmare appearance. His white bandaged, shaven head, his chalk-white face, his sunken wild eyes made him the object of startled glances from the steady flow of visitors coming up the hospital steps.

'You don't have to bother with me,' he said. 'I can walk. There is no more gold to rub off. You're wasting your time.'

'I asked where I may take you, amigo,' Creel said gently.

Cade paused, then stared at the fat man. He put his hand on Creel's arm.

'Sorry... don't pay any attention to what I say. Take me to the house.'

They drove in silence to the house. Cade remained in the car for several minutes, staring down at his hands before making the obvious effort of getting out of the car. Creel waited half an hour, then he walked up the path and entered the house.

Cade was sitting in one of the lounging chairs in the living-room, a glass half-full of Tequila in his hand.

'What are those things, Adolfo?' he asked as the fat man came uneasily into the room. He waved his glass towards the table, slopping some of the drink onto the carpet.

Creel looked at the small cards neatly laid out on the table. He peered at them, then grimaced.

'They are tickets on the National Pawnshop.'

Cade leaned back and stared up at the ceiling.

'She must have needed money badly,' he said. 'Everything is gone.' He drew in a long shuddering breath. 'Even my camera equipment.'

Creel sat down and began to list the value of the tickets on the back of a crumpled envelope he had taken from his pocket.

'How much?' Cade asked.

'Eight thousand pesos, senor.'

Cade shrugged.

'What does it matter? You run along, Adolfo. Come and see me tomorrow if you feel like it. Go on, shove off.'

'I believe in courage,' Creel said, getting to his feet. 'I once said to you that

one can forgive a man much if he has courage. Please don't disappoint me, senor.'

'You are a sentimental fool,' Cade said, not looking at him. 'Run along. You don't have to worry about me. I've reached the happy stage when I'm not worth worrying about.'

'I would like to stay. We could talk. Talking often helps.'

'Oh, get out!' Cade said, his voice low and strangled. 'I don't want anyone! Do you imagine I want a greaseball like you slopping over me? Get out!'

'Yes, senor,' Creel said, his face impassive. 'I understand.'

As he started to the door, Cade said, 'You're slipping. You called me amigo not so long ago.' Creel paused.

'If I chose to make a man my friend, I don't expect him to make me his friend, senor.'

'Oh, get out!' Cade said and picking up the bottle of Tequila, he splashed the raw spirit into his glass. 'Please be careful with that drink,' Creel said, watching him. 'It is very dangerous and vicious. It is habit-forming.'

'I said get out!'

Creel regarded him sadly, then went down the path to his car.

Half an hour later, he was talking to Sam Wand on the telephone.

Wand said, 'Now look, Adolfo, there is nothing you can do about this. You can't lead other people's lives. If Cade gets thrown because some woman takes him to the cleaners, it is his funeral. Not yours, and most certainly not mine. So don't bother me with Cade's troubles. I have enough of my own. He'll snap out of it. Just leave him alone.'

'He is a good man, senor,' Creel protested. 'We should try to do something. Can't you come down here? You could talk some sense into him.'

'No one can talk sense into him. He'll snap out of it. Quit bothering me!' and Wand hung up.

Creel left the cafe from where he had been telephoning and went to sit in his car. He sat there for three hours with the indifference to time all Mexicans have and worried about Cade, wondering what he could do for this man he liked so much.

When it was dark, he drove back to Cade's house. He had no idea what he would say to Cade, but he couldn't bear the thought of leaving Cade to face the night on his own.

He found the house in darkness. The front door was unlocked and he

entered the sitting-room and turned on the light.

Cade lay slumped across the table, the bottle of Tequila empty, the glass at his feet.

With difficulty Creel got the unconscious man onto the settee. He loosened his tie and took off his shoes, then he went over to the table and picked up the pawn tickets. These he put in his wallet. He went back and stood over Cade, hesitating to leave him, but he finally decided Cade would sleep the rest of the night and shaking his head, he let himself out of the house and walked slowly and heavily to his car.

A little after 10.00 hours the following morning, Cade swung his legs off the settee and sat up with a groan. He had a splitting headache and his mouth was dry. He remained still for some minutes, his head in his hands, then he forced himself to his feet. He felt weak and shaky and depressed.

He looked around the room, then he stiffened and started forward. His well-used Pan-Am overnight bag stood on the table. With shaking fingers, he pulled back the zipper and looked into the bag. His camera and his equipment were all there, and as he hefted the Minolta from the bag, the door pushed open and Creel came in carrying a tray of steaming coffee, a cup and saucer and a bowl of sugar.

'Good morning, senor,' he said and put down the tray.

Cade looked at him.

'You get this back?' he asked, fondling the camera.

'Yes, senor.' Creel poured the coffee. 'How are you feeling?'

'Where did the money come from.'

'A small loan, senor. There is no hurry. We both had disasters. I lost my tyres. You kindly replaced them. You lost your camera...' He lifted his fat shoulders and smiled.

Cade sat down.

'Thank you, Adolfo.'

'It occurred to me that you wouldn't want to remain in this house,' Creel said, pushing the cup of coffee towards Cade. 'I happen to have a spare room in my apartment. It is nothing very much, but I thought you might care to use it for a few days.'

'No. I'm not in the mood for company,' Cade said quickly. 'Thanks all the same. I'll find somewhere.'

'The room has a separate entrance. I understand how you feel, senor. I too

would want to be alone. No one would bother you.'

Cade rubbed his aching forehead, hesitated, then shrugged. The thought of trying to find other accommodation appalled him for he knew he couldn't afford to remain in the house.

'Well, then I can't very well refuse. Thank you, Adolfo. But only for a few days. That's understood.'

'Of course. Please enjoy the coffee. I will pack your clothes,' and the fat man went out of the room.

Three hours later, Creel put a telephone call through to Sam Wand.

He explained that Cade was now installed in a room in his apartment.

'It is essential, Senor Wand, for him to start work again. He is in deep depression and is inclined to drink too much. You must find him something at once. He not only needs the money, he needs rehabilitation. This is extremely urgent and important.'

'Okay, Adolfo,' Wand said. 'I'll see what I can dig up. Is he fit enough for work?'

'I think so.'

'How can I contact him?'

Creel gave him Cade's telephone number.

'You can leave it with me.'

But Creel wasn't happy. He had alerted his servant, Maria to keep an eye on Cade and she reported that a boy had arrived soon after Cade had moved into the room, carrying three bottles of Tequila.

The food she had left outside Cade's door had been scarcely touched.

The following morning, Creel, taking a newspaper with him as an excuse, knocked on Cade's door.

There was silence. He knocked again.

'What is it?' Cade's voice sounded sharp and impatient.

'The newspaper, senor,' Creel said.

'I don't want it! Leave me alone!'

'Is there anything you want? Cigarettes perhaps?'

'Oh, go to hell and leave me alone!'

Creel lifted his fat shoulders in a gesture of despair and went away. During the afternoon, he visited Cade's house where he found some mail. He drove back to his apartment and again knocked on Cade's door.

'There are letters for you, senor.'

There was a pause, then the door jerked open.

Cade had removed the bandage around his shaven head. His hair was beginning to grow again. He hadn't shaved, and Creel could see he was pretty drunk. He glared at the fat man, his face stony, his eyes glazed.

'Give them to me!'

He snatched the letters out of Creel's hand and flicked through them with a desperate urgency that made Creel unhappy. He guessed Cade was hoping for a letter from Juana.

'Leave me alone!' Cade said and he slammed the door in Creel's face.

Sitting on the bed, he ripped open the envelopes. A brief glance told him they were all bills. Among them was a letter from the Car Insurance people acknowledging Juana's receipt for three thousand dollars as settlement for the Thunderbird. There was also a Diner's Club statement for six hundred dollars.

Cade tossed the bills on the floor. He walked unsteadily to his dressing-table where the remaining full bottle of Tequila stood. He poured a drink, then flopped down on the bed.

He knew he was destroying himself, but he was past caring. As he was raising the glass to his lips, the telephone bell rang. The sound startled him and he slopped his drink. For a moment, he hesitated, then he put down the glass and lifted the telephone receiver.

It was Sam Wand.

'How are you, Val?' Wand boomed. 'You feel fit for a day's work?'

Cade closed his eyes. His head was swimming and he felt sick.

'You there, Val?'

With an effort Cade said, 'Hello there, Sam. I'm fine. Look, I've got a flock of bills just arrived. I want you to settle them. Sell Stock. I must get these goddamn debts fixed.'

'That's okay. Send them to me. I have work for you. Are you fit enough?'

'I keep telling you... I'm more than fine. What's the job?'

'General de Gaulle will be arriving in Mexico City tomorrow. He's returning captured flags or some damn thing. You've got the French exclusive of this, Val. I've bust a gut landing this one for you. It's big: Paris Match, Jours de France ... the lot. Get those pictures and you won't have to worry about debts. Adolfo will set it all up for you. You have just to get the pictures.'

Cade wiped the sweat from his face with the back of his hand. The Tequila

he had drunk was making his head ache again.

'Can do ... will do,' he said. 'Thanks, Sam. You'll get them,' and he hung up.

This was the first of the disasters to come from Cade's camera.

Although Creel did the field work well, arranging for passes, getting Cade an exclusive interview with the General, getting Cade to his allotted place at the Palace well before time, Cade had drank too much Tequila to bolster up his sagging nerves to make successful photography possible.

He wasn't even in a fit enough state to process his own films. He had to hire Tomas Olmedo to do it for him. He and Creel sat in Olmedo's office waiting to see the prints. Both men were silent with a premonition of disaster hanging over them. When Olmedo came out of the dark room, the expression on his face sent a chill up Cade's spine.

'What's the matter?'

'I don't understand,' Olmedo said, looking bewildered. 'These are useless. They are all out of focus. There's not one that's any good. Something bad must have happened to the camera.'

Cade knew it wasn't the camera, but that was his excuse to Wand.

'What the hell do you mean?' Wand shouted furiously when he heard the news. 'It's your business to check your goddamn camera! What's the matter with you? What am I going to say to Paris Match? You mean you haven't one goddamn picture for me?'

'This is a once in a lifetime thing, Sam,' Cade said, lying frantically. 'The automatic pre-set wasn't working. It had me fooled. It's just one of those things.'

'Is that what you think? Let me tell you something! You've fixed me in France! Those boys don't listen to excuses. Judas! Cade ... how could you do a thing like this to me?'

'Oh, shut up!' Cade shouted. 'This could have happened to anyone. Forget it! Find me something else! I want money! I'm cleaned out! Right now, I'm borrowing from Creel. Find me something! Do you hear?'

'Pull another stunt like this, and you and me are through,' Wand said. 'It's all right for you to talk this way, but I have to do the explaining. This fiasco is going to cost me plenty!'

'Stop whining!' Cade reached for the ever ready glass of Tequila and drank. 'I've got to have work!'

'I'll call you,' Wand said and banged down the receiver.

Two days later, Cade received a statement of accounts from Wand. All his bills had been settled, including Dr. Pinto's account and the hospital charges. He no longer owned any Stock and he saw with a sinking heart that the account included his half year's royalty. He realised he wasn't worth a dollar now since he already owed Creel seven hundred dollars and his credit balance with Wand was six hundred and fifty dollars.

But he was beyond caring. He was hooked by alcohol. Without the deadening effects of Tequila his mind immediately began to dwell on Juana, and this was something he couldn't bear.

Wand got him the assignment to cover the Duke of Edinburgh's visit to Mexico for Look Now, a new, but up-and-coming magazine that circulated in California. They were offering six hundred dollars for exclusive pictures.

'Can't you do better than that?' Cade demanded furiously over the telephone. 'Edinburgh is a big story, damn it! This should be a syndicate job!'

'So it is, but Lucas has got that,' Wand said. 'The words got around about the General. You've only yourself to blame. I'm sorry, Val, take it or leave it. It's up to you, but if you do the job, for God's sake, give me pictures!'

'You'll get them,' Cade said.

It cost him a lot physically and mentally to get the pictures. Half the time he was drunk, the rest of the time he wished he were drunk. When the films were processed, Olmedo silently handed him the prints. He didn't even bother to look at them. He knew they were the ordinary run-of-the-mill stuff any third rate press man would take, but at least they were in focus and could be reproduced, but they weren't Cade.

The following afternoon Wand came through on the telephone. Cade was lying on his bed with the now inevitable glass of Tequila in his hand. He guessed it was Wand and for some moments, he let the bell ring, afraid to hear what Wand would say.

Then he sat up, put down his drink and lifted the receiver.

He was expecting a blast from Wand, but this time Wand was quiet, but nonetheless lethal.

'Look, Val, I don't think you can be fit,' he said. 'This stuff you sent me is no use to Look Now. They could have hired any small time photographer if they wanted the prints you have come up with.'

Cade felt a surge of weak rage rush through him.

'What the hell do they expect for six hundred lousy dollars?' he shouted. 'Those photographs ...'

'Skip it, Val! They've paid, but they are using Lucas's prints. It's costing them, but they have a reputation to think of. So have I. I'm sending you six hundred dollars. I'm not taking any commission. That should hold you for a couple of months if you're careful. You take it easy and rest. When you're really fit, I'll look around for something for you, but right now ...'

'Oh, get stuffed!' Cade shouted, his voice high-pitched and he slammed down the receiver.

The noise of the fast moving traffic coming through the open window, the monotonous whine of Maria's vacuum cleaner, the sudden roar of a passing jet tore at his nerves.

What was he going to do? He couldn't believe, after all these years, Wand was dropping him. The fat slug! Who did he think he was anyway? Cade reached for the glass and drained it. He got unsteadily to his feet.

Well, Wand wasn't the only agent! He would show him! From now on, he would never get another Cade picture!

Then something came adrift inside Cade. He began to shake. Dropping on his knees, he hid his face in his hands. Racking, gasping sobs came from him as sounds of hopeless despair.

chapter five

Ed Burdick, special correspondent to the New York Sun, walked into the News Editor's office, pushed the door shut and straddled the only other chair in the room.

Henry Mathison laid down his blue pencil and regarded Burdick suspiciously. By rights, Burdick should have been down in Mexico. Mathison had sent him down there to write a series of articles aimed at the tourist trade: an assignment that Burdick had been reluctant to accept.

'Who told you to come back, Ed? I didn't.'

Burdick grinned. He was a tall, thin blond man in his late thirties. He was probably one of the best writers the Sun had ever had, and he knew it. He took certain liberties but he had never failed to deliver.

'If you're worrying about that tourist crap, relax. I've got it all wrapped up and Burley's handling it. Henry, something's come up. I have an idea that if it's handled right, it could do the Sun a lot of good. It could do you good and me good.'

Mathison fetched out a pack of cigarettes. He looked even more suspicious, but he waited.

'Guess who I ran across in Mexico City ten days ago?' Burdick said, helping himself to one of Mathison's cigarettes although Mathison hadn't offered him the pack.

'Tell me. This isn't a TV quiz.'

'Val Cade, the photographer,' Burdick said and leaned back to watch the effect of his words. He was disappointed. Mathison lit his cigarette and blew smoke across his soiled blotter.

'Well?' he asked as Burdick waited.

'You remember Cade?'

'Yes, I remember him. He got mixed up with some woman, took to the bottle, loused up the de Gaulle assignment and cost his agent a heap of money. Why should I get interested in a lush like him?'

'Because he happens to be the greatest photographer in the world,' Burdick said crisply.

'If you've come all the way back from Mexico to tell me that, I'm still not

interested. Just why did you come back, Ed?

'Because I want to work with Cade.'

Mathison stared, screwed up his eyes and leaned forward.

'Come again.'

'I want to team up with Cade. He and I could give the Sun a new look, and strictly between friends, the Sun could do with a new look.'

'Have you been helping Cade empty his bottle?'

'Henry, I'm serious. If you don't cotton to this idea, then I'm going to talk to the Times, and if they don't cotton, I'll talk to the Tribune. Cade and I as a team could be sensational.'

'The guy's a lush. He's hooked. You're wasting your time. What's got into you? What makes you think Cade could ever be fit to work again?'

'What makes you think he can't?'

'I know luses. Once on the hook, they're on for keeps.'

'Do you have to be so goddamn pessimistic? What have we to lose? This could be a once in a lifetime idea.'

'Have you talked to Cade about it?' Mathison leaned back in his chair and flicked ash on the floor.

'Of course I have. He's as keen about it as I am.'

'I understood he was holed up in some Indian's shack. Then I heard he was living on a pesos a day and a bottle of Tequila. Right?'

'That's all old hat. He was holed up in a shack. Then he got ill. Wand's agent, a guy named Adolfo Creel, found him and got him into hospital. They worked on him. He was in hospital for three weeks without a drink. Creel came to me. He begged me to do something. So I saw Cade. I liked him and he liked me. Remember those bull fighting pictures he took? Remember the documentary he did on the Indians? Tremendous stuff, Henry! This guy is as low as a man can get, but he's ready to rise up again. He's ready now. Do you realise he has never worked for a newspaper? He has always been so good and so talented no newspaper could ever hook him and you know nearly all of them, including the Sun, have tried some time or other. He's not yet ready to stand on his own feet, but with me with him and you directing, he'll come back as good as he ever was and that, as you know, is very, very good indeed.'

Mathison stubbed out his cigarette.

'Just because he hasn't had a drink for three weeks, doesn't mean he won't

start drinking as soon as he is out of hospital. I know these luses.'

'Oh, for God's sake!' Burdick said impatiently. 'He's been out of hospital now for a week. He's right here, and he hasn't touched anything stronger than a Coke since he's been out.'

'You mean he's here?' Mathison said, looking startled.

'That's what I mean. What's it to be, Henry? Do I work with Cade or shall we go over to the Times?'

Mathison lit another cigarette. His frown showed he was thinking.

'You're pretty serious about this, aren't you, Ed?'

'I am. I want to work with Cade. We'll make a sensational combination.'

'What had you in mind?'

'I would like to have six pages of the Weekend supplement to fill. We could work out the subjects: the three of us. We would have Cade in colour.'

'Got any ideas?'

'Comparison stuff. Cade's brilliant at that. The young and the old. The rich and the poor. The weak and the strong. The crooks and the suckers.'

Mathison thought about this, nodded, trying not to show his growing excitement.

'What's it going to cost?'

'For Cade ... as he is? You've got a bargain. You can get him for three hundred dollars a week. And that is a bargain. A year ago he was making four or five times that amount.'

'Hmm. Well. . . might be interesting. Think we could get him on a six year contract?'

'I wouldn't let him sign a contract for that long. Two years: no more, and five hundred dollars for the second year.'

'Have you appointed yourself his agent?' Mathison asked, looking suddenly sour.

Burdick grinned cheerfully. 'I'm making sure he gets a square deal. I know you. Well, what is it to be?'

'I'll talk to him,' Mathison said. 'I don't promise anything, but at least I will talk to him.'

An hour later, Cade walked into the bar where Burdick was anxiously waiting.

Four months had made a big difference to Cade. He was thinner, harder, and there were white streaks in his black hair. The Mexican sun had burned

his skin to an Indian brown, but he didn't look well. There was a drawn, remote look about him that hinted of a secret illness, but his smile as Burdick looked questioningly at him was alert and pleased.

'Thanks, Ed,' he said, hoisting himself on a stool beside Burdick. 'It worked. For better or for worse, I signed for two years.'

Burdick punched him lightly on his bicep.

'Val, old pal, now we will show them! This is something I have really set my heart on. You and I are going places!'

And they did. This was the beginning of a partnership of brilliant reporting that raised the circulation of the New York Sun way above its competitors.

The discipline and the pressure of newspaper routine seemed to agree with Cade. Working to a deadline, having Burdick as a constant companion, gave him little time to brood about the past.

There were times when he wanted a drink badly, but he fought off the urge. It was at these times he was thankful to have Burdick, understanding and sympathetic, with him. Burdick had also given up alcohol to make things easier for Cade. Both men now only drank Coca-Cola or coffee.

Burdick had a three-room apartment near the Sun's office and he persuaded Cade to take the spare room. This was convenient for the two men could work together in comfort and they seldom went to the Sun's offices except to deliver their finished assignments.

There were times when Cade, before falling asleep, alone in his bedroom, would think of Juana.

Her memory was less painful, but he was still in love with her. He knew that if she walked into his room at that moment, he would gladly take her in his arms which proved, he thought ruefully, what a stupid sucker he was. He knew her behaviour had been unforgivable, but he was ready to forgive her. She was in his blood like a virus. Although he often longed for her, he made no attempt to trace her or to find out what was happening to her. It was now six months since she had left him. The bull fight season was over in Spain. She was probably back in Mexico City. He wondered if she were still with Diaz or tiring of him, had found someone else. Cade was very conscious that she was still his wife. He knew he should divorce her, but he could not bring himself even to think of it.

One evening some months after Cade had begun to work for the Sun, he was settling down to watch television when the telephone bell rang.

Burdick, in dressing-gown and pyjamas, was lying on the settee. He lifted his head and glared at the instrument.

'Let it ring,' he said.

This call was to affect Cade's future destiny. He felt an extraordinary compulsion to answer the call.

He hesitated for a long moment, then got to his feet.

'I'd better answer it,' he said and lifted the receiver.

It was Mathison.

'That you, Val?'

'I suppose so,' Cade was sorry now he had answered.

'Listen, Val, things are popping and I haven't a photographer. Two of my mutton heads are out of town and my other jerk is out of reach. Will you help me?'

Cade grimaced at Burdick, then shrugged.

'What is it, Henry?'

'Old Friedlander has been shot! We have an exclusive on this if we act fast! Lieutenant Tucker is handling it and he's a good friend of mine. He gave me the tip. Will you get out there, Val?'

Cade could have refused. This kind of work wasn't in his contract, but he remembered Mathison had given him his chance to rehabilitate himself. This seemed to him to be his chance to even the score.

'I'll take care of it, Henry. Leave it to me.'

'Good boy! You know the address?'

'I know it. I'm on my way'

Cade hung up, ran into the bedroom, put on a tie and his jacket, snatched up his camera equipment and started for the front door.

'Where the hell are you off to?' Burdick said, gaping.

'Friedlander's been shot! I'm covering it!' Cade said and was gone.

Jonas Friedlander was a poet, dramatist, painter and musician. During the past thirty years, he had established himself as a character without whom no artistic event, no opera first night, no literary luncheon could hope for success. He was also a pederast. An ageing, fat, raddled, pot-bellied, slug-like creature who snapped, bit, clawed and caressed his way through New York Society always accompanied by a willowy, frail, beautiful youth who disappeared from time to time to be immediately replaced by yet another willowy, frail, equally beautiful youth who would last no longer than his

predecessor.

But Friedlander made news. Whatever he did, whatever he said was scrupulously recorded in the World's press. Cade knew, as he drove recklessly towards Friedlander's magnificent penthouse that Mathison had every right to call on him for help. An exclusive on a Friedlander shooting was a scoop that News Editors dream of and news that would electrify the world.

Leaving his car double parked and not caring what happened to it, Cade ran up the steps of the apartment block. He took the elevator to the penthouse. As the elevator door swung back, Cade was confronted by a big, red-faced cop standing guard outside Friedlander's front door.

Cade crossed the lobby while the cop glared threateningly at him.

'Who are you and where do you think you're going?' the cop growled.

'Lieutenant Tucker around?' Cade asked briskly.

'What if he is?'

'Tell him Cade of the Sun wants in. Snap it up, Jack. That glaring act of yours is pure horror-comic!'

The cop's jaw dropped. He hesitated, then he opened the front door and stepped inside. Cade shoved his way in after him.

Lieutenant Tucker, a small, white-haired, hard-faced man, was standing in the ornate lobby, talking to another detective. He turned and scowled at Cade as Cade side-stepped the cop and walked up to him.

'Who are you?' Tucker snapped.

'Cade of the Sun. Mathison sent me. What's going on?'

Tucker's frown went away. Mathison and he had been to school together. They both helped each other whenever they could.

'Glad to know you, Cade,' he said and shook hands.

'What's going on?'

'The old fairy tried it on once too often,' Tucker explained. 'He forgot to get rid of his boyfriend before he brought in another. They had an argument and the boy shot him.'

'Is he dead?'

'No such luck. He's in there, making like a hero,' said Tucker jerking his thumb to massive double door.

'Who's the boy?'

'Jerry Marshall. Seems a decent enough kid. Probably dazzled and

corrupted by the old bastard. Still, he could have killed him.'

'Where is he?'

'The boy?' Tucker nodded to a closed door on his right. 'I'm going to talk to him now.'

'I'll want shots of him.'

'Sure. You can have him when I'm through,' and Tucker opened the door and went into the room.

Cade got his camera out of the case. He screwed on the flash gun and opening one of the big double doors, entered the vast, high-ceilinged lounge, decorated in black and white with Friedlander's own decadent murals on the walls.

Lying on a chaise longue, covered with a zebra skin and raised on a high dais was Jonas Friedlander. He wore tight, scarlet velvet trousers and he was naked to the waist. Hovering over him was a scared-looking elderly manservant and a tall, thin man who Cade guessed was a doctor who was putting the finishing touches to a bandage on Friedlander's fat arm.

'How are you feeling?' Cade asked, climbing the steps of the dais and pausing at Friedlander's side.

The fat man scowled at him.

'Go away! How dare you walk in like this! I won't have any pictures taken! I feel very bad.'

'I am Val Cade.'

The manservant, tuttering and twittering, advanced on Cade, but Friedlander waved him aside.

'Cade? Are you really? Yes, I recognise you. Well, this is a happy surprise. You are as great an artist as I am ... in your own very special field let it be understood. What brings you here?'

'Mr. Friedlander, you must not exert yourself,' the tall, thin man said soothingly.

'Shoo! Run away!' Friedlander snarled. 'I will not be dictated to by quacks! Be off!'

The tall, thin man seemed used to this treatment. He beckoned to the manservant and drew him aside. He began whispering to him.

Cade said, 'Mr. Friedlander, this shooting can't remain a secret. You don't want any kind of photograph of yourself appearing in the Worlds' press. You know my work. Give me an exclusive and you can be sure of an artistic job.'

Friedlander forced a smile. Although in pain, he was flattered.

'Yes, of course, dear boy. You go right ahead. No other photographer will be allowed in here. After all, a Cade photograph is like a Friedlander painting.'

As Cade began taking photos, he asked casually, 'How did it happen, Mr. Friedlander?'

The old man's face turned vicious. It was the kind of expression he was hoping for. The shutter snapped as Friedlander said, 'The boy is mad! Quite, quite mad! When I think what I have done for him! I had a little friend. It is so stupid. Jerry is madly jealous, but no one dictates to me. He had this gun. I couldn't believe he would use it.'

The doctor, seeing how pale the old man was growing, signalled to Cade. He had his pictures, so he nodded and stepped back.

'Thank you, Mr. Friedlander. Get well quickly.'

The old man looked on the point of fainting, but to the end, he waved a feeble hand as Cade left the room.

The clamour of voices outside the front door warned Cade that the press had arrived.

Tucker came from the side room.

'Go ahead. I can give you ten minutes ... no more,' he said. 'I guess I'd better talk to these apes outside.'

Cade walked into the room where two bored looking detectives were smoking by the window and a young man sat in an upright chair, his hands between his knees, his shoulders slumped.

Jerry Marshall was twenty three years of age. He was tall, blond and handsome with good features and blue deep-set eyes. As soon as he saw Cade's camera, he stiffened and became scowlingly hostile.

Cade put the camera on the table.

'I'm Val Cade,' he said. 'You have probably heard of me. I want to photograph you, Jerry, but only on your say-so. You've made headlines of the World press tonight, and there is nothing you can now do about it. Outside, there are pressmen and photographers. You can't avoid them. But I'll do a deal with you. Pose for me and in return I'll get my paper to hire the best attorney they can find to look after your interests. If there is anything else I can do for you, just say so and I'll do it.'

Marshall studied Cade, then relaxed.

'I know of you. Who doesn't? All right, Mr. Cade, it's a deal.'

Because Marshall wasn't self-conscious and highly photogenic, Cade only took four flashlight shots, but he knew they were what he wanted.

One of the detectives said, 'We have to get this guy down to headquarters, Mr. Cade. Hurry it up, will you?'

'I'm through,' Cade said, then to Marshall, he went on, 'I'll have a lawyer with you tonight... the best. Don't worry about a thing. Is there anything else I can do?'

Marshall hesitated, then said, 'Could you tell my sister what's happened? I don't want her to read about it in the papers tomorrow.'

'Sure,' Cade said. 'I'll see her tonight. Where do I find her?'

Marshall took out his wallet and scribbled an address on the back of one of his cards.

'Don't jump it on her, Mr. Cade.' His face suddenly crumpled and he struggled to hide his emotion.

After a moment, he controlled himself. 'She and I are pretty close. Let her down lightly. It'll be a shock.'

'Sure,' Cade said, taking the card. 'Don't worry. Any message?'

'Tell her I wish I had killed the stinking old bastard,' Marshall said.

'I'll tell her just that. Okay, relax. I'll fix it for you.'

He picked up his camera case and went out into the lobby. The uproar outside the penthouse made him hesitate. The elderly manservant came hurrying out of the lounge and Cade grabbed him by the arm.

'Is there a back way out of this place?'

The manservant pointed to a door.

'That leads to the service elevator.'

Five minutes later, Cade was in his car and heading for the Sun offices.

He found Mathison impatiently pacing up and down. He put the film cartridge on the desk.

'We've got exclusive pictures, Henry, and they are good ones, both of Friedlander and the boy who shot him.'

Mathison snatched up the telephone receiver and yelled for the Photo Editor to come arunning.

'I did a deal with the boy,' Cade went on as Mathison hung up. 'Will you arrange for a first-class attorney to take care of him? I have an idea my photos could get him off.'

'What do you mean?' Mathison said, staring at him.

'Wait until you've seen them, Henry.'

'I'll get Bernstein. A case like this is right up his alley.'

'Yes,' Cade started for the door. 'I've something to do. Get Bernstein down to the boy tonight.'

'Wait a minute! Hey! Val!'

But Cade was already running down the stairs and out to his car. He slid under the wheel and then looked at the card Marshall had given him to check the address. Vicki Marshall, The boy's sister, lived in an apartment on Tremont Avenue.

As Cade drove towards Tremont Avenue, he was unconsciously keeping yet another appointment with his destiny that was to lead him eventually to a town called Eastonville.

Indifferent to the world-shattering news of Friedlander's shooting, Ed Burdick lay on the settee watching the Perry Mason show with cynical interest. As the programme was coming to its inevitable end, the telephone bell started its clamour. He hesitated about answering it. Then thinking it might be Cade wanting him, he picked up the receiver.

It was Mathison.

'Ed! I want you down here right away! I don't give a damn what you are doing. I want you down here!'

'Take it easy, Henry. I'm off duty and I'm staying off duty. Besides I work with Cade now. What's biting you? Friedlander? Let me tell you something: Friedlander. . .'

'Stop flapping with your mouth!' Mathison roared. 'We have a story, Ed, right here on my desk that you wouldn't pass up for all the gold in Fort Knox! That Cade! Wow! He's taken a picture of Friedlander that will crucify the old bastard throughout the world! You've never seen anything like this picture! Cade thinks it could get the boy off. I'm damn sure it will. I have Bernstein coming down here. I want you to handle the story. Cade's done his job. Now it's up to you and Bernstein!'

Burdick began to get excited.

'Because of Cade's pictures?'

'Sure. I'm telling you. It's the picture . . . wait until you've seen it!'

'Remember what you once said, Henry? You said, "I know luses. Once on the hook, they're on for keeps." Remember?'

'So I was wrong. Okay, if it will make you happy, I'll eat my words. Now, come on down here and stop wasting time.'

'Did Cade give you that picture, Henry?'

'Oh, God! Now what's biting you?'

'It's not in his contract to take news pictures,' Burdick said. 'You'll pay him for that picture and you'll respect his copyright. If it's as good as you say it is, it will be reproduced all over the world. The Sun doesn't own the copyright, just remember that.'

'What do you think I am ... a thief?'

'You could be unless you're closely watched, Henry,' Burdick said and hung up.

He was scrambling into his clothes when he heard the front door open. Hastily zipping up his trousers, became out of his bedroom.

Cade and a tall, blonde girl had entered the living-room.

'Hello, Val,' Burdick said and then looked at the girl. What a beaut! he thought. Wherever did she drop from?

'This is Vicki Marshall,' Cade said, setting down his camera bag. 'Her brother put a slug in Friedlander's arm. She is going to stay the night here, out of the way of the reporters.' He turned to the girl and went on, 'No one will think of looking for you here, Miss Marshall. Just take it easy and try to stop worrying. I have an idea I can fix it for your brother. I'm going down to the Sun now. I'll be back in a couple of hours.'

The girl walked slowly around the table, shedding her black, light-weight coat. She seemed in a state of shock. Her large violet-blue eyes were empty of expression, her full red lips were trembling.

'Sit down,' Cade said gently. 'It's going to work out. You take it easy until I get back.' To Burdick, he went on, 'You coming, Ed?'

'Sure. Henry is yelling for me.'

'Then let's go.'

Vicki Marshall was now sitting in one of the lounging chairs, her head down, her fine gold hair falling forward and hiding her face.

Cade signalled to Burdick and the two men left the apartment. On the way down in the elevator, Cade said, 'It's knocked her sideways. She and the boy are pretty close.'

'Some girl!' Burdick said. 'What a looker! Any idea what she does?'

'From what I saw in her place, she is a fashion artist. Very good stuff. I

thought it best to get her out of the way. She wanted to go to him, of course, but I persuaded her to wait.'

Ten minutes later, they walked into Mathison's office. Joel Bernstein was already there. The well-known criminal lawyer was short, fat and aggressive. He was studying one of Cade's photos of Friedlander. He stood up as Mathison made the introductions. The three men shook hands.

'I wouldn't want a picture like this printed if I were Friedlander,' Bernstein said, dropping the print on the desk.

Burdick examined it, then whistled. Here was a fat, ageing face of evil and corruption, every wrinkle cruelly etched, the heavy bags under the eyes in deep shadows, the slack ruthless, mean mouth twisted in a snarl.

'We're not using it,' Cade said quietly. 'We can do a deal with Friedlander. We'll use the others.'

'We won't!' Mathison exploded. 'That's the one! What are you talking about? These others are nothing!'

Burdick flicked through the other prints.

'They flatter the old fairy,' he said. 'That's the one, Val.'

Cade looked at Mathison.

'These photographs are my property, Henry. You can have the others for free. They show Friedlander's bandaged arm and that's news. They are also exclusives. This one will not be used unless I say so.'

'You can't stop me using it!' Mathison said furiously.

'He can, you know,' Burdick said, 'and he can sue the Sun for infringement of copyright.'

Cade turned to Bernstein.

'We could get this thing settled quickly. Would you see Friedlander and show him this print? If he will drop the charges against Marshall and say it was an accident, we don't print, but if he wants it rough, he can have it rough.'

Bernstein thought for a moment, then nodded.

'Nice idea.' He put the print in his briefcase. 'I'll get over there right away.'

'Now, wait a minute . . .' Mathison shouted, banging his fist on the desk. 'You ...'

But Bernstein walked out of the office without even looking at Mathison.

There was a pause, then Mathison said, 'Do you realise, Val, you could have sold that picture to every paper in the world? You could have cleaned up big with it. What's the matter with you?'

'Nothing. There are times when money isn't everything. I would like to get the boy off... that's all there is to it.'

Watching him, Burdick wondered if it was the sister and not the boy who was influencing Cade. He hoped it was.

An hour later, Bernstein telephoned.

'It worked,' he said to Mathison who answered the call. 'I'm on my way down to Police Headquarters. Friedlander is dropping the charge. It's lucky it was his gun and not Marshall's. His story is Marshall found the gun in a drawer, didn't realise it was loaded, picked it up and it went off.'

Mathison breathed heavily.

'But everyone will know it's a lie.'

'Of course, but they won't be able to prove it's a lie.'

Mathison looked at the remaining prints of Friedlander and Jerry Marshall. At least he had the exclusives, even if the story was dead.

'Okay,' he said. 'Thanks for calling.'

'I have the boy out in an hour. He'll have to appear in court tomorrow, but that will be a formality. I'll take care of it all,' Bernstein said and suddenly laughed. 'This fellow Cade is something pretty special. It never occurred to me to blackmail Friedlander. He certainly knows his psychology.'

'Yes, doesn't he?' Mathison said sourly and hung up. Cade and Burdick were waiting outside police headquarters when Jerry Marshall came out, surrounded by excited press men. An angry cop cleared the way for him to Cade's ear. Getting in, with flashlights popping, Marshall flopped on the back seat as Cade drove away.

'Mr. Bernstein told me what you did for me, Mr. Cade,' Marshall said. 'I owe you a lot. Anyway, thanks.'

'You owe more to your sister, Jerry. She's a pretty nice girl. Try to remember that in the future, will you?'

Burdick smiled to himself. There was a note in Cade's voice he hadn't heard before. Burdick had heard about Juana. He had a feeling that Vicki Marshall could be the antidote that he was hoping sooner or later Cade would find.

Cade pulled up outside their apartment.

'Go on up,' he said to Marshall. 'We'll take a drive around. Take her home and keep out of mischief. We want to be in bed in a couple of hours so be out of our place by then.'

Marshall got out of the car. He bent to look at Cade.

'Vicki will want to thank you. Please come up with me.'

Cade shook his head.

'What do I want with thanks? Don't keep her waiting. So long, Jerry,' and he pulled away from the kerb.

'Nice work,' Burdick said, lighting a cigarette, 'and nice girl.'

'Yes,' Cade said.

They drove in silence along the traffic-packed streets, and from time to time Burdick glanced at Cade. The relaxed expression on Cade's face, the faraway look in his eyes pleased Burdick. This was the first sign that the inner pain and tension that Burdick knew was always with Cade was beginning to lessen.

The following morning, the two men left New York for Hollywood. This was an assignment that had been set up two weeks previously. They were to do an article on the forgotten movie stars, an opportunity for Cade's camera work that Mathison was sure would be unique.

They returned to New York ten days later. Cade had been following the Friedlander case in the newspapers. The affair had been quickly disposed of as Bernstein had promised. Marshall had been discharged, and Friedlander had gone to Rome to recuperate.

Among his pile of mail, waiting for him at the apartment, was a short note from Vicki Marshall.

Dear Mr. Cade,

I want to thank you for what you did for Jerry. Could we meet? Would you come here when you have a free moment? I am at home most evenings. Yours sincerely, Vicki Marshall.

The same evening, Cade rang on her front doorbell. He found this girl serious, gentle, understanding and artistic, the companion he had always hoped to find, but up to this moment, had believed a mirage of his imagination.

They talked until two o'clock in the morning. Jerry, she said had gone to Canada. He had a friend in Vancouver who ran a skittle alley and had been pressing Jerry to work with him as his partner. It was a pretty nightmare thing, she said, to have a brother who was homosexual, but it was something you just had to accept. They had always got on well together, and were very fond of each other, but she realised now they were better parted.

She told Cade she was a tremendous admirer of his work. She talked about some of his recent successes, and it pleased him she really knew what she was talking about. This wasn't idle flattery.

When he finally looked at his watch and saw the time, he got to his feet.

'I have a few free days,' he said. 'How are you fixed? Could we go somewhere tomorrow? We could get out of town ...'

She looked at the clutter of drawings on the big table under the window.

'I can't. I would love to, but not tomorrow. You could come here tomorrow evening for dinner. Would you like that?'

'Very much. All right, suppose we go out? I know a place . . .'

She smiled.

'Are you afraid of my cooking?' He suddenly thought of Juana. Vicki saw his sudden expression of pain and she said quickly, 'Then let's go out. I would like that.'

'No, I would prefer to come here. It's nicer here.'

For the next ten days, he was around at her apartment every evening. It was after the fourth evening, after he had told her about Juana, about his drinking, about the nightmare weeks when he had lived in an Indian shack not caring whether he was alive or dead that he realised he was in love with her. He was careful to say nothing although he felt she was also in love with him. The ghost of Juana was too close still and too dangerous. He was frightened of starting something that would come to pieces as the Juana episode had come to pieces.

He welcomed the assignment that took him and Burdick to Paris. It was May, and Burdick thought they should do an article on the American tourist invasion of Paris. Cade agreed. He needed time and distance to get his association with Vicki into perspective. He thought continuously of her while in Paris, and on the flight back, eight days later, he made his decision. He would get his divorce, as soon as he was free, he would ask Vicki to marry him.

Without saying anything to Burdick, he consulted a lawyer, specialising in divorce. He was told there would be no difficulty. Mexican divorces went through quickly and easily. He would have to go down to Mexico City for a couple of weeks. The lawyer gave him the address of his Mexican representative who he said would arrange everything.

Cade told Mathison he had sudden urgent personal business to take care of

and would be out of circulation for two weeks. That was all right with Mathison. He had plenty of Cade's material to run on.

Cade told Burdick he was going to Mexico to get his divorce. Guessing what was in the wind, Burdick wished him luck.

Cade spent the evening before his departure with Vicki. He said nothing about the divorce. He feared there might be an unexpected snag, and until he was sure he was free, he couldn't bring himself to confide in her. He said he had to go to Mexico to clear up some outstanding business.

The following morning, he flew to Mexico City.

chapter six

Cade walked through the main lobby of El Prado hotel where Rivera's fifty-foot-long A Dream on a Sunday Afternoon mural was being gaped at by a large gathering of American tourists.

He had had a lonely lunch in the grill room. He wasn't sure now what he was going to do with himself. The day was Sunday. He had spent the past three days talking to his Mexican lawyers who airily told him there would be no difficulty about the divorce, but kept asking him to consult with them, to sign papers, and to check and recheck the obvious evidence of Juana's adultery which he was now sick of explaining to them.

He walked to the bookstall with the idea of getting a paperback and then going to sit in the Alameda Gardens until the sun went down.

'Senor Cade!'

He looked around and was confronted by Adolfo Creel's beaming face. A great weight of loneliness lifted from him. To see this fat Mexican who had been such a good friend to him was the nicest thing he imagined could happen to him. But as he shook hands, he felt a twinge of guilt that he hadn't contacted Creel before. He knew why. Creel was too close to his past, but now they were together, Cade felt nothing but pleasure.

'This is a very special moment in my life, senor,' Creel said, his eyes moist with emotion. 'I had no idea you were here. You look wonderful! Senor Cade! I am very, very happy!'

'That makes two of us,' Cade said. 'Let's have a drink or something and talk. Have you the time?'

'Of course.' Creel went with Cade into the dimly-lit bar. 'I don't have to ask. All is well with you. I have seen your magnificent work for the Sun. Forgive a stupid, uneducated man like myself, but your photographs move me.'

Cade was glad of the dim lighting. He squeezed Creel's fat arm. It wasn't until they were sitting side by side on the padded bench and Cade had ordered a Coke for himself and a coffee for Creel, that he was able to say in a steady enough voice, 'Adolfo, for Pete's sake, stop calling me Senor Cade. I regard you as the best friend I have ever had. Call me Val, and what is all this

nonsense about being stupid and uneducated?'

Creel squirmed with pleasure. 'Tell me please. Why are you here?'

Without hesitation, Cade told him about Vicki.

'This girl, Adolfo, means everything to me. I'm here for a divorce. You must meet her. She is everything that Juana isn't. I guess I was crazy getting mixed up with that woman. Now, I'm seeing sense at last. All I want is to be free of her.'

Creel put three lumps of sugar into his coffee.

'That I can understand. Juana is not for you. She has a fatal destiny. She thinks only of the body and of money. This is a disease with her.'

Cade jiggled the ice cubes in his glass.

'What has happened to her?'

'She is here,' Creel said.

Cade felt a sudden tightening in his throat.

'Still with Diaz?'

'No. Here then is an example of her destructive-ness. When they returned from Spain, it was all over. This afternoon, I am going to see what I hope will be Pedro Diaz's last bull fight.'

Cade stared at him.

'What do you mean ... his last fight?'

'He is now a wreck of a man. Yes, I know, through him you were brutally beaten. He was arrogant, cruel and vicious, but he had courage. She has taken away his courage so he has nothing left but his skill, but skill is nothing without courage. You would be sorry for him if you saw him. Last Sunday they threw bottles at him. The Sunday before they whistled at him. This afternoon ...' Creel lifted his fat hands and let them drop heavily on his knees.

'But why, Adolfo?'

The fat Mexican looked at him, then away.

'Do you remember a certain Indian shack? You ask why?'

Cade flinched.

'What goddamn fools we men are, aren't we?'

'Yes, I suppose you can say that in truth. She has a fatal fascination.'

'What about her?'

'She is living in the house you once rented in the Chapultepec Park. At the moment she is unattached. Diaz gave her many expensive presents. She goes every night to the San Pablo night club where the rich Americans are. She

arranges her life very well.'

Cade forced his mind away from the image that came suddenly of her brown, sensual beauty and the long black tresses acting as a shield to the most exciting body he had ever known.

'Could I come with you, Adolfo? I want to see Diaz fight.'

'That I can understand. Yes, there will be plenty of seats. It is only those who expect tragedy who go now to watch Diaz: the vultures who hope for death.'

'Yet you go?'

'It is an ending of a chapter,' Creel said, shrugging. 'I have lived a little of my life with you, with her and with Diaz. It was because of him, I lost my tyres. We Mexicans remember small things like that. Perhaps I am also one of the vultures, but when something begins, I wish to see it finish.'

At 16.20 hours, they made their way down the steps to their seats at the barrera, right by the red-painted fence around the sanded ring. As Adolfo had said there were plenty of seats, but there was still a big crowd.

Below and a few yards from where they sat, Cade could see the sword handlers of the three matadors who were fighting that afternoon. He easily recognised Regino Franoco, wearing a white shirt with bishop's sleeves and wine coloured trousers. He was honing a sword, his movements expert and practised, a sullen frown on his face.

Seeing Cade watching, Creel said, 'Yes, he is still with Diaz ... one of the faithful. When they threw bottles last Sunday, he wept.'

On the far side of the ring, in the direct light of the sun, they were forming up for the paseo.

Cade recognised Pedro Diaz who was in silver and black. He stood, waiting, flanked on either side by two matadors: both elderly and fat, one of them bald. Behind them were the men of the curilla. Behind them, the mounted picadors.

With their right arms swinging, the men began to march across the sand, followed by the bull ring servants and the mules.

Cade was aware of a feeling of sick excitement, aware too that his heart was thumping unsteadily.

As the three matadors made their bows to the President, he examined Diaz.

Yes, Adolfo was right. There was nothing there now but a shell. The cruel, hawk-like face that had made one of Cade's finest photographs was now slack

and flabby. The small eyes moved uneasily, the thin mouth was twitching.

'He has the first bull,' Creel said.

Diaz walked over to Franoco. They spoke together, then Franoco took Diaz's dress cape from him and spread it over the fence.

Diaz looked up and stared at the faces looking down at him. He looked at Cade, looked away, then stiffening, he looked back at Cade. He said something to Franoco who looked round quickly and also stared at Cade. The sudden entry of the bull made both men jerk around.

'He knew you,' Creel said in a satisfied voice.

Cade was looking at the bull that had come into the ring with a blind rush and was now trotting around in the sun, cutting at the air with his horns.

'Well, he is big enough,' Creel said and Cade thought this was an understatement. The bull seemed enormous to him.

A thin, shabby man ran out, trailing a cape. The bull charged, hooking with his left horn. He continued around the ring after he had lost the cape, then seeing another cape flopping at him, he charged again.

'Diaz will have to watch that left horn,' Creel said. 'Aye! Aye! This is a big one!'

Cade looked down at Diaz, immediately below him. Diaz was watching the bull. Franoco was leaning over the fence whispering furiously at Diaz, a nagging, scolding, womanish expression on his handsome face.

'Shut up!' Cade heard Diaz say. 'Give me the bottle!'

Franoco handed him a big, narrow-necked jug. Diaz drank. Cade saw him shudder as he handed the jug back.

'They think it is water,' Creel said, 'but it is Tequila.'

There was a commotion going on in the ring. The bull had caught the horse and had flung it over.

The picador, cursing, rolled clear. The capes took the bull away.

Diaz looked directly at Cade. He gave a sneering grin.

'So we meet again,' he said, pitching his voice so that Cade could hear. 'I give you this bull but I owe you nothing. I am even sorry for you.'

The crowd along the seats either side of Cade leaned forward to stare at him. Franoco snarled at him and spat at the sand beyond the fence.

'Good luck,' Cade said. He meant it. The small shell of the man incited his pity.

Creel said quietly, 'He is very drunk.'

They watched the short, stocky figure walk out towards the bull. The banderillo had done his work.

The scene was now set for the encounter between Diaz and the bull which stood solid across the far side of the ring in the sun.

Diaz seemed in no hurry to reach the bull. He was slightly unsteady on his short legs, and twice during the long walk he staggered. The crowd watched in silence.

Cade saw Franoco talking urgently to the other two matadors who listened, shrugged and nodded.

Taking their capes, they trotted after Diaz. Three men of the curilla joined them. They formed a wide protective circle behind Diaz.

When he was within thirty yards of the bull, Diaz looked around. Seeing the men moving forward, he waved them away. He cursed them in Spanish. Some of the crowd began to whistle.

Cade saw Franoco was moving frantically around the ring, between the fence and the seats, heading towards the bull.

'What that fool thinks he is doing, I can't imagine,' Creel said. 'He will only distract Diaz.'

Diaz was now within fifteen yards of the bull. He stopped, unfurled his cape and shook it at the bull.

By now Franoco was immediately behind the bull, his hands clutching the top of the fence.

The bull's tail went up as it charged.

It happened so quickly Cade was unable to see exactly what had gone wrong. He heard a thumping impact and he saw Diaz go up in the air and come down on the sand on the back of his head.

He heard Creel say, 'Well, that's it then,' and let out a long, hissing sigh.

The bull turned with the quickness of a cat. The capes were flopping as the men ran in, but the bull was only aware of Diaz who was struggling up on his knees. Franoco sprang over the fence, but the speed of the bull beat him. The left horn chopped into Diaz's chest, slamming him against the fence.

The horn struck again.

Franoco was screaming. He now had the bull by the right horn and was beating his fist on the bull's nose.

Cade was only vaguely aware of the uproar. Like everyone, he was standing and shouting.

The bull shook his head and Franoco, like a stringless puppet, was thrown away. He fell on his side.

The bull charged, but the flick of a cape caught his eye and he charged over Franoco, one of his hoofs thudding into Franoco's upturned face as the bull went with a rush across the ring, pursuing a running matador.

Three bull ring servants picked Diaz up. They ran with him out of the ring. Another of them helped Franoco to his feet, his face streaming blood.

'Let's get out of here,' Cade said, sickened.

'Yes,' Creel said and the two men walked quickly up the steps and away from the ring.

As they reached the exit, Cade said, his voice unsteady, 'How badly do you think he was hurt?'

Creel shrugged.

'He is dead. A chest wound like that is always fatal. He had no chance. The horn smashed the cage of his ribs.'

Cade wiped his sweating face. He was completely unnerved.

'Get me back to the hotel, Adolfo. I'm not staying here any longer. I hate this City.'

'Yes,' Creel said. He led the way through the hundreds of parked cars to where he had left his Pontiac. 'Don't dwell on it. He brought it on himself.'

They drove in silence back to El Prado hotel. Cade could think only of the broken body that hung so limply in the arms of the bull ring servants as they ran with it across the sand.

'I'll have to return in a few days,' he said as Creel pulled up outside the hotel. 'I'll call you, Adolfo.'

The two men shook hands. Cade forced a smile before climbing the steps to the hotel.

He went immediately to the Travel Agency office and booked a New York flight, leaving at 11.00 hours the following morning.

He took the elevator to his room, unlocked the door and as he opened it, he thought it was still early. The long evening ahead of him depressed him.

He shut the door, then stood motionless.

Juana was standing there with her back to the window. She was wearing a simple white dress, no jewellery and the sunlight made a hazy glow around her beauty.

'There is no one and there never can be anyone like you,' she said. 'I have

returned because I love you and will always love you.' She moved forward, holding out her hands to him. 'Do you want me? If you do, then take me.'

The following morning, Cade called down from his room to the Travel Agency office and cancelled his flight to New York.

Juana, naked and on the bed, her long black tresses draped across her body, listened, smiling and reached for his hand.

They had made love and talked, made love and talked during the night.

'It was only when I lost you that I realised how much you mean to me,' she had said, her head on his chest, her fingers stroking the back of his hand. 'It was because you were in hospital and I was alone that this bad thing that is in me made me go away with Pedro. If you had been with me, it would never have happened.'

Cade had thought of the agony she had caused him and the debts she had incurred, but he didn't care. He knew that however badly she behaved, she was the only thing in his life. For better or for worse, he thought bitterly. It was a crushing sentence, and it depressed him.

'Don't let's go over past history, Juana,' he said. 'We begin again. You are my wife. You want me back. All right so we begin again and we don't talk about the past. In a couple of weeks, you and I will return to New York. We will find a small apartment somewhere. You can look after it while I work.'

She traced her finger nail down the hollow of his chest.

'New York? I don't think I would care to live in New York.' She turned her face and kissed him. 'Couldn't you work here? We could keep the house. I have it still. You liked the house, didn't you?'

'I am under contract. I have to work in New York.'

She lifted her head and looked at him puzzled.

'Contract? What does that mean?'

'I work for a newspaper now.'

'Is that good?'

'Not really, but it suits me.'

'They pay very well?'

'No, they pay very badly.'

'So? Then why do you work for them?'

'This is something you wouldn't understand. I have a year and a half before the contract finishes.'

She put her hands on her full breasts and lifted them as she stared

thoughtfully up at the ceiling.

'What do they pay, carifio?'

'Three hundred a week.' He thought without hope: money and the body. Adolfo knows her as I am learning to know her. 'Money is very important to you, isn't it?'

'I wouldn't say that. It is nice to have money, but it is not really important.' She turned her head and smiled at him. 'I am thrifty. Didn't I keep the house beautifully and wasn't my cooking beautiful?'

'Yes.'

'And you think we can manage on three hundred a week?'

'Of course. Thousands of people manage on less.'

She patted his hand.

'Then let us go to New York.'

That was during the night. After he had cancelled the flight to New York, he called his Mexican lawyers. He told them he wasn't going through with the divorce. That was something he had also discussed with Juana during the night.

'But you mustn't divorce me!' she had said, gripping his arm fiercely. 'Without you I should be lost!'

No other man has ever wanted to marry me. You understand? It is because you are my husband that I have returned to you.'

He took her face in his hands.

'It is because you are my wife, I can forgive you,' he said.

When he had finished talking to the Mexican lawyers, she swung off the bed and threw her arms around him.

'I am so happy! Let us go back to the house. Why stay here? Let us begin to save our money. The house is paid for to the end of the month. Let us go back and I will cook for you.'

So they went back. The first thing Cade noticed was the new scarlet Thunderbird in the garage.

She dismissed it with a wave of her beautiful hand.

'I like the one you gave me better. Pedro gave this one to me. He had to. He admitted he was responsible for the fire.'

Cade moved his shoulders as if shifting a heavy weight. He walked into the house and opening the french windows, walked out into the patio with its little fountain and its flowers.

'I will get you a drink, carino. A Tequila?'

Cade sat down in one of the lounging chairs.

'No, nothing, thank you. I don't drink now.'

'But why?'

'It happens to be bad for me.'

She looked at him puzzled, then shrugging her shoulders, she said, 'I will unpack your bag.'

She left him, sitting in the sunshine. The Thunderbird in the garage sickened him. The atmosphere of the house depressed him. He was sure Juana and Diaz had made love in the big, cool bedroom upstairs.

It can't work, he said to himself. It might last a month, perhaps not even so long. Money and the body. She can't help herself as I can't help myself being in love with her.

But at least, he thought, during the uncertain time they would be together he would possess her, have her with him, be able to see her beauty and prepare himself for the inevitable break. But this he must be sure of, he warned himself, when the break did come, he must wash her forever out of his mind. No more drinking. He had been through too much ever to let her do that to him again.

So for ten days, they lived together, making desperate, fierce love, going out to a modest restaurant when they felt like it, going to a movie, taking long drives. It was a period of peace for Cade, but never once did he let her out of his sight. Even when she went to the market, he was with her. He was so much her shadow that he began to worry her.

One evening, when they were in the garden, she said, 'Are you happy, carino?'

He glanced up from the crossword puzzle he was trying to solve.

'Why do you ask?'

'You have changed so much. You are so quiet, so serious. You aren't interested in things any longer.'

'Things? What things?'

'Many things. Aren't you going to work again?'

'Yes. I was going to talk to you about that. I must return to New York next week. You will come with me of course.'

'Yes.' She looked questioningly at him. 'Where will we live in New York?'

'We'll stay at a hotel, and then we will look for an apartment.'

'There will be no garden?'

'No.'

She crossed her long legs. She was wearing only a bikini and Cade thought he had never seen a more lovely woman.

'Perhaps it would be better for me to join you when you have found the apartment. It would save money. We have this house for another two weeks.' She looked at him, smiling. 'You see? I am really very thrifty.'

'You will come with me, Juana. I am not leaving you alone in Mexico City.'

She shrugged and patted his hand.

'Very well, carino. I will do what you think best. When do we leave?'

'Next Thursday'

'Perhaps if we left on Wednesday, we could drive to New York.'

'You will have no use for a car in New York, Juana. No one these days owns a car in New York...there is never anywhere to park it. We will sell it. I will ask Creel to find a buyer.'

He was watching her closely. He saw her eyes darken, but after a little thought, she nodded.

'I didn't realise that. Good. Then we will sell the car and we will use the money to help furnish the apartment.'

That night while Juana was preparing dinner, Cade called Ed Burdick.

'I'll be back on Thursday, Ed,' he said. 'Ready for work.'

'Well! Why haven't you written? I was getting worried about you. I called El Prado. They said you had checked out. What's going on? Are you all right?'

'I'm fine. There's nothing to worry about. I'll give you all the dope when we meet.'

'Fine. I have a job lined up and waiting for you. Can you make a start on Friday?'

'What is it?'

'There's a new musical opening with Harry Weston's costumes. We have an exclusive for the Supplement. It's all fixed for Friday afternoon.'

'That's okay,' Cade said. 'I'll be there,' and he hung up.

He then called Creel.

'Juana and I have decided to settle down together, Adolfo,' he said, after greeting the Mexican. 'We are leaving for New York on Thursday. We are

leaving her Thunderbird in the garage. Could you sell it? Get what you can for it, but sell it.'

There was a long pause, then Creel said in an alarmed voice, 'Did you say you and Juana? No, it must be a mistake, Val, what was it you said?'

'It's all right. Don't get excited. I know what I'm doing. Will you take care of the car?'

'Of course, amigo.'

'Thanks,' and Cade hurriedly replaced the receiver.

On Wednesday night, as Juana was packing, she sat suddenly on the bed, holding her head in her hands.

Cade went to her.

'Darling! What is it?'

'I'm just dizzy. It's all right.'

She dropped back flat on the bed, and he saw she was white, and there were beads of sweat on her face.

'What is it?'

She shut her eyes. For a long moment her body shifted as if in pain, her mouth tightened.

'Juana!' Cade was alarmed. 'Tell me! What is it?'

She made an obvious effort as she opened her eyes.

'It would happen now! I have hell every month!' She rolled on her side. 'Please leave me.'

Cade felt sudden panic.

'I'll get a doctor. Don't worry ... I...'

'Don't be stupid!' She was suddenly furious and she sat up, her eyes snapping. 'Women have this damn thing! Don't act like a child. Just leave me. I'll be all right.'

He went down stairs and moved uneasily from the living-room to the patio and back to the living-room. Later, unable to bear the silence from upstairs, he went up to the bedroom and cautiously opened the door.

Juana was in bed, the bedside lamp shaded. Her face was chalk white and she looked towards him, her brow furrowing with irritation.

'Please leave me alone. This happens sometimes. There is nothing to worry about. I'll be like this for two or three days, and then I'm fine again. I just want to be left alone.'

Cade moved further into the room.

'Do you think you will be able to travel tomorrow?'

'I will if I have to.' Her face twisted. 'Please don't bother me, carifio.'

'You don't have to,' he said quietly. 'You can come later. Is there anything I can do?'

'No, nothing. I could be all right tomorrow.'

But of course, she wasn't. She looked so white and ill that Cade knew he couldn't expect her to travel, and yet he felt this was suddenly too convenient. He had now learned to distrust her. He was determined to keep her for himself as long as he could.

'I'll have to leave in an hour,' he said standing by the bed and looking down at her. 'You don't really feel like coming, do you?'

'I'll come if you really want me to,' she said. 'It hurts, but I can put up with it.'

'You stay where you are,' and he went downstairs and called Adolfo.

'Will you come quickly, amigo?' he said when Creel answered the call. 'I have to leave in an hour and I need you.'

'I will be with you in ten minutes,' Creel said and he was. He came hurrying up the path, mopping his face, anxious and worried.

'Will you do something for me, Adolfo?' Cade said as he led the way into the living-room. 'There is no one else I can ask: no one else I can trust.'

'Anything, amigo,' Creel said, 'but what is this about Juana? I have warned you ...'

'Yes. Don't let us discuss it,' Cade said. 'Have you anything important to do over the next three days?'

Creel blinked, then shrugged.

'I seldom have anything important to do.'

'I want you to remain here. I want you to stay with Juana, and when she is well enough, I want you to put her on a plane to New York. I want you to be her jailer.'

Creel stared at him, his eyes growing round.

'Jailer? I don't understand, amigo.'

'We were going together to New York this morning,' Cade said. 'Last night, she complained of being ill. She looks ill, but she could be faking. I don't trust her, Adolfo. This could be an excuse to escape from me again.'

'I still don't understand,' Creel said, bewildered. 'Why not let her escape if that is the way she feels? What is the use of a woman like her to you?'

'I can't explain it to you. She wants me. I am sure of that. I even believe she loves me, but now, I think she is in the process of balancing me and money and the scale is tipping in favour of money. If I can get her to New York, I think I will win. It is a battle between us. My life would be empty without her. It's as simple as that. I must keep her.'

Creel lifted his fat shoulders.

'Are you so sure about that?'

'Yes, I am sure. You are my friend. I have no one else who I trust more than you. Will you do this for me?'

'Of course. I won't fail you, amigo. She will be on the New York plane. That I promise you.'

Later, Cade went upstairs and told Juana.

'Adolfo will stay here,' he said. 'When you feel well enough, he will put you on a plane. I don't want you to be alone in Mexico City.'

She lay flat in the bed, her black tresses arranged around her in a shroud, her eyes distant.

'You have no trust in me, have you?'

'No,' Cade said. 'But I love you and I am going to keep you. This is the only way I can make sure that I will keep you.'

She suddenly smiled and held out her arms.

'How I love you!' she exclaimed. 'It is good for a woman to be loved like this. No man has ever taken so much trouble. When I am better, I will be with you, carino.'

Cade kissed her, feeling her passion in the soft movement of her lips.

'We can make a wonderful life together, Juana,' he said.

'We will make a wonderful life together,' she said.

Carrying his bag, Cade came down the stairs to where Creel was waiting. The two men shook hands.

'It is time I did something for you, Adolfo,' Cade said.

'A time will come,' Creel said with a smile. 'It is what friendship is for.'

'I will telephone every evening at eight. Watch her, please. There should be no trouble while you are here.'

'There will be no trouble, amigo, but you can't continue to live like this. If there is no trust, there can be no happiness.'

'I'm buying time,' Cade said. 'So long. I'll call tonight.'

Ed Burdick was at the airport when Cade arrived. As they drove along the

traffic congested highway, Cade tried to explain about Juana.

Burdick cut him short.

'This is your business, Val. I thought you were serious about Vicki. Okay, you must know what you are doing. After all, you are an adult.' He brooded for several moments, then said, 'I hope to God you do know what you are doing.'

'Juana is my wife,' Cade said. 'Marriage is important to me. It is something that has to be permanent.'

Burdick moved his shoulders impatiently.

'Nothing is permanent to me, but I'm a cynic. I want to tell you about Weston's decor. In colour . . .'

They talked shop and technical details until they reached the offices of the New York Sun. From then on, Cade was too busy to think of Juana. While discussing the sets with Harry Weston, Burdick and the two leads of the show in a down-town bar, Cade glanced at his watch and saw it was 19.55 hours. He excused himself and went to a nearby telephone booth and called Mexico City.

He waited in the booth until the call came through.

Creel said, 'She is still not very well, amigo. She is in bed. I have a buyer for the car. He will pay a fair price.'

'Can I talk to her, Adolfo?'

'She is sleeping. I went up there five minutes ago to see if she wanted anything to eat, but she was asleep.'

'So she really is ill?'

'That I don't know. I am here. I sit in the garden. She remains upstairs in bed. I will expect you to call again tomorrow.'

'Get her here as fast as you can.'

'That I have promised to do. There is no need to worry.'

Cade went back to the discussion, more light-hearted than he had been since he had left Mexico.

The following day, he and Burdick worked at the theatre. The assignment went well. Cade spent most of the early evening processing the films he had taken, but his mind kept shifting to Juana. At 20.00 hours he left the final processing to the technical staff and going into one of the empty offices, he put a call through to Mexico City.

While he waited, he began a rough sketch for the layout of the pictures, but

his mind was only half on his work.

When the telephone bell rang, he eagerly scooped up the receiver.

'There is no reply,' the operator told him.

Cade stiffened.

'But I know someone is there. Please try again.'

He waited. A tense, uneasy feeling making any further concentration on his work impossible.

Finally, the operator again told him there was no reply.

'Give me the airport,' Cade said. What was he getting so excited about? he asked himself. Juana and Creel were either at the airport or driving to the airport. She was on her way to New York.

The clerk at the airport said there was a flight from Mexico City landing at Kennedy Airport in two hours.

She would be on that, Cade thought, replacing the receiver, but it was odd Adolfo hadn't warned him.

An hour later, after he had sent the finished prints to Mathison, Cade again tried to reach Creel, but again the operator told him there was no one answering. He called the airport and the clerk said that Senora Juana Cade was not booked on the last flight from Mexico City.

Burdick came into the office as Cade hung up. One look at Cade's anguished expression made him ask sharply, 'What's the matter?'

'I can't get an answer from Juana,' Cade said, getting to his feet. 'I shouldn't have left her! Goddamn it! Let's go out and have a drink!'

'Cut it out!' Burdick said. 'You're not starting that again. We'll go home.'

Cade looked at him, hesitated, then forced a smile.

'Yes. We'll go home.'

At 06.00 hours the following morning, while Burdick slept, Cade put another call through to Mexico City. Again he was told there was no answer. He called the airport. They told him there was a flight out at 09.30 hours. He threw whatever he needed into a bag and left the apartment.

At 13.00 hours, he got out of the taxi that had brought him from the airport to the little house in the park. As he walked up the path, he saw the garage doors were open and the scarlet Thunderbird no longer there.

He tried the front door and found it unlocked. Moving slowly, he walked into the living-room. The french windows stood open. Beyond, he could see the patio and the lounging-chairs.

He put down his bag and stood listening. He had a premonition of disaster and he had to force himself to mount the stairs. At the bedroom door, he stood hesitating, his heart thumping, then he pushed open the door and walked in.

Creel lay on the bed. He had on a pair of pink and white striped pyjama trousers. In his right hand, he clutched a .22 revolver. Dried blood caked on the side of his face, the small black hole by his temple told Cade how he had died.

The only indication of Juana's presence was the faint but unmistakable smell of her perfume.

Cade returned to New York late that night. He walked into the apartment where Burdick was anxiously waiting. One glance at Cade's flushed, sweating face told Burdick he had been drinking.

'Well, that's it!' Cade said, tossing his overnight bag on the settee. 'Short and sour!'

'What happened?' Burdick asked, careful to conceal his dismay.

Cade sat down. As he lit a cigarette, Burdick could see his hands were shaking.

'She's gone. She's taken all her things and her car. I guess it was my fault. I gave it to her a little too rough. I guess it was the car that finally decided her. If I had let that alone she just might have come to New York. The car obviously meant a lot to her, but I just couldn't stomach having her around in a car given her by one of her lovers. Anyway, she's gone.' He frowned down at his hands. 'Apart from the car, I must have scared her with my talk about money. Money means an awful lot to her.'

'I thought Creel was looking after her.'

Cade laughed. The harsh sound made Burdick wince.

'Sure, he was supposed to be looking after her. It's a damn funny thing, but I really did believe I could trust Creel. The trouble with me is I am a born sucker. She and Creel went to bed together. Messy, isn't it?'

Burdick drew in a deep breath.

'Are you sure, Val? That's a hell of a thing! Creel struck me as a pretty good man.'

'I'm sure. I found him in our bed. The stupid bastard shot himself.' Cade put his hand over his eyes.

'That's what he did. He laid her, then he hadn't the guts to face me ... the

fat, stupid son of a whore!'

'Good God!' Burdick, shocked, got to his feet and went over to the window, pulling aside the curtain to stare out at the night sky.

'He promised to put her on the plane.' Cade went on, his voice shaking. 'He said I could trust him. I bet she had him in the goddamn bed before I even left Mexico. Well, I hope he is burning in hell right now!'

'Oh, shut up!' Burdick said furiously. He turned and faced Cade. 'You're drunk! This is your fault, and you damn well know it! Leaving him with a woman like that! She made a fool out of you enough times! What gave you the idea that Adolfo was stronger and less of a man than you? What made you imagine he was a saint?'

Cade stared at him.

'So you think because he shot himself, the score is even? Well, I don't. He said he was my friend. Then he does this to me! Friend! The fat greaseball!'

'You make me sick,' Burdick said quietly. He genuinely liked Adolfo. The shock of the Mexican's end blunted his caution. 'You ruined yourself for that woman... and God! what a worthless, vicious, disgusting whore she's turned out to be! Now, you're drinking again. You are a weak, spineless mess! It's time someone told you, and I'm telling you. Okay, you have talent. You can take a photograph, but that doesn't mean you are anything but a gutless, body loving womaniser! At least Adolfo had guts. She fixed him. She would have fixed me! He knew there was nothing he could do or say that would make you understand it was your fault to have left him with such a woman, so he gave you his life!'

Cade got to his feet.

'I'm telling Mathison I am not working with you anymore,' he said. 'If that's the way you feel about me...'

'Feel about you? I don't feel anything about you. You are less than nothing. I'm going out,' Burdick said, his voice unsteady. 'When I get back, I expect you to be out of here. You're going to start hitting the bottle and I know there is nothing I can do to stop you, so I don't want you here, and it is more than all right with me if we don't work together. Working with you now will be a pain in the neck. So pack up and get out and get drunk and kill yourself if you have to. You've had your chance. Vicki would have married you, but no, you still must cling to your rotten whore and now you're going to pay for it. To hell with her and to hell with you!'

He went out, slamming the door.

For the next three days, there was no sign of Cade. Mathison who had been alerted by Burdick waited patiently. He accepted the situation and sent Burdick to London to do a series of articles on the General Election.

He shrugged when Burdick had said bitterly, 'Well, you were right. He is a lush, and he probably will always be a lush. I don't know what you are going to do with him, but I am not going to spoil my reputation having him with me.'

'That's okay, Ed. I'll talk to him if he ever shows up. He is still a great photographer. I am square enough to remember he and you shoved up the Sun's circulation by twenty-seven per cent. That is quite an achievement. You get off to London.'

On the fourth day, Cade came into Mathison's office. He was pretty drunk, but he carried it well enough. He said he was ready to go to work.

'I have other ideas for the Supplement now, Val,' Mathison said. 'How do you feel about having a shot at straight press work?'

'I don't give a damn. Sure, why not?' Cade said. 'I have a contract with you. You pay me ... I work.'

After three disastrous weeks, came the Eastonville assignment.

chapter seven

Cade walked slowly and stiffly down the steps of Eastonville's State hospital to where Ron Mitchell was lolling against his dusty Chevrolet.

Apart from a swelling under his left eye, a strip of plaster along his jaw and his paleness, Cade showed no visible signs of the brutal body beating he had received from the three deputies after his escape from the Central Motor Hotel.

His body ached and he had difficulty in holding himself upright, but a feeling of utter triumph which he was careful to conceal, kept him moving.

'Hello, Cade,' Mitchell said. 'Get in. I bet you don't want to miss your plane. I bet you have had enough of this little ol' town, huh?'

'Just about,' Cade said and got into the passenger's seat.

By now, he thought, as he carefully straightened his legs, the cartridge of film would be on its way to Mathison. In a day or so, the pictures would be with the F.B.I., and then those thugs who had killed Sonny Small and his girlfriend would laugh the other side of their brutal faces.

Mitchell climbed in beside Cade and sent the car roaring towards the highway.

'Your camera's on the back seat, Cade,' he said. 'Thought I would bring it along.' He touched his bruised face and grinned. 'I certainly asked for that. Well, you got beat up: I got beat up, so we're square. Just keep your long nose out of this little ol' town in the future.'

'I'll do that,' Cade said tonelessly.

He turned to look at his worn Pan-Am overnight bag. Then he felt a prickle of apprehension. Had this moronic sadist checked the camera and found the film missing? Maybe he hadn't thought about the film. He was stupid enough for the idea not to occur to him, but Cade now began to sweat a little. Maybe this was a trap and he wasn't being taken to the airport. Maybe he was going to be taken somewhere and asked for the film: asked with the persuasion these thugs would know how to use.

'Something biting you, Cade?' Mitchell asked, glancing at him.

'I just don't feel good. Nor would you if you got kicked in the belly.'

Mitchell laughed.

'I thought you had something on your mind.'

But they were heading for the airport. Cade could see a plane coming in to land, and in a few minutes, he saw the distant airport buildings.

'You haven't asked about the march you were at one time so interested in,' Mitchell said. 'Well, we broke it up. It was fun while it lasted. Those niggers are certainly sitting in their shanties with sore heads this morning.' He laughed. 'I wouldn't talk too much about it when you get back to your nigger-loving home. Just relax, and don't flap with the mouth.'

Cade didn't say anything. In another three minutes, they pulled up at the Departure Centre of the airport. Cade slung his heavy bag on his shoulder, wincing a little as he got out of the car.

'Well, so long, Cade,' Mitchell said. 'Sorry you didn't enjoy your visit.'

Cade walked into the lobby. He checked his ticket, the clerk gave him a sneering little grin as he stamped the ticket.

'Have a good trip,' he said.

Cade paid no attention. In another few minutes he would be past the police control and then he would be out of trouble.

'Hello, Cade.'

He stiffened and slowly turned.

Deputy Joe Schneider was strolling towards him, a half-grin on his fleshy face. He was immaculate in his khaki drill, his star shining in the neon light.

Cade waited, aware of fear, but thinking: all right, you sonofabitch, you can start something now, but this time I can finish it. I have this stinking town where I want it. Five of your natives are going to feel a hand on their collars, and it will happen because of me.

'You off?' Schneider said, pausing before Cade.

'That's the idea, deputy,' Cade said.

'Fine. Well, none too soon, but now you're going, no ill feelings.'

Cade didn't say anything.

'I guess you must be feeling a little sore. My boys get overenthusiastic. You know how it is, Cade. We just don't like nigger-lovers in this town.'

Still Cade said nothing.

'I brought along a little memento for you,' Schneider went on, his grin widening. 'I wouldn't like you to leave us without something to remember us by.'

Cade straightened his aching body. Here it comes, he thought. The

sonofabitch is going to knock my teeth out. But take it, for you are going to even the score. You have this stinking town by the short hairs.

Schneider took something from his pocket and held it up between his finger and thumb.

Cade stared at the Kodak film cartridge, feeling the blood drain out of his face and his body turning cold.

'Yeah. The film you took,' Schneider said. 'You know, Cade, you don't understand what goes on in this little ol' town. Nigger eats nigger here. When a nigger thinks he can do good for himself, he does good for himself. Old Sam brought this film to me. He said you told him to send it to the Sun. He thought I would appreciate the gift more than the Sun, and he was right. We'll take care of Sam. A nigger like him deserves to be taken care of.'

Cade had a mad impulse to snatch the cartridge and run for it, but he knew it was hopeless.

'I'll tell you what we will do,' Schneider said. 'I'll keep the film and you have the cartridge. How's that?' He began pulling the film out of the cartridge until it made a long black coil of destroyed film at Cade's feet.

Cade looked down at the film. This was the worst moment of his life.

This is my finish, he thought. Nothing for Mathison. Nothing to show for my beating and those swine will now get away with their murder. But what does it matter? Juana... Adolfo ... Ed... Vicki... and now this. What the hell does it matter? What does anything matter?

He stared at Schneider for a long moment while Schneider continued to grin at him.

'Screw you and screw your bastard town,' Cade said, then turning, he walked slowly through the barrier towards the waiting aircraft. Schneider's bellowing laughter followed him.

Three and a half hours later the aircraft touched down at the Kennedy airport. Cade was now so drunk the air hostess had to help him along the ramp from the aircraft to the reception centre. The other passengers, some disgusted, others grinning, stood aside and let him go first.

When he and the girl finally reached the reception centre, the girl, a nice looking blonde, asked anxiously, 'Are you sure you are all right now, sir?'

Cade tried to focus her, but her face swam in a haze of drunkenness.

'I'm fine, baby,' he said. 'Thanks a million.'

A tall, thin man, wearing a smart chauffeur's uniform came up to Cade. He

jerked his head at the air hostess, dismissing her.

'Mr. Cade?'

Cade reeled, grabbed the man's arm and steadied himself.

'That's the name.'

'I have the car here, sir,' the chauffeur said. 'Let me have your bag.'

'Mistake,' Cade said and shoving the chauffeur aside, he began to stagger towards the line of taxis he could vaguely make out through the open gates.

The chauffeur followed him.

'Excuse me, Mr. Cade . . .'

Cade turned and squinted at the man.

'Now what the hell is it?'

'Mr. Braddock wishes to see you sir,' the chauffeur said. 'May I have your bag?'

'Go ahead if you're all that excited about it,' Cade said and let the chauffeur take his bag. 'Who is Mr. Braddock?'

'The car is right here, sir,' the chauffeur said and indicated a black and yellow Rolls Royce parked at the kerb.

Cade stared at the car, then at the chauffeur.

'Sure you haven't made a mistake?' he asked, trying to fight off the whisky fumes that enveloped his brain. .

'There is no mistake, sir.'

Cade felt himself being helped into the car and he sank into the soft luxury of the seat, suddenly not caring anymore. His head dropped back against the cushion and he passed out.

The chauffeur regarded him with distaste, then put Cade's bag carefully by Cade's feet. He got in the car and drove away.

Shad Braddock sat in a lounging chair in the shaded garden of his penthouse, twenty-four stories above the bustle and roar of New York.

He was tall, bony and heavily sunburned. A faddist about his health, he lived on health food, shunned all meat, and when he had the time practised Yogi exercises and sun worshipped at every opportunity. For his age, and he admitted to seventy-five, he was remarkably well preserved. His face was the face of a skull. His eyes were deeply sunk: small, glittering stones, animated and restless. His lips were thin, his nose pinched, his ears large and flat.

He was rated by the New York social index as the fifth richest man in America. One of his business sidelines was the scandal sheet Whisper. This

weekly newspaper gave him more interest, and more amusement than any of his other varied business activities.

Braddock was a sadist. He was never happier than when he was able to cause pain and trouble for some well-known person in the gutter-inspired pages of Whisper.

Opposite him, holding a whisky and soda in an unsteady hand, sat Cade. The time was 22.15 hours and Cade was still a little drunk. He recognised Braddock as he had crossed the terrace to where Braddock was sitting. He knew him to be one of the most dangerous, influential and wealthy tycoons of all American tycoons.

'Well, Cade,' Braddock said in a dry, soft voice, 'you seem to have reached the end of your road.'

The Japanese manservant who had served Cade his whisky and soda had gone and the two men were alone.

Cade sipped his drink. He felt pretty bad, but not bad enough to accept patronage from a man like Braddock.

'Who cares what you think?' he said.

'I've been following your career,' Braddock went on. He glanced at the gold Omega on his skinny wrist. 'I haven't a lot of time. I have an offer to make you.'

Cade lifted his shoulders. He finished his drink and set down the glass. He was genuinely uninterested.

'I want certain photographs. The fee will be ten thousand dollars,' Braddock said, staring at Cade. 'You will also retain the syndicate rights. They could net you a small fortune.'

'Why pick on me?' Cade asked. 'There are plenty of other photographers. I'm just a goddamn lush.'

'It is because you are what you are, Mr. Cade, that I know you are the man I need,' Braddock said, crossing his thin legs. 'Drink destroys principles. I know you are in need of money. I have it. I think we could work together.'

The Japanese servant came in silently, refilled Cade's glass and went as silently away.

'I'm still under contract to the Sun' Cade said.

Braddock shook his head.

'Not anymore. I have taken over your contract. Mathison seemed pleased to be rid of it.'

Cade stared down at his drink, then he lifted his shoulders. He didn't blame Henry. How much lower am I going to sink? he asked himself. To work for a rag like Whisper is about as far as I can get.

'I don't know if you have studied your contract, Mr. Cade,' Braddock went on, 'but it is a very comprehensive document. Mathison would be in his rights to sue you for falling down on your various assignments, but he has a kindly disposition. I have not. I want it understood that you are to do as I tell you or else you will have a law suit in your lap that will prevent you from earning another dollar: even if you find work outside your particular speciality.'

Cade drank half the whisky in his glass and shrugged again.

'So what do you want me to do?' he said, looking at Braddock, his eyes glassy and out of focus.

'I am preparing a profile on Anita Strelík,' Braddock said. 'I want certain photographs to complete the profile. It will be your job to get them.'

Anita Strelík was an international movie star. She rated along with Bardot, Moreau, Lollobrigida. She had been hailed by some of the New York critics as the modern Garbo. Russian by birth, aged around twenty-seven, blonde, handsome rather than beautiful, she had been headline news for the past five years. She was to the film world what Callas was to the Opera world: an intriguing international figure, whose slightest move immediately appeared in the world's press.

Cade knew all this. He finished his drink, then with a shaking hand, he lit a cigarette.

'What did she do to you, Braddock?' he asked. 'A profile? I can imagine what that is going to be.'

'So much the better,' Braddock said. 'Never mind what she has done to me. That is immaterial. Has it ever struck you as odd that this woman has never married?'

'Strelík doesn't interest me. Why should she? Why should I care if she married or not?'

'You will take an interest in her now, Mr. Cade,' Braddock said, recrossing his thin legs. 'So you should begin to think about her. She is unique as far as movie stars are concerned. During her five years of success, there has been no scandal and no men. She is not a lesbian. Her behaviour as it is must be suspect. She is made of flesh and blood. I do not believe a woman of her temperament has reached the age of twenty-seven and has remained a virgin.'

That is something I do not accept. However, up to now, we have been unable to discover a lover, and I might tell you, my men have watched her continuously from the time she became internationally famous.'

'Rough luck,' Cade said. 'I can imagine how frustrated your dirty little rag must be, Braddock. Remind me to be sorry for you some time.'

'It so happens, Mr. Cade, that you are now working for my dirty little rag,' Braddock said, his skulllike face expressionless.

'So what?'

'In May, Strelík went to Switzerland. My agent there was alerted. He lost her in Lausanne. In September, Strelík again went to Switzerland. My agent who is no fool again lost her in Montreux. She seems to have been aware that she was being followed and she took elaborate precautions to shake off my men. Why? I think she has a lover who she meets somewhere in Switzerland. I want to know who he is. I want photographs of him and her together. This will be your job, Mr. Cade, Get me those photographs and I will pay you ten thousand dollars and you will have the syndicate rights. If you fail to get them, I will sue you. You might as well cut your throat if I do have to sue you for I will see that you are never in a position to earn a dollar without paying that dollar to me.'

Cade flicked his cigarette butt onto the close-cropped lawn. 'Where is she now?'

'She is in Paris. Tomorrow morning, you will be in Paris. My agent will meet you in Orly. He will line everything up for you. Would you like another drink?'

Cade smiled.

'Why not? What was it you said: drink destroys principles? Yes, I'll have another drink.'

Ben Sherman, Whisper's Paris representative, was waiting outside the barrier of Orly airport's reception centre. He was stocky, around thirty-two, dark with small ice-grey eyes. He had the bustling, efficient air of a second-rate salesman. Rain glistened in his close-cropped hair and darkened his raincoat around his shoulders. His shirt was grubby, his tie worn, his pointed shoes shabby.

After a casual handshake, he went with Cade to the Customs barrier and waited until Cade had collected his bag, then the two men walked in silence to where Sherman had parked his Simca.

As Sherman headed for Paris, along the broad highway that connected with the Autoroute du Sud, he said, 'She'll be off any time now. Goddamn this rain! This time, we haven't made any mistakes. She always drives herself. I now have her garage attendant fixed. Her concierge is also on our pay roll. Her hairdresser —she is costing me two hundred francs a week, for God's sake! — reported this morning that Anita is packing. We have now only to wait for the green light. As soon as we know she has left, you will fly to Geneva where Baumann will take care of you. He is a good guy. I will try to follow Anita by road. She drives an Aston Martin and I could lose her. She drives like a lunatic. Anyway, you and Baumann will be waiting for her at Vallorbe. She has to cross the frontier there. Twice we have lost her on the Lausanne-Montreux road. I have a couple of boys in fast cars waiting for her to show between Lausanne and Vevey. If I lose her this time, I'm cooked. S.B. pays well, but he doesn't go along with failure.'

Cade didn't say anything. He was thinking of a double whisky with ice. This assignment was utterly without interest to him. It was up to Sherman to line the job up for him. He was prepared to take pictures, but he wasn't prepared to make any effort to get them.

Sherman glanced at him.

'Listen, pal, take that mask-like expression off your map. I know about you. You may be able to click a mean shutter, but right now, you and me have to work together. There is plenty for you to do, so don't imagine you're going to sit around like a goddamn prima donna waiting for her cue, because you aren't.'

Cade glanced at him, then settled down comfortably in his seat.

'Get stuffed,' he said and closed his eyes.

Later, in silence, Sherman pulled up outside a shabby hotel on the Left Bank, off Rue de Vaugirard.

'Dump your bag and check in,' Sherman said. 'I'll wait here for you. I want to see Anita's concierge. You can come along with me.'

Cade got out of the car and shouldered his bag.

'You talk to whoever you like,' he said. 'I have other things to do,' and he walked into the hotel.

Sherman hesitated, then shrugged and starting his car, drove away.

Cade spent the evening lying on his bed, a bottle of Scotch at hand, the New York Herald Tribune to glance at. Around 21.00 hours, he went across

the street to a bistro for a light supper, then he returned to his room. He had often been in Paris during his successful days. He liked the city, but in his present mood, he wanted nothing but solitude and alcohol.

A little after 23.15 hours, just when he was going to sleep, the bell of the telephone by his bed rang.

It was Sherman.

'She leaves tomorrow,' he said. 'I have your ticket for Geneva. You'll catch the 09.14 plane. I'll pick you up at 08.00 hours. Baumann will meet you at the other end.'

Cade grunted and hung up. He lay there staring up at the ceiling for some moments, thinking, then lifting his shoulders in a resigned shrug, he turned off the light.

In the darkness, his brain fuddled by drink, he thought of Juana. The picture he had of her in his mind was sharp etched. He could see her clearly, lying on the bed in the bedroom of the house in Chapultepec Park, her black hair covering her nakedness, her eyes veiled with desire as she waited for him to come to her.

Every time he was alone and in darkness, he thought of her, and swearing under his breath, he put the light on again. It wasn't until he had had three stiff drinks that he was stupefied enough to fall asleep.

The following morning, Sherman drove Cade to Orly Airport. Cade's complete indifference infuriated Sherman.

'Can't you snap out of this goddamn alcoholic haze?' he demanded as he drove in the heavy traffic, battling his way towards the Autoroute du Sud. 'This is important to me. How the hell do you expect to get pictures if you're always plastered?'

'Screw you,' Cade said, sinking lower in his seat. His head ached and his mouth felt as if it were lined with fur.

'S.B. must be crazy to employ a lush like you!' Sherman said savagely. 'And I collect the blame if this turns sour!'

'Screw you again,' Cade said and closed his eyes.

At the airport, Sherman checked Cade's bag, then gave him his ticket.

'You're on your own now. Baumann will be at Geneva, and he'll take it from there,' he said. 'Watch Baumann. He is a little tough. He hasn't my tolerance.'

Cade blew out his cheeks and squinted at Sherman.

'Don't be so anxious, little man,' he said. 'Who cares for Baumann except perhaps his mother? Who cares for Braddock come to that?'

He walked away with lurching steps towards the escalator that would take him to the departure centre.

By the time Cade reached Geneva airport, he was pretty drunk. He was the last passenger to leave the aircraft and the Swiss Customs officials were startled and officially stiff as they passed him through the barrier.

Horst Baumann was waiting beyond the barrier. He was a Zurich Swiss, short, compact and heavily built. His fattish face was sun-tanned, his eyes cold and shrewd, his mouth humourless and thin. He had been warned both by Braddock and by Sherman what to expect so it came as no surprise to find Cade drunk.

Baumann considered he was capable of handling any situation. He had been the Swiss representative of Whisper for five years. Switzerland offered tax-free sanctuary for many world-famous names and Whisper thrived on digging out the secrets of such people. Baumann had proved himself one of the most efficient muckrakers of Whisper's company of gutter-inspired, dedicated men.

'She won't be at Vallorbe for three or four hours,' Baumann said. 'You should be sober by then. From now on, Cade, you stop drinking. You have a job to do. You'll find I am rough if I don't get my own way.'

Cade looked at the stocky, powerful figure.

'Is that right?' he said. 'Here, carry my bag. I'm Cade. Your moronic boss wouldn't have bought my contract if he didn't think I could give him what he wanted. Park your chatter. You bore me.'

Baumann took the bag. The two men walked out into the cold, crisp sunshine to where Baumann's E-type Jaguar was waiting.

As soon as Cade settled himself in the bucket seat, he went to sleep. Baumann regarded him thoughtfully, his light blue eyes icy, then he drove out of Geneva, heading for Vallorbe.

At Vallorbe, Baumann drove to the Customs post and pulled up outside the small hotel that was within twenty metres of the frontier. By this time Cade was half awake and half sober. The two men got out of the car and walked into the hotel where Baumann had a room reserved. Baumann ordered a litre of black coffee to be sent up to their room. He then led the way up the stairs and into the large bedroom, the windows of which overlooked the frontier

post.

Cade slumped down on the bed, holding his head in his hands.

'I want a double Scotch and ice,' he said. 'Hurry it up. I have to have a drink!'

Baumann took off his heavy windcheater which he tossed on a chair. The room was stifflingly hot.

He crossed to the window and opened it. There was now a hint of snow in the sky that had become overcast and the air was sharp and cold.

'Shut that goddamn window,' Cade said.

Baumann walked over to him.

'Look at me,' he said quietly.

Cade took his hands from his face and peered up at Baumann.

'You heard me. I said shut that window.'

Baumann slapped Cade's face. Four lightning backhand slaps that flattened Cade on the bed. He lay there, stunned, staring up at the stocky Swiss. Then he struggled upright, trying to get to his feet.

Baumann slapped him again, sending him once more flat on his back on the bed.

Cade lay still. He put his hand to his burning face, his eyes now in focus, suddenly sober and hating Baumann as he had hated Ron Mitchell of Eastonville.

'I can keep that up for hours,' Baumann said softly. 'You and I have to work together. I said no drinking, and that means no drinking? Get it?'

Cade braced himself, then he came off the bed in a rush, his fist wildly seeking Baumann's deadpan face. Baumann shifted his head, avoided Cade's blow with humiliating ease and banded his fist with all his weight and strength in a devastating punch that landed just below Cade's heart.

Cade dropped to his knees, gasping.

Baumann grabbed Cade by his hair, dragged him half upright and then slapped his already bruising face three more times with a vicious violence that stunned Cade into helplessness.

Leaving Cade on the floor, Baumann walked across the room and opened the door. He took the coffee from the porter, winked and put the tray on the dressing-table. He turned in time as Cade, gathering his remaining strength and self-respect, struggled off the floor and came staggering towards him. Brushing aside Cade's weak lead, Baumann slammed another punch into

Cade's body, bringing him with thudding violence to the floor.

Baumann sat on the bed, took out a pack of cigarettes and lit a cigarette.

Cade lay on the floor, then he stirred and dragged himself to a sitting position. He stared at Baumann, his eyes hating him.

'You're quite a bastard, aren't you?' he said.

Baumann smiled.

'That's just what I am. Now we have that behind us, have some coffee.'

He got up and poured coffee into a cup.

'Sugar?'

'No.'

Baumann handed Cade the cup and then sat on the bed again.

Cade remained on the floor. His body ached from the two heavy punches he had taken. His mind had become clear. He suddenly realised how he must look to a man like Baumann, sitting there on the floor, a lush with a bruised face, his clothes crumpled and his defeat showing so plainly. His tiny spark of self-respect asserted itself. He got painfully to his feet, drank the scalding coffee, crossed the room and poured more coffee.

'Cigarette?' Baumann asked, offering his pack of Matrocaïne.

'Thanks,' Cade said and lit the cigarette. He drank more coffee, then putting down the cup, he went into the bathroom and bathed his aching face. Feeling clearer in mind than he had felt since he left New York, he came back to the bedroom and went over to the open window and looked across at the Frontier Post, breathing in the cold, crisp air.

'She should be arriving in about three hours. We have plenty of time,' Baumann said. 'Feel like eating?'

'No.'

'Well, I do. If you want anything, ring. They won't serve you with any alcohol, so don't try that one on.' He went to the door. 'See you,' he said and left.

Cade drank another cup of coffee, then sat down in a lounging chair.

After a while he got bored with his depressing thoughts, and getting up, he went down to the lobby.

Taking his overcoat off the peg, he walked across to the Boutique shop. The Magnum-sized bottles of Scotch whisky made him stare, but he resisted the urge to buy one. Instead, he bought a packet of wine gums and seeing Baumann had come out of the hotel, he joined him.

'Feel like something to eat now?' Baumann asked. 'They have some pretty good steaks. You should eat something.'

'I guess,' Cade said. He wasn't hungry, and his ribs still ached, but he had the impulse to become normal again.

When he had finished a very late lunch, Baumann paid the check, and the two men went out into the growing dusk and sat in the Jaguar, facing away from the frontier post.

Anita Strelík arrived at the frontier post at 17.50 hours: an hour ahead of Baumann's estimated time.

By now it was dark, but Baumann spotted her red Aston Martin as it pulled up under the bright lights of the frontier post.

'Here she comes,' he said. 'She won't be more than five minutes passing through the customs. We'll get moving.' He started the engine and headed towards the Lausanne road.

Turning in his seat, Cade looked through the rear window. He caught a glimpse of a tall woman, wearing skiing trousers, a white windcheater and a white helmet that concealed her hair. She was standing by the Aston Martin, talking to one of the grey-uniformed frontier guards. Then he lost sight of her.

He felt suddenly excited: a feeling that hadn't come to him for many months.

'We'll let her pass,' Baumann said. A few minutes later, the impatient note of a horn made Baumann pull to his near side and the Aston Martin stormed past, travelling at over a hundred kilometres an hour.

'That's the way to get yourself killed on these narrow roads,' Baumann said, slightly accelerating.

He switched on the short wave receiving set on the dashboard and picking up the microphone, said, 'Horst calling YR. Come in, YR.'

A man's voice came through the loudspeaker, 'Listening in, Horst.'

'Our party is heading for Lausanne. Where are you?'

'By Grand Pont.'

'She'll come that way. Follow from in front, but watch it. She's moving fast.'

'Roger.'

They didn't see the Aston Martin again until they had reached the outskirts of Lausanne. Baumann who knew the road from Vallorbe like the back of his

hand, had driven with tremendous bursts of speed when the road was straight, and with carefully controlled speed on the bends. He knew he couldn't be much more than three minutes behind the Aston Martin, but he was relieved when he caught sight of the red car now slowed down in the heavy traffic entering Lausanne.

They crawled along the traffic congested road until they began to cross the Grand Pont. They had already lost sight of the Aston Martin. The car had weaved through the traffic much faster than Baumann could drive. The short wave set came to life. 'YR calling. She's right behind me, trying to pass. We are on Avenue du Lemman, heading for Vevey.'

'Don't let her pass,' Baumann said. 'I'm closing up.'

'Roger.' There was a sudden curse. 'Hell! She's passed me! That was nearly a pile up! She snaked around me right in the teeth of an oncoming truck and she scraped by it by the paint of her fender!

She's way out of sight and I'm blocked in!'

'Call yourself a driver?' Baumann snarled. He accelerated and threaded the Jaguar dangerously through the traffic, and in a few seconds, swept past YR. He waved and the driver waved back.

Cade was sitting forward now, tense and excited. He couldn't but admire the way Baumann was handling his powerful car.

'If she thinks she can shake me off she has another think coming,' Baumann muttered. He reached for the microphone. 'Calling Grau. Come in, Grau.' Another man's voice came from the loudspeaker. 'Listening in, Horst.'

'Our party is heading your way. Where exactly are you?'

'I'm parked on the lake road between Claren and Montreux.'

'Stand by. She's moving fast.'

'Roger.'

They were through Lausanne and moving fast along the lake road. The traffic was heavy and Baumann took chances, cutting in, overtaking when he shouldn't, but always watchful for any sign of a policeman.

It was now very dark, and there was a light mist coming in from the lake. The oncoming traffic with undipped headlights bothered Baumann.

'We could lose her in this visibility,' he said and he sounded uneasy. 'I'll have to hope Grau picks her up.'

They drove through Vevey, then as they increased speed on the straight road to Montreux, Cade said suddenly, 'You're passing her! She's stopped!'

He had just seen the Aston Martin parked in the shadows as Baumann swept past.

Cursing, Baumann stood on his brakes and the Jaguar squealed as it slowed. He pulled to the kerb.

'Are you sure?'

Cade leaned out of the car and looked back along the dark road.

'Yes ... she's talking to a cop. She's been flagged down.'

'About time,' Baumann said and picked up the microphone. 'Grau, our party has been stopped for speeding. She'll be along in a while. It's my guess she won't be racing this time.'

'Roger.'

Baumann replaced the microphone.

'We'll have to watch her. This is where we lost her before,' he said to Cade. 'What's happening?'

Cade was still staring back along the road.

'The usual. He's giving her a ticket. She should be through any moment now.'

Baumann set the Jaguar moving at a sedate sixty kilometres an hour.

'Here she comes,' Cade said.

The Aston Martin passed them and Baumann tagged along behind its twin rear lights. From then on, through Montreux, Villeneuve and towards Agile, they had no trouble keeping behind the Aston Martin.

'Is she heading for the Italian border or will she go up into the mountains?' Baumann muttered. 'It's going to snow.' As rain began to blur his windshield, he switched on the wipers.

A car behind them flashed on its headlights and flashed them off.

'That's Grau.' He reached for the microphone. 'She's just ahead, Grau, overtake me and get in front of her. Watch out you don't lose her at the fork road to Italy. She could turn off for Villars.'

'Roger.'

Twenty minutes later with Grau some metres ahead of the Aston Martin and with Baumann a hundred metres behind, they saw the car swing to the left.

'She's going to Villars,' Baumann said. 'It'll be rough up there,' and he accelerated. 'The visibility as you climb gets bad, and it is certain to be snowing.'

They hadn't climbed more than a kilometre before snow started flaking on the windshield. The Aston Martin had increased speed and was travelling dangerously fast, taking the sharp bends with a skill that hinted the driver knew the road well. Baumann had turned off his lights and he drove after the Aston Martin, keeping close, scared that on this stretch of road he would lose sight of the car.

Grau had gone on the Italian road and he had had to stop, reverse and come after them.

Through the narrow bottleneck of the small village of Huemoz, the Aston Martin slowed and Baumann had to brake sharply to avoid a collision. He cursed under his breath.

'I wonder if she spotted us,' he said. 'There she goes. Goddamn it! She can certainly handle that lump of metal!'

They stormed up the steep ascent and into the village of Chesieres, empty in the mist and snow.

The Aston Martin was now a hundred metres ahead. Baumann took the slight turn out of the village too fast and got into a skid. He steered into the skid, slowed and for a moment the Jaguar threatened to turn right around. Then Baumann got control and straightened the car.

'She's gone,' Cade said in a flat voice. He had been sitting forward, staring through the misting windshield, his eyes glued on the bright red rear-lights: now they had vanished.

'She's heading for Villars . . . there's nowhere else for her to go,' Baumann said. He slowed and began the steep approach that led to the town.

'To your right!' Cade exclaimed. 'She's gone in there! Double gates! I saw two men closing them!'

Baumann kept on, but slowed. A few metres further on, he pulled up. Grau in a Lancia drew alongside. Cade looked at him as he leaned out of his car window, snow whitening his green Swiss hat and his raincoat. Grau was around the same age as Baumann. He was fat and broad-shouldered and typically Swiss.

'She turned off into some estate,' Baumann said. 'Did you spot her?'

'No. How can you see anything in this snow?'

Baumann got out of his car.

'Wait here,' he said and bending his head against the driving snow, he walked back down the road.

Grau manoeuvred his car ahead of the Jaguar to get off the road. He lit a cigarette and getting out, came over to Cade.

'So you're Cade,' he said, peering at him. 'I've heard a lot about you.'

'I've heard a lot about myself,' Cade said indifferently. He shifted around so he wasn't looking directly at Grau and fumbled for his cigarettes.

'You certainly can take photographs,' Grau went on. 'I've followed all your work.'

'So have I,' Cade said.

There was a long pause, then Grau sensing he wasn't wanted, walked back to his car.

After a five minute wait, Baumann returned. 'She's gone in there all right,' he said. 'High walls; iron gates and a long drive-in. Can't see any sign of a house. Okay, Grau you stay here. Watch the gates. We are going on to Villars. I have to find out what this place is.'

'Okay,' Grau said and waved as Baumann, getting into the Jaguar, drove on towards Villars.

chapter eight

The lounge of the Bellavista Hotel was deserted at this time of 20.00 hours. The few visitors who had come up to Villars with the optimistic hope of early sport were in the dining room. A big log fire crackled in the grate. The parchment-shaded lights cast a red glow on the highly polished parquet floor. The room was homely and pleasant.

Cade sat in a lounge chair in a corner, away from the fire, his eyes closed. He wanted a drink, but he fought off the urge. He had gradually become intrigued by Braddock's assignment, and he knew if he started drinking, he wouldn't get pictures. He now wanted to prove to himself that he was still capable of getting pictures.

The door pushed open and Baumann with Ben Sherman on his heels, came in. They joined Cade and sat down.

Cade opened his eyes and stared at Sherman.

'Where did you spring from?'

'Don't talk about it,' Sherman said with an exaggerated shudder. 'I nearly killed myself trying to follow that bitch from Paris. I'm still in a state of shock.'

'I've heard all that,' Baumann said impatiently. 'You knew what you were in for. Give it a rest.' He leaned forward and tapped Cade on his knee. 'I have been asking around. Anita has gone to ground in the Chateau owned by General Fritz van Ludwig. Remember him? He surrendered his army to the Russians in 1943 at Stalingrad. He has been living in retirement in this Chateau for the past twenty years. What do you make of that?'

Cade shrugged.

'Nothing ... what do you?'

Sherman said, 'I remember him. When the Russians made him a prisoner, he broadcast anti-Hitler propaganda from Moscow. Anita is Russian by birth, isn't she?'

'That's right,' Baumann said. 'The idea was she came to Switzerland to meet a lover, not an eighty-year-old German General.'

'That should disappoint Braddock, shouldn't it?' Cade said.

The two men looked at him.

'This intrigues me,' Baumann said. 'You and I are going to take a look at that Chateau tonight.'

'Is that such a hot idea?' Sherman asked. 'You'll leave footprints all over the place. Do you want to alert Anita we are on to her?'

'It won't matter if it goes on snowing this hard,' Baumann pointed out. 'Any prints we make will be covered by the morning. Look, Ben, suppose you go and relieve Grau? He's been out there for the past two hours.'

'Why should I care?' Sherman said. He got up and went over to the fire, holding-out his hands to the comforting warmth.

'Get going!' Baumann snapped. 'He'll relieve you at midnight.'

'How nice,' Sherman said, but he left the lounge.

Baumann lit a cigarette.

'S. B. has a fantastic instinct for news. This could turn out to be a lot more interesting than a love affair. An aged German General with Russian sympathies and one of our top movie stars. Could be quite a story. You and I are going to get it, Cade.' As Cade said nothing, Baumann stood up. 'Let's eat. We have a cold night ahead of us.'

After dinner, the two men went to their rooms. Baumann had booked three bedrooms all leading into one another with a sitting-room at the far end. He had ski clothes for Cade and both men changed. Then equipped with skiing boots and gloves, they left by the service door of the hotel and drove down to where Sherman, cold and miserable, was sitting in his Simca.

There was now a high wind and the snow made visibility difficult. It was also freezing.

'We'll take a look around,' Baumann said as Sherman lowered his car window.

'Rather you than me,' Sherman said sourly. 'God! It's cold!'

Cade and Baumann reached the high wrought iron gates after a few minutes of difficult walking.

They paused outside the gates. Beyond them, they could make out the dim outlines of a small lodge.

A light showed in one of the lower windows.

'We don't go in that way,' Baumann said. 'Come on . . . follow me.'

He continued on down the road by the high flint and concrete, wall of the estate. After walking some thirty metres, he stopped.

'We'll go over the wall.'

He stepped down into the ditch, the snow covering his boots, and set his back against the wall.

'Come on. I'll give you a lift up.'

Cade put his foot in Baumann's clasped hands and Baumann heaved him up. Cade's fingers reached the top of the wall, got a grip and he swung his leg over. He sat astride the wall and looked down at Baumann.

Baumann tried to reach Cade's outstretched hand, but he was too short and he cursed.

'Okay. I'll wait here. You take a look. Be careful. See if you can get a look at the Chateau.'

'How do you expect me to get back over the wall on my own?' Cade asked mildly. He was careful not to let Baumann see how intrigued he was and how he welcomed this adventure.

'I'll get a rope. Ben has one in his car. I should have thought of that. You wait here. I won't be long,' and Baumann vanished into the darkness.

Snow pelted down on Cade as he crouched on the wall. He decided not to wait for Baumann. He scraped a high pile of snow off the wall where he was sitting, marking his place of entry, then he swung his leg over and dropped down into the deep snow. Although the snow broke his fall, the drop came as a jar. His feet stinging, his legs a little shaky he set off through the trees, moving cautiously and silently.

He had no idea how long he walked. It was some time. The wind howled, around him and the snow turned him into a white, ghost-like figure. Finally, he was free of the trees, and he came upon a large flat snow-covered surface which he guessed would be the lawn, surrounding the Chateau.

It was then that he saw the house: a big, rambling building with turrets: a typical Swiss Chateau, three storeys high with narrow windows, some of which were showing lights.

A feeling of danger made him pause. He drew back and stood by a snow-covered fir tree and looked towards the Chateau. He stood motionless, watching, unaware of the coating of snow that built over him. Slowly, his eyes became accustomed to the dark, and he was thankful he had made no attempt to cross the coverless space ahead of him. He saw a movement near the Chateau, and peering into the driving snow, he saw a figure of a man walking with bent head around the outside. Then he saw other figures standing against the walls, sentinels, spaced widely apart, facing him and

sinister enough to make him step further back into the shelter of the forest.

He remained watching for some twenty minutes until the cold began to creep up his legs and chill his body. Then, satisfied he had seen enough, he headed back to the wall.

He had difficulty in finding the mark he had left on top of the wall. In a few more minutes, the snow would have obliterated his landfall.

He called softly, 'Baumann?'

'Right here,' Baumann replied from the other side and a rope snaked over the wall, the end dropping at Cade's feet.

It took him several minutes to haul himself up and he was so out of condition, he had to rest on top while his breath rasped at the back of his throat and his heart slammed against his ribs. Finally, in control of himself, he dropped down beside Baumann.

'Why didn't you wait for me?' Baumann said angrily. 'I told you to wait.'

'So you did,' Cade said. 'Let's get out of here.'

They walked in silence to the Jaguar, then shaking off the snow that covered their clothes, they got into the welcome warmth of the car.

'What's cooking?' Baumann asked as he began to drive back to the hotel.

'Something,' Cade returned. 'We'll talk about it when we get back to our room.'

A few minutes later, Baumann pulled up outside the hotel and the two men entered the warm, brightly lit lobby. The manager of the hotel, Willi Tanz, a pudgy, smiling Swiss and a good friend of Baumann's came from behind the reception desk.

'Horst, you haven't completed the usual police cards for your friend and Mr. Sherman. Would you do that for me?'

'Sorry, I forgot,' Baumann said. 'Give them to me. I'll take them up with me.'

Tanz gave him the two cards, then nodding, Baumann led the way to the lift. Up in their sitting-room, Baumann began to strip off his skiing clothes.

'Well? Come on, Cade, don't be so damn mysterious.'

Cade had taken off his windcheater and now, sitting before the fire, he began to take off his boots.

'There are about a dozen armed men patrolling the grounds of the Chateau,' he said. 'At least two have automatic rifles.'

Baumann gaped at him.

'Are you sure?'

'I watched them for a good twenty minutes. I am sure.'

'Well, what do you know?' Baumann kicked off his boots. He pushed his stockinged feet towards the fire. 'But why?'

Cade shrugged.

'How's the barometer?'

Baumann got to his feet, went over to the telephone and asked the desk about the weather, listened, grunted and hung up.

'It's rising. Should be fine tomorrow'

'There's a big Arolla pine tree at the edge of the forest,' Cade said. 'It faces the Chateau. It's my only hope to get pictures. There's a terrace on the second floor. If it is sunny tomorrow, Anita might possibly come out on the terrace. I can't see any other way I can get pictures. I'll need a 600 mm Tele Rokkor lens. Where can I get one?'

'What about these armed men?'

'Never mind about them. Concentrate on the lens.'

Baumann thought for a moment, then looked at his wrist watch. The time was a few minutes after midnight.

'I can get you one tomorrow some time.'

'I want to be up that tree with my equipment before daylight.'

Baumann frowned, then crossed to the telephone, dialled a number, waited, then spoke in a low voice. Cade didn't bother to listen. He moved close to the fire, his mind busy with the technical difficulties that faced him of getting good pictures of the terrace. With the Rokkor lens, he decided he could get good close-up photographs always providing the sun was warm enough to tempt Anita out onto the terrace.

'I'll send Grau,' Baumann said as he hung up. 'I have a friend who owns a photographic shop in Montreux. He has the lens. Grau will have it here in less than three hours.'

He went into Grau's bedroom and got him out of bed. Grau cursed when he was told he had to go right away to Montreux, but after a brief delay while he struggled into his clothes, he went off.

Cade had brought his camera equipment from his bedroom into the sitting-room. He began loading film into his Minolta.

'I'll need enough sandwiches to last me for twelve hours, coffee, a half-bottle of brandy, some thin cord, three metres of knotted rope, a good hunting

knife and a set of climbing irons,' he said. 'That tree isn't going to be easy to climb, but once I'm up, I'm not likely to be seen.'

Baumann nodded. For the first time since he had met Cade, he looked animated.

'I'll fix all that for you. Anything else?'

'I don't think so. I'm going to bed. Call me at six o'clock. That'll be time enough.'

'Do you want me with you?'

'Once I'm up the tree, I'll be better on my own, but I might have to get out fast. How can we keep in touch?'

'I have a two way radio you can take with you. It'll be heavy, but it is the safest way for us to keep in touch. How's that?'

'Fine. You'll have to come over the wall with me. If it stops snowing, you'll have to wipe out our prints and you can help carry the gear, then you can leave me.'

A little after 06.00 hours the following morning, Cade and Baumann left the hotel. Grau had got the Rokkor lens and Baumann had collected the various things Cade had asked for: these he had packed into a rucksack which Cade carried. It was now no longer snowing, and the moon, riding high, cast a brilliant light over the white landscape. It was frosty and well below freezing, the road surface was dangerously slippery.

They stopped beside Sherman's Simca, still parked off the road. Baumann told him about the armed men guarding the Chateau.

'What's the idea?' Sherman asked, looking startled.

'That's what we are going to find out,' Baumann said. 'You are to wait this side of the wall: When I return, it's your job to throw me the rope. So keep awake.'

Baumann led the way to the wall, hoisted Cade up and then Sherman hoisted Baumann up beside Cade. Sherman tied the rucksack, Cade's camera equipment and the short wave receiver to the end of the rope and Baumann hauled them up. The two men slid over the wall and cautiously moved off through the dark forest. They walked one behind the other, Baumann careful to step into Cade's deep footprints.

Finally, Cade said softly, 'We're not far off. Watch out.'

Baumann grunted. They could see through the trees the snow-covered lawn ahead of them, dazzlingly white in the moonlight.

Cade continued more slowly until he reached the tall Arolla pine tree he had noticed during the night.

'See them?' he whispered and pointed across the lawn.

Baumann's breath hissed in sharply as he saw the sentinels. They were spaced some ten metres apart: dark, motionless figures, holding rifles and looking towards the forest.

Cade stepped back into the shadows. He sat in the snow and began to fix the climbing irons to his boots. His fingers were so cold he had difficulty in securing the straps.

Baumann said, 'What the hell do you think they're guarding?' He was still staring across the lawn at the motionless men.

'You make a guess,' Cade said and stood up. He uncoiled the knotted rope, tossed one end over the nearest bough, then catching hold of the loop, he dug his climbing irons into the trunk of the tree and slowly, laboriously hauled himself up. He reached the lower branches, then paused. 'Okay. Let's have the equipment, then you get off,' he said, astride a branch and leaning forward. 'Make sure you get rid of our prints.'

Baumann attached the various things they had brought with them to the end of the rope and watched while Cade hauled them up into the tree. Then with a wave of his hand and a muttered 'Good luck,' he moved off into the darkness, pausing at every step to wipe out their prints with a fir branch he had cut off.

Cade waited until Baumann was out of sight, then he began climbing. He moved cautiously to avoid knocking off the thick snow that covered the branches of the tree. Finally, nearly at the top of the tree, he was level with the big terrace under which the massive entrance to the Chateau was built.

He set up his light tripod, tying the legs to the fir branches, then he secured his rucksack to another branch and settled down to wait. After a cold, dull half hour, he switched on the short wave receiver and called Baumann.

'Listening in,' Baumann's voice said immediately.

'Keep that way,' Cade said into the microphone. 'I'm all set and waiting,' then he switched off.

With nothing to do for at least four hours, he relaxed back against the tree trunk and closed his eyes.

By 11.00 hours the sun was so warm that Cade discarded his windcheater. He had eaten some of his sandwiches and had drunk two cups of coffee, laced

with brandy. He had now screwed his camera to the tripod and clipped the long Rokkor lens which, when he peered through the eyepiece, brought the terrace nearly on top of him. He could easily make out the cracks in the terrace wall and see the water dripping off the gutter as the snow began to melt.

Since the first light of dawn, he had been able to see the sentinels clearly. He counted nine of them: big, burly, heavily-built men, clad in black raincoats, rubber boots and plastic, black hoods.

Examining them through the 600 mm lens, he decided he had never seen such a tough bunch of men. He had been right about them carrying automatic rifles. When the sun came up, six of them went into the Chateau, the other three continued to patrol and Cade got the impression that they were very alert and watchful.

Around 10.00 hours, the french windows leading onto the terrace opened and an elderly man wearing a woollen cap pulled down over his ears and a shabby overcoat came out. He carried a long handled broom. He began to sweep the terrace clear of snow. Having completed his task, he set out four lounging chairs and carried out a wooden slatted table.

This activity encouraged Cade. He spent a little time focusing his camera on one of the chairs, making sure he would get needle-sharp photographs, then he replaced the lens cap and lit a cigarette.

During the wait between 10.00 hours and 11.00 hours he had a sudden scare. In the silence, he heard men's voices directly below him talking in German. He stiffened and looked down, but the thickly interwoven branches of the tree made it impossible for him to see what was going on at ground level. It was irritating that he couldn't see what was happening, but at the same time, reassuring to know that if these men looked up they couldn't discover him. Finally, he heard the crunch of snow as the two unseen men moved away.

It wasn't until the sun was directly overhead, and it had become really warm, that there was any further activity. Suddenly the french windows opened and Anita Strelik came out onto the terrace.

Watching her through the telescopic lens, Cade immediately recognised her. She was tall, blonde with an Ekberg bosom, flat Asian features and a lazy, tigerish walk that always excited her fans. She was wearing close fitting scarlet pants, a white sweater and her short blonde curls glittered in the

sunshine.

Cade slightly altered the focusing ring of his camera, bringing her face into sharp focus. Through the powerful telephoto lens, he could see dark smudges under her eyes and sharply etched lines of weariness either side of her nose down to her full lips.

He leaned back, resting his hands on his knees and watched her. She sat in one of the lounging chairs, opened her bag and took out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. As she lit the cigarette, a man came out onto the terrace and joined her. He wore black skiing trousers and a black turtle-neck sweater: a man of middle height, his iron grey hair close cropped, his shoulders square, his bearing upright and military.

Cade peered at the man as he walked over to Anita who raised her hand, smiling at him. The man bent and kissed her fingers and Cade instinctively pressed the cable release. The focal plane shutter snapped across. The first photograph was taken.

He continued to stare at the man. Where had he seen him before? In the course of his work as a photographer, Cade had seen many famous personalities, and with growing excitement, he knew this man was famous, although for the moment he couldn't place him. He peered through the eyepiece of the camera, shifting the Rokkor lens slightly as the man sat down by Anita's side, then he stiffened, looked again at the hard, sun-tanned face that filled the focusing screen. His mind flashed back to two years ago when he had visited East Berlin and had taken a series of photographs for the Daily Telegraph's Weekend Supplement. He remembered waiting for three cold, boring hours for the expected arrival of General Erich Hardenburg, Head of the East German Secret Police, and how, when the General eventually arrived, he had glared at Cade and refused to be photographed.

And here he was: the most dangerous and the most ruthless German since Himmler, whose cold, snake-like eyes seemed to be staring directly into Cade's as Cade peered through the telephoto lens, a sudden chill crawling up his spine.

Hardenburg! Here with Anita Strelík! This couldn't make more sensational news than if Garbo at the height of her fame had had a tryst with Himmler himself. So Braddock with his instinct for sensational news had guessed right!

This accounted for the armed men in the grounds of the Chateau: they

would be members of Hardenburg's Secret Police. Cade, suddenly apprehensive, looked at the patrolling men, aware that this could be his most dangerous assignment. He knew that if he were seen, none of these armed men would hesitate to shoot him. There would be no questions asked. A finger would tighten on a trigger, and that would be that.

He forced his mind back to the terrace. The elderly man who had swept the terrace came out, carrying a loaded tray and a silver coffee pot which he put on the table. He then went away.

Anita and Hardenburg were talking animatedly. Hardenburg got up to pour coffee while Cade continued to take photographs. He was satisfied in the brilliant sunshine he was getting the photographs he wanted.

Then the french windows opened wide and two men came out onto the terrace. One of them, a tall, gaunt-looking man of forty or so, wearing the same skiing outfit as Hardenburg was pushing a wheel chair in which a much older, fatter man sat.

Cade immediately recognised the gaunt man as Herman Lieven, Hardenburg's right-hand man, who, two years ago, had been so rude to Cade when he told him the General was not to be photographed.

But it was the old man who held Cade's rooted attention. He stared through the long focus lens, not believing his eyes, but knowing that there could not be another man who looked like Boris Duslowski. The fat, coarse face, although aged, still had the same arrogant, sneering character. The completely bald head, the pointed ears, the snarling bitter mouth made this man Duslowski, one time Stalin's Chief of Police, terror of the Jews who had ranked in world opinion with the same feeling of revulsion and horror as the Beast of Belsen.

Cade's instinct for headline news and his past training as a news hunter immediately told him he was witnessing a historical event. This meeting of such ruthless men with the astonishing addition of one of the most famous international movie stars was an unique event of world-shaking proportions. Here was an enemy of the present Russian regime consorting with the man who controlled East Berlin and supposedly an ally of the Russian government.

In spite of his excitement and surprise, Cade continued to take photographs.

Hardenburg and Duslowski were now at the table. Lieven had returned to

the Chateau. He came out again carrying a portfolio of papers which he laid on the table.

Anita got up and stood behind Hardenburg, her hand resting familiarly on his shoulder. Hardenburg took papers from the portfolio: one of them was a map. This he spread out on the table. The efficiency of the Rokker lens enabled Cade to see some of the details of the map which was of West Berlin. He suddenly realised he had finished one cartridge of film. He rewound the film and reloaded the camera.

The two men were talking earnestly together. Hardenburg was pointing out features on the map.

Cade went on pressing the cable release, knowing his camera was making history, that the pictures he was obtaining were beyond price: far too important and explosive to sell to Whisper. These pictures had to go direct to the Secretary of State. No one should see them until he had seen them.

Cade had sufficient political education to realise such pictures could give America a tremendous bargaining power with the Russians.

The men were still talking, still examining the various papers that Hardenburg had taken from the Portfolio when Cade had finished his second cartridge of film. He now had seventy-two explosive pictures, and that was enough. His one thought was to get away, get back to the hotel and get the pictures to the American Consul at Geneva.

He found he was shaking as he wound off the film. He put the second cartridge in his pocket, then took a long drink from the brandy bottle. As he put the cap back, the bottle slipped out of his frozen fingers and dropped through the fir branches into the snow below.

He remained motionless, his heart racing, cold chills crawling up his spine. If one of the guards passed and spotted the bottle!

He switched on the short wave receiver.

'Baumann? Are you listening in?'

'This is Sherman,' Sherman replied. 'How's it going?'

'I have all the photos I need,' Cade said. 'I want out. What's the situation?'

'You can't leave before dark. I drove past an hour ago. There are two men at the gates, watching the length of the wall. You'll have to wait until it's dark.'

'It's important. I have dynamite here.'

'No can do. You'll have to wait.'

'Okay,' Cade said resigned and switched off. He looked towards the terrace.

Hardenburg was wheeling Duslowski back into the Chateau. Anita, carrying the portfolio, followed him. The french windows closed and the terrace became deserted.

Cade began to dismantle his camera which he carefully packed into the rucksack. He untied the tripod and packed that away. While he worked, his mind was busy.

He had no idea how the American Consul would handle his pictures and he didn't care, but he was certain he had a responsibility to get the pictures to the Consul and he was determined to do so.

He relaxed back against the trunk of the tree and waited for darkness.

A little after 17.15 hours, snow began to fall, and it turned very cold. Darkness crept over the forest, shutting out the Chateau except for three or four lighted windows.

During the long, cold wait Cade had watched the guards as they walked around the Chateau, pausing to talk to one another, then moving on, alert and watchful.

Now, satisfied it was dark enough, Cade switched on the short wave receiver.

'Baumann?'

'Listening in,' Baumann said. 'Okay. We're coming. Think you can find your way back to the place we came over?'

'I'll try. In this darkness it all looks the same.'

'You've got something?'

'The biggest ever,' Cade said. 'Give me a flash from your headlights when you arrive. That'll guide me.'

'What do you mean ... the biggest ever?' Baumann demanded.

'You're wasting time. Get me out of here,' Cade said and switched off.

He began lowering his equipment down by rope. It didn't prove easy as the branches of the tree grew closely together, but finally, after some nerve irritating jerking and moving of the rope, the equipment finally reached the snow.

Cade began his cautious descent. He felt shaky and short of breath. Once or twice, he had to pause to rest, but at last, he dropped into the snow. He picked up his equipment and stood motionless, listening. He heard no sound

except the moaning of the wind and the movement of the trees. He had only a vague idea where the wall was over which he had climbed. He began a cautious approach towards where he thought it would be.

His equipment was heavy and he wished Baumann was with him to carry the short wave receiver. Then suddenly his foot caught in something and he fell flat on his face. For a moment he choked in panic as his mouth and nose sank into the cold snow, then he struggled up on hands and knees.

He became aware of a soft light all around him. He looked back, his hair bristling, fear clutching at his heart. For a long moment the Chateau seemed bathed in light, then everything went dark again, blinding him. Somewhere in the distance he heard a shrill bell ringing.

He knew then that he had set off a trip wire of an alarm. He got frantically to his feet, more frightened than he had ever been before. His one thought now was to get to the wall before the guards began to search the forest. He dropped the short wave receiver, but clung onto the rucksack as he blundered forward into the darkness, banging against tree trunks, his panic increasing.

Then suddenly he saw the beam of a flashlight switch on and immediately switch off some fifteen metres to his right.

Cade came to a standstill, trying to control his hard breathing. He listened, peering towards where he had seen the light.

He heard a rustle of shrubs, then a movement alarmingly close to him. He let the rucksack slip to the snow. His heart was beating so violently, he had trouble in breathing. Instinctively, he crouched, then suddenly the beam of the flashlight hit him.

He was half aware of a man's grunt of startled surprise, then without thinking, Cade dived forward, his hands seeking the man's legs. His shoulder hit the guard's thigh, and together, the two men crashed down into the snow.

Frantic with panic, Cade butted, punched and clawed at the invisible face. For several seconds he was on top of the fight as the guard had been taken completely by surprise, but Cade's efforts were not enough to reduce the guard to submission. Once over his surprise, the guard exerted his superior strength. His body was trained and he quickly slid away from Cade's clumsy hold. He flung Cade off and then rearing up, crashed down on Cade as he was trying to get to hands and knees.

Cold, steel-like fingers quested and found Cade's throat. He felt fingers close on his windpipe, and for a horrible moment, he thought he was about to

die. He remembered the hunting knife he carried in his belt. Even as consciousness began to slip away from him, he found the knife, drew it and stabbed upwards with all his remaining strength. He felt a jar run up his arm as the knife cut through the guard's clothing and sank into his body. The steel-like fingers released their grip. Sobbing for breath, Cade rolled clear, got to his feet and peered down at the dark figure in the snow.

He became aware of voices not far off. At the same time he saw a light flicker on, outlining the wall that was not more than ten metres from where he was standing.

He turned and blundered towards the wall, still gripping the knife, his heart pounding, his breath rasping in his throat.

'Cade?'

He recognised Baumann's voice.

'Yes!' His voice was a croak.

Something hit him sharply on the shoulder. It was the end of the knotted rope that Baumann had tossed over the wall. He could hear men crashing through the forest and looking back, cold sweat masking his face, he could see flickering beams from a dozen flashlights.

He caught hold of the rope, dropping the hunting knife, and bracing his feet against the wall, he climbed to the top. He got astride the wall, then dropped over, falling into the snow close by where Baumann was standing.

'Let's go!' Cade panted as he struggled to his feet. 'They're after me!'

Baumann was quick-witted enough to recognise the frantic note in Cade's voice. He grabbed hold of him, hoisted him to his feet and half dragged, half pushed him to the parked Jaguar.

It wasn't until the car was moving with Cade, panting and exhausted by his side that Baumann said, 'What the hell's going on?'

Cade tried to speak, but he couldn't. He was remembering with horror the feel of the hunting knife as it had cut into the guard's clothes and into his body. He could have killed him! he thought.

'Cade!'

'Shut your goddamn mouth!' Cade managed to say. 'Drive!'

Ten minutes later, skidding on the ice-bound road at a reckless speed, Baumann pulled up outside the hotel.

'I have to have a drink!' Cade said. 'For Christ's sake ... get me a drink!'

Baumann got out of the car, went around to Cade's seat, opened the door

and hauled him out.

'Don't take me through the hotel, you fool,' Cade panted. 'I'm all covered in blood!'

'Just what the hell has happened?' Baumann demanded, his voice rising.

'Get me upstairs!'

Baumann cursed, then grabbing hold of Cade, he led him to the back of the hotel. They took the service lift up to the second floor. Baumann, still clutching hold of Cade, walked quickly along the corridor and into their sitting-room where Sherman was pacing up and down, and Grau, a bored expression on his face, sat in a chair, chewing gum.

As they entered the room, both Grau and Sherman gaped at Cade, then Grau sprung to his feet.

'He's bleeding!' he exclaimed.

Cade tore off his windcheater, stained with the guard's blood.

'Give me a drink, damn you!' he said furiously to Baumann. 'Don't gape at me ... get me a drink!'

Baumann, unnerved, poured drinks.

'Are you hurt?' he asked Cade as he gave him a stiff whisky.

Cade drank, sighed, finished the drink, then pushing by Baumann poured another drink.

'I'm all right. I had a fight with one of the guards ... I had to knife him.'

There was a sudden silence as the three men stared at Cade.

'You knifed him?' Baumann's voice rose. 'You... Good God! You didn't kill him?'

Cade looked at the blood on his fingers. Shuddering, he took out his handkerchief and wiped his fingers clean.

'I don't know. He would have killed me if I hadn't had the knife.' He was now recovering. The blessed calming effect of the alcohol seeping through him minimised his panic. 'We have to get these photos to the American Consul, Baumann! They are dynamite! Come on ... we have to get to Geneva fast!'

'What do you mean... dynamite?' Baumann shouted. 'Don't you realise, you fool, I don't know what the hell's been happening? What is all this?'

Cade blinked, then pulled himself together.

'Sorry. This is big. The biggest. There's been a meeting between General Erich Hardenburg and Boris Duslowski. They were on the terrace, examining

maps together and I have photos of them.'

Baumann stared at Cade as if he thought he had gone mad.

'Duslowski? Are you crazy? Duslowski killed himself ten years ago! What are you yammering about?'

'That's what I thought, but he's alive. Why do you imagine they have all those armed guards?'

'They're Hardenburg's men!'

'Duslowski?' Baumann continued to stare at Cade. 'You're drunk! He's dead! What are you talking about?'

'He's alive! He and Hardenburg!' Cade said, banging his fist on the table. 'I have pictures to prove it!'

'If this is true ... !' Baumann stared at Cade's white face and saw by the expression in his eyes it was true. 'Give me the films! I'll fly them to S. B. right away!'

Cade shook his head.

'No, you won't. He's not having them. These pictures are far too important to give to Braddock. They are going direct to the American Consul at Geneva!'

Baumann's face hardened.

'You're under contract to S. B. What pictures you take are his property. Give them to me!'

'The Consul gets them, Baumann, and no one else!'

Baumann's face darkened with rage.

'This is what comes of working with a drunk!' he exploded. He turned to Sherman. 'Do you go along with him, Ben?'

'You bet I don't,' Sherman said. 'S. B. gets the photographs! It's up to him what he does with them!'

'That's it,' Baumann said and held out his hand. 'Let's have the films, Cade. It's three to one... we'll get rough if we have to!'

'Will you?'

Cade backed away. He wished he had more guts. He wished he wasn't a drunk. He was frightened of Baumann, but something behind his fear stiffened his morale, making him determined not to give the films to this stocky Swiss.

He snatched up a glass ashtray: a despairing gesture of the weak against the strong.

'You start something and this goes through the window,' he said.

Baumann sneered at him.

'What's a broken window between friends?' he said. 'Come on, Cade, you can't be all that drunk. Give me those films!'

Sherman and Grau began to move towards Cade, then they paused and stiffened as a loud knock sounded on the door.

Sudden alarm in his eyes, Baumann said, 'Who is it?'

A voice snapped: 'Police! Open please!'

Suddenly white-faced, Baumann turned on Cade.

'Give me those films, you drunken fool!'

As Cade continued to back away, the door leading into his bedroom opened and a tall, powerfully built man, wearing the grey uniform of the Swiss Police strode into the room.

'Remain as you are!' he barked, his hand on the butt of the gun at his hip.

A short, stocky man in a black raincoat and wearing a black slouch hat moved in behind the policeman. He walked across the room, turned the key in the lock and opened the door. Two other men who Cade recognised as Hardenburg's guards came in, their hands in their raincoat pockets, their faces stony as they took up position around the room.

Baumann faced the Swiss policeman.

'What does this mean?' he blustered. 'What do you want?'

'Your passports please,' the policeman said. 'You haven't registered in this hotel... that is an offence.'

Baumann drew in a long breath of relief.

'I'm sorry. We have been busy. We forgot. Here is my passport. My friends have theirs.'

Watching, Cade wasn't fooled by this by-play. If the policeman had come on his own, he would have accepted the situation, but with Hardenburg's men in the room, he knew it would only be a matter of minutes before they were all arrested and searched.

Both Sherman and Grau took out their passports and handed them to the policeman.

'Mine's in my bedroom,' Cade said casually. 'I'll get it.' He began walking slowly towards his bedroom, his body stiff with fear, his heart thumping.

'Hey, you! Wait!' the policeman snapped.

His body cringing, Cade continued into his room. He heard footsteps

behind him. He caught hold of the door and slammed it shut in the face of the advancing guards. He turned the key as a shoulder slammed against the door which creaked, but held. He jumped across the room, flung open the door that led into the corridor, hesitated, then stepped back behind the door, pulling it against him, wedging himself between the door and the wall.

He heard the door from the sitting-room burst open.

'He's getting away!' he heard a man shout. 'Quick!'

He then heard two men dart into the corridor and start running towards the elevator. He remained where he was, his heart hammering.

From the sitting-room, he heard the policeman say, 'You are under arrest.'

He listened to Baumann's excited protests, then came the sounds of a scuffle. He heard Sherman curse.

Then: 'All right... all right.' This from Baumann. 'We'll come ... cut it out!'

Crouching against the wall, Cade listened to the tramp of feet as the policeman and the two other men with Baumann, Grau and Sherman moved past his open door and on down the corridor.

He waited until he heard the whine of the elevator, then he moved out from behind the door. He snatched up the wool-lined motoring coat he had worn on the way up to Villars, straggled into it, then ran to the french windows. He opened them and stepped out onto the snow-covered balcony.

He closed the windows behind him.

Looking down onto the courtyard of the hotel, he saw three parked cars and two Swiss Policemen standing by them. Immediately below him was another balcony. Without hesitation, he swung himself over the balustrade and dropped onto the balcony below. The fall shook him, but he was far too frightened to care. The french windows leading into the room were dark. He tried the latch: it gave and he moved into the darkened room. He paused to listen, then hearing nothing, he pulled the drapes across the windows and groped his way across the room, found the light switch and turned it on.

His blood froze when he saw a girl in the bed close to him. She was beginning to sit up as he threw himself on her, his hand clamping down on her mouth, the weight of his body crushing her.

He was aware of two terrified blue eyes as he lay flat on her. She tried to struggle, but she was helpless under his weight.

Cade said in a hysterical whisper, 'Don't be frightened. I won't hurt you. I want your help!'

The big, terrified eyes searched his face, then seeing he was much more frightened than she was, the girl began to relax. Slowly, he released his grip over her mouth.

'What is it?' she asked, her steady, calm voice did much to blanket Cade's own panic. She spoke English but from her accent, he guessed she was either Swiss or French.

'I'm sorry.' He sat upright, taking his weight off her body. 'I didn't know you were here. You won't scream, will you?'

'You're crushing me'

He realised he was sitting on her legs and he hurriedly stood up.

'I'm sorry ...'

'Don't keep saying that! Oh! You frightened the life out of me!'

'Nothing like the way you scared me,' Cade said with feeling. 'You wouldn't have a drink up here?'

She was studying him.

'You can't be Val Cade, can you?' She sat up, holding the sheet against her breasts. 'I believe you are.'

He now became aware of her. She was around twenty-five years of age, dark, and she made him think of Elizabeth Taylor. Not quite so beautiful, but beautiful enough.

'Yes, I'm Cade. How did you know?'

'How do I know? My dear man! I am probably your most dotty fan! You aren't here to rape me, are you?'

Cade suddenly felt as if he was going to faint. He looked around wildly, then seeing an armchair, he dropped into it. Cold sweat glistened on his face. The horror of the thrusting knife, the blood that had stained his hands still haunted him.

'No ... I... ' he managed to say, then he put his hands to his face, fighting off the faintness that threatened him.

He was vaguely aware that she had got out of bed and he heard a tap running, then a glass was thrust into his hand.

'Drink this!' Her voice was sharp and cut into his fading consciousness.

The bite of whisky revived him. He drank greedily, then let the glass slip out of his fingers. It dropped with a little thump on the floor.

'Could you please tell me what is happening?' the girl asked.

He looked at her, amazed at her calm.

'Who are you?'

'Me?' She had thrown on a flame-coloured wrap and was now sitting on the side of the bed. 'My name is Ginette Dupris. I am a French national. I work for a Travel Agent in Montreux. I am on vacation, and I am crazy about your photographs. Is that the kind of thing you want to know?'

'Have you a car?'

'It's in the garage below... a Volkswagen.'

'I have to get to Geneva. May I take your car?'

'You mean ... now?'

'Yes.'

'But what would I do without a car? If you must go to Geneva, I'll drive you there myself.'

'I don't want you to get involved in this,' Cade said. 'It's safer for you to know nothing about it. It is of international importance. I would rather go on my own. You could get into trouble.'

Her eyes sparkled.

'Is it something to do with some photographs you have taken?'

'That's it.'

'Then I'll help you. I insist. I won't be a moment.' She snatched up clothes from a chair and disappeared into the bathroom.

Still unnerved, Cade poured more whisky into his glass. Then he got up, drank, turned off the light and crossed to the window. He opened the windows and moved silently out onto the balcony.

Immediately below him, he could see a group of men, four of them in Swiss police uniform: the other two were Hardenburg's men. He stepped hurriedly back out of sight, but remained still, listening.

One of the policemen was speaking into the microphone.

'He could have got away, but we are searching at the hotel,' he was saying. 'Block the road above and below the town. He can't get far. Watch it... he's dangerous.'

Cade stepped back into the room and closed the windows. He might have guessed it wasn't going to be all that easy. He stood still, trying to make up his mind what to do when Ginette, wearing a grey and scarlet wool dress, came from the bathroom.

'I'm ready,' she said. 'I'll just get my back 'They are setting up road blocks,' Cade said. 'We can't go by road now.'

'They? Who do you mean?'

'The police,' Cade said.

At that moment there came a sharp rap on the door.

chapter nine

Cade and the girl stared at each other as the rap sounded on the door again.

Cade looked wildly around the room for a hiding-place. His hand went into his pocket, his fingers closing protectively over the two cartridges of film.

'The bathroom,' the girl whispered and pointed. Then raising her voice, she called, 'Who is it?'

'Police,' a voice answered. 'Open up, please.'

As Cade moved silently into the bathroom, Ginette zipped open her dress, stepped out of it and snatched up her wrap.

Cade was now in the bathroom. He silently closed the door, then looked around the small, windowless room. There was no way of escape. His heart pounding, he leaned against the wall by the door and waited.

He heard Ginette unlock the bedroom door, then a man's voice said, 'We are looking for a man ... a dangerous criminal.'

'Oh!' Ginette's voice sounded alarmed. 'There's no one here but me. I've been here all evening ... I was just changing.'

'Your passport, please.'

There was a pause, then Cade heard heavy footfalls as the man entered the bedroom.

'Here's my passport,' Ginette said. 'What's this man wanted for then?'

'Murder,' the policeman said and walked with a heavy tread to the bathroom, turned the door handle and looked in.

Cade cringed back against the wall, closing his eyes. He couldn't believe his luck when the door closed again.

Murder! So he had killed the guard! He was aware now of nothing but panic. He lost count of time, and it was only when the bathroom door opened and Ginette said, 'It's all right... they have gone,' that he made the effort and pulling himself together came out into the bedroom.

Ginette had put on her dress. She looked at him, her face pale, her eyes uncertain.

'You had better tell me what has happened.' Her voice was determined. 'They say you are wanted for murder.'

Cade walked slowly to a chair and sat down. In a flat monotone, he told her the whole story about Braddock, Anita Strelík and what he had seen on the terrace of the Chateau. Ginette, sitting on the edge of the bed, listened, in silence, her face set in her concentration.

'If I hadn't knifed him he would have killed me,' Cade said as he concluded telling her of his fight with the guard and his escape. 'They must know now I have photographs. They are certain to have found my camera equipment. I can't give up now. I must get these films somehow to the American Consul.'

'Are they so important?' she asked.

'I suppose so.' He pulled at his underlip, uncertain, 'We seem to have spies everywhere. This could be stale news, but if it isn't, then it must be vitally important.'

'I could take them. There's nothing to stop me driving to Geneva.'

Cade stared at her, hesitating. On the face of it, it seemed to be the obvious solution, then he remembered Old Sam, the negro barman at Eastonville. He also had seemed to be the obvious solution. But who was this girl? How could he trust her with something so important? Besides, suppose they did stop and search her? It was unlikely, but it was also possible. Then she would be in serious trouble. No, he couldn't push his responsibility onto her.

'I have to do it myself,' he said. 'Do you know this district well? Is there any way of getting to Geneva except by road?'

'There's the railway down to Montreux. You could get a train to Geneva, but I suppose they will be watching the station, won't they?' She thought for a moment, then asked, 'Can you ski?'

Cade nodded.

'I'm not good, but I can manage.'

'We could get to Aigle by ski-paths. I know the way. I have often done it. From Aigle we could get a bus to the lake and then a steamer to Geneva.'

Cade thought about this. Taking the girl with him worried him.

'I can't expect you...' He stopped and shrugged. 'Anyway, we have no skis.'

'I can get them. A friend of mine has a villa not far from here. He's in Paris at the moment. He has skis ... if we can get to the villa.'

'This is dangerous,' Cade said. 'I can't drag you into it. Tell me where the villa is . . . I'll find it.'

'You wouldn't.' She got briskly to her feet. 'I'll go down and see what's happening. If the police have gone, we can go through the garden. If they are

still in the hotel, we'll have to wait.'

She was gone before he could stop her. He looked around for the whisky bottle. He found it on the dressing-table and poured a stiff drink. For-titled, he lit a cigarette and began to pace up and down.

In about ten minutes, she returned.

'They have left the hotel,' she told him. 'There is a policeman outside the hotel, but we can go by the back way. There's no one there.'

'My three friends who were arrested? What's happened to them?' Cade asked.

She shook her head.

'Mr. Tanz ... he owns the hotel... told me they were driven away in a police car.'

Cade grimaced. He watched Ginette go to a closet and take out a short, wool-lined coat.

As she struggled into it, she said, 'Come on, let's go.'

He went up to her and put his hands on her shoulders.

'Just why are you doing this?' he asked. 'I have told you I have killed a man. If the police find me, they will probably kill me. They wouldn't want me to talk. If they find you with me God knows what they will do to you. Why are you doing it?'

She looked up at him, her blue eyes sparkling.

'Because I am an infatuated, sexually aroused fan of yours,' she said softly. 'Do you want it plainer than that? This is the most exciting thing that has ever happened to me.' Then putting her hand to his face, she pressed her soft, yielding lips to his.

For a brief moment, Cade held her close to him, then he pushed her gently away. He was depressed that the feel of her lips against his raised no desire in him.

'All right,' he said. 'If that's the way you feel, then let's go.'

She gave him an intent stare and then smiled ruefully.

'You are not madly romantic, are you?' she said and moved to the door.

Cade dropped the half-empty bottle of whisky into his pocket. He followed her out into the corridor, then walked with her to the stairs. Halfway down the final flight, she lifted her hand and he stopped.

She went on, looked into the deserted lobby, beckoned and he joined her.

She led the way past the crowded dining room, down a corridor to a glass

door that led onto the terrace.

They walked onto the thick, frost hard snow. It was very cold, and the moon drifted in dark clouds.

Cade could feel the frost nipping his face.

He followed the girl who seemed to know the way. She went down snow covered steps and along a path that led through fir trees to a head-high wall.

'There's a path the other side,' she said. 'It leads to the villa.' She rested her hands on top of the wall.

'Help me over.'

He took her foot in his mitten-covered hands and lifted her. She swung over the wall and dropped the other side. He quickly joined her.

It was dark there under the trees, but the fitful moon lit the snow-covered open ground beyond the forest.

As they started off, Cade looked back over his shoulder. Their trail of footprints made sinister black marks in the snow: an easily read escape route, and it worried him.

A ten minute walk through the forest brought them to the back entrance of the villa: a small two-storey wooden building with a big terrace facing the view of the slopes.

He followed her up the wooden steps, standing close to her as she groped along one of the rafters supporting the sloping roof over the front door.

'I have it,' she said and thrust a key into the front door lock, turned the key, and together, they moved into a cold, dark hall. As he shut the door, she turned on the light.

'The shutters are closed. No one can see the light from outside.'

'We had better hurry,' he said, worried. 'If Hardenburg's men see our prints out there, they'll investigate.'

'I'll get the skis,' she said. 'Wait here.'

'Let me help you.'

'It's all right.' There was a note of impatience in her voice. 'They are downstairs. We don't want to make a mess all over the place. Look at your boots.'

As he looked down at his snow-covered boots, she opened a door leading to the stairs, turned on the light and went quickly out of sight.

Cade needed another drink, but he resisted the urge. As he waited nervously, he put his hand in his coat pocket. Then he stiffened, his heart

skipping a beat. He groped feverishly, snatched out the bottle of whisky, dropping it on the floor and groped in that pocket. Both pockets were empty. The film cartridges had gone!

For an agonising moment, he stood motionless, then his heart racing, he moved swiftly to the head of the stairs and peered down into a corridor.

'Ginette!' His voice was off-key and frantic.

She called from somewhere out of sight. 'I won't be a minute.' Wait. ..'

He blundered down the stairs and along the corridor which led to an empty garage, Standing by a rack on which were hung a number of skis, Ginette looked towards him, her eyes startled.

'What is it?' she demanded.

'The films have gone! They were in my pocket in the hotel bedroom . . . they have gone!'

'Oh! No!' She came towards him. 'Are you sure? Have you looked in all your pockets?'

He snatched off his gloves and went frantically through his pockets. Then with a gesture of despair, he slammed his fists together.

'Every goddamn thing I do goes wrong!' he said, his voice shaking.

'You could have dropped them. When you climbed the wall. .. they could have fallen out of your pocket.'

'I don't know. . . they have gone!'

'If they did, they will be there now. I'll go back and look. They weigh nothing ... they wouldn't sink in the snow. They are probably right by the wall.'

Her words gave him hope.

'They could be. I'll come with you. Come on... let's go.'

He turned and ran along the corridor and up the stairs.

'Val! Please! Wait!'

She came hurrying after him. He turned impatiently. They were now in the hall, his hand on the door latch.

'What is it?'

'You mustn't go out there! It's too dangerous. The police may be waiting for you. I can go. I can say I was returning to the hotel by the back way if they spot me. You wait here. I won't be five minutes.'

'You may have trouble finding them. They're so small. No, I'll come with you. Let's go,' and he began to open the door, but she moved past him and

pushed the door shut.

'Do be sensible! Of course I can find them! I'll bring them right back! Why take risks? I couldn't bear anything to happen to you.'

Cade looked intently at her, then a ghost of a smile lit up his white face.

'Maybe after all there is still a chance for me,' he said. 'Maybe I am not such a drunken sucker as I think I am. Of course! And I nearly fell for it! So you are an infatuated, sexually aroused — that was what you said, wasn't it? — fan of mine! That kiss! You took my films. You took them from my pocket while you were pretending to swoon in my arms, didn't you?'

'I took them? How can you even think of such a thing? I'm doing my best to help you!' Her big blue eyes were shocked; her lips trembled. 'If you don't trust me, then let us both go together and look for them. I was only...'

It was now she who began to open the front door and he who slammed it shut.

'Give me those films!' His voice was thick with fury. 'I won't tell you a second time! I'll strip every shred of clothing off you until I find them! Give them to me!'

She stared for a long moment at him. There was a crazy, furious light in his eyes that made her flinch. She backed away, then lifting her shoulders in a gesture of surrender, she forced a smile.

'I did nearly get away with it, didn't I?' she said. 'I really thought I was going good. All right, you can have them.' She dropped her hand into her coat pocket and lifted out a .38 Smith and Wesson automatic which she levelled at his chest. 'Don't move, Mr. Cade. I don't want to kill you, but I will if I have to.'

Cade looked at the gun, rock steady in her gloved hand, then he looked directly into the blue eyes that had suddenly become cold and hard.

'Just who are you?' he said. 'I should have guessed you were too damned convenient. Who are you?'

'Back into that room behind you, please. You may as well make yourself comfortable. I am sure you are cold. You can light a fire in there.' She waved the gun at him. 'Don't try anything heroic.'

Cade made a grimace of disgust. He turned and walked into the living-room clicking on the light.

There was a large fireplace, laid with logs at the far end of the room. He walked to it and applied the flame of his cigarette lighter to the wood

shavings that caught, and in a few moments, flames were blazing around the logs.

Ginette tossed the half-empty bottle of whisky onto the settee.

'Amuse yourself with that,' she said. 'I have a telephone call to make.'

She backed to where the telephone stood on the sideboard, dialled a number, the gun in her hand still covering Cade who took a long drink of whisky. He shuddered as he replaced the cap.

Ginette said, 'Is Nicki there?' She listened. 'In ten minutes? Tell him to call me. I'm at his place. Tell him it is very urgent,' and she replaced the receiver.

Feeling the heat of the fire, Cade took off his wool-lined coat and dropped it on the floor, then he sat on the settee, nursing the whisky bottle.

'Are you working for the Russians?' he asked, looking at Ginette, mild interest on his white face.

She studied him, then smiled.

'Perhaps. I shall be leaving you in a little while. I don't know what will happen to you. You will be safer if you stay here. If you leave, you will almost certainly be caught. They will probably kill you. If you will take my advice, stay right here.'

'Your anxiety for my welfare is most touching,' Cade said. He lit a cigarette and was pleased to see his hands were steady. 'I am trying to work out this little puzzle. Since you have my films, do you see any reason why you shouldn't explain to me how you come into all this?'

She thought for a long moment as she regarded him, then she shrugged.

'No. It's fair. Anita Strelik and I have worked together for a long time. We have been trying to get evidence of Hardenburg's treachery. Anita dangled her charms before him and he fell for her. She convinced him she was against the present Russian Government and regretted the old regime.

Hardenburg was so infatuated with her that he confided to her that he was planning to put Duslowski back into power. It was such a far-fetched story, we needed tangible proof to support it. It wasn't difficult to bait a hook for Mr. Braddock of Whisper. He became curious and sent you here to take photographs. . . and we needed the photographs which we weren't capable of getting ourselves. I reserved a room below yours at the hotel and waited hopefully. You obligingly took the photographs and I now have them. It is really very simple, isn't it?'

Cade thought this over.

'How did you know I would blunder into your room the way I did?'

'Know? I didn't. It was sheer luck. You don't imagine I would have been in bed if I thought you would be arriving? I had been up all night watching you in that tree and I just had to get some sleep. When you turned up, I couldn't believe my luck!'

'Who is Nicki?'

'You are curious, aren't you? He owns this villa. He will take one of your films by road. I'll take the other by train. I believe in spreading the risk.'

'And I remain here, toasting my toes by the fire until Hardenburg's thugs find and kill me. Is that the idea?'

She lifted her shoulders indifferently.

'I'm sorry for you. A year ago I would never have put you in danger, but you are expendable now. You can't consider yourself anything but unimportant now, can you?'

'That seems to be the idea most people have of me,' Cade said, staring into the fire.

She studied him, then leaning forward, she said, 'You have always interested me. I think you are a great artist and I admire your work. Is it really true you ruined your life because of some slut in Mexico?'

Cade continued to stare into the fire.

'You are amusing as a spy,' he said, 'and you are quite picturesque with your gun and your sleazy methods of sexual awareness, but would you please keep your bitchy nose out of my past?'

She flushed.

'I'm sorry ... really I mean that.'

'That's nice of you.' He glanced at her and smiled. 'I can understand your morbid interest. I have become a museum-piece to be stared at and wondered at.' He lifted the bottle and took a long drink, then as he replaced the cap, he went on, 'What really surprises me is your faith in me as a photographer. I should have thought you, with your intelligence, your sophistication and your quite impressive courage, would have had more psychological awareness. Didn't it occur to you that I was so goddamn drunk that I just didn't get any photos?'

She became motionless, her fingers tightening on the gun, her blue eyes widening.

'What are you saying?'

'Baby, my heart bleeds for you,' Cade said, still staring into the fire. 'You claim to know something about me, but your research has been very superficial. Didn't you hear about my debacle with General de Gaulle? I had the exclusive on him, but I was so plastered at the time, the pictures were completely out of focus. Do you imagine I sat up in that tree without getting plastered? Don't puff out that pretty little chest of yours. Wait until the films you have stolen from me have been processed. It's my bet they will be as useless as I am: probably a little more useless, if that is possible.'

He watched her lose colour and confidence. She put her hand inside her coat as if the touch of her fingers on the two film cartridges would work a miracle.

'I have a sneaking feeling you have backed the wrong horse,' Cade said, stretching his feet out towards the fire. 'For the past six months, people have been making the same mistake about me. A man on the bottle is always a rotten bet. I don't know who your Russian boss is, but he won't be at his amiable best when he finds out you picked on Cade of all the photographers to get vitally important photos.'

She sat for a long moment, still and tense, then she said, 'You know how to talk, don't you? You think my psychology is all wrong, but I don't. No matter how drunk you were, you would have taken good pictures. This happens to be one of the biggest news scoops ever. You don't bluff me. You — Cade — wouldn't have fallen down on an assignment this important.'

Cade smiled at her.

'Your confidence in me is touching,' he said. 'The proof of the pudding is in the processing.'

The sound of the telephone bell made them both start. She lifted the receiver, the gun covering Cade.

'Ginette,' she said, then listened. She went on, 'Will you come here at once, Nicki? It is urgent. We have what we hoped for. Yes ... all right. I'll wait, but be as quick as you can,' and she hung up.

Cade was taking another long pull from the bottle.

'Oh! Can't you stop that!' she exclaimed angrily.

'Don't worry about me.' The bottle nearly slipped out of his hand. He hastily grabbed it. He now seemed pretty drunk. 'It's time you began to worry about yourself, baby. We're no longer alone. While you were talking to your boyfriend, company has arrived.'

Her eyes widened.

'Company? What do you mean?'

'There's creaking and groaning outside.' Cade got to his feet, lurched, recovered himself and pitched the bottle of whisky on the settee. 'Someone is prowling around on the terrace.'

She raised her hand and they both listened. They could hear the rise of wind in the fir trees. There was a sudden startling noise that made her catch her breath as snow dropped from the roof onto the terrace.

Cade walked unsteadily to the door, opened it and listened. Ginette watched him, tense. He beckoned, holding up his finger for silence. She came close to him.

'They are in the basement,' he said, his mouth close to her ear. 'Listen!'

She leaned forward as he opened the door wider.

She heard nothing, then his hand slammed down on her wrist, knocking the gun out of her grip. He gave her a hard shove that sent her reeling back into the middle of the room. He scooped up the gun and smiled at her.

'Still psychologically wrong, baby. You really thought I was drunk, didn't you? That was just an act. I'm not all that much of a sucker, am I?'

She stood motionless, her eyes smouldering.

'Okay, let's start where we came in. Give me those films!'

She backed away, but moving quickly, he caught hold of her wrist, twisted it, turning her, then pushed her bent arm up against her shoulder blade. She caught her breath in a little exclamation of pain.

'Do you want me to strip you?' he asked. 'Give me my films!'

As he increased the pressure on her arm, she hurriedly took the two film cartridges from her pocket and dropped them on the rug.

He gave her a violent shove that catapulted her across the room to land sprawling on the settee. He picked up the cartridges, then walked over to the lounging chair and sat in it.

'You know something?' he said, looking at the two film cartridges in his hand. 'I have had a change of mind. I am now asking myself why I got so worked up about Hardenburg and his silly little plot. I am asking myself why my people should give a damn? So why not let him go ahead? There was a time when I could get worked up over a situation like this, but not now. Did you ever hear of a town called Eastonville? There, they hate Negroes. They really know their business of hating in that small town. I got worked up about

that. I thought the murder of two young Negroes was the end of civilisation. But I have learned different now. I know that people have to die so other people can survive. I had photographs of that murder: proof that five brutal bastard men clubbed the life out of two harmless negroes. That film was destroyed by a man who had no conscience.' He frowned as he recalled Deputy Sheriff Schneider's sneering face. 'Right now, you imagine the world will come to an end if you don't prove that Hardenburg is a traitor. You just happen to be young. I assure you the world will go on its own sweet way because treachery is the normal background of our lives these days. So it seems to me I won't have any part of this. These films belong to me and as my property, I can do what I like with them.'

Deliberately, he began to pull the film out of the cartridge in exactly the same way that Deputy Sheriff Schneider had done once in Eastonville airport.

'No!' Ginette screamed, jumping to her feet. 'Don't!'

'If you come near me,' Cade said evenly. 'I will hit you pretty hard. I mean that.' He began stripping the second film out of the cartridge while Ginette, white-faced, watched him. Finally he looked down at the coils of film at his feet, then he tossed the empty cartridges onto the settee. 'Keep these as a memento. Don't look so tragic. You just backed the wrong horse.' He reached for the bottle of whisky and took a long drink, sighed, then took another. As he lowered the bottle, he said, 'I think I deserve that drink. You are not a very clever spy, are you? You should have seen that the bottle is still half full.'

'I was mad to have hoped for anything from a spineless drunk like you!' Ginette said furiously. 'Go back to your Mexican slut if she will have you!'

Cade smiled.

'Okay, so I'm spineless. Okay, she is a slut, but she and I together discovered something, short as it was, that you will never find. I say this because when I look at you, I see you haven't ever found a man to love you the way a woman needs love. While I am philosophising, here is another tip: the trick in this complicated life which we are trying to live is to appreciate the good moments and discount the bad ones. That has been my trouble. The bad moments have always been too much for me. Take my advice and drop this cloak and dagger nonsense. Find a man, get married, have kids: that's what a woman is made for.'

'Shut up!' Ginette said furiously. 'Who cares what a drunk like you thinks?'

Cade scratched the side of his nose, then he nodded.

'You have a point.' He paused to take a final drink, then he dropped the bottle on the floor and stood up. 'People who can't manage their own lives should never offer advice. Well, so long, baby. I am on my way. You stay here and keep warm until your boyfriend arrives. I am going to take a ski run down to Aigle.'

As he walked to the door, Ginette said, 'Stop playing the fool! They are waiting for you outside! Stop being dramatic!'

He paused, turned and smiled.

'I have no future. I now have no means of earning a living so why shouldn't I be dramatic? I am inserting a full stop to a way of life that now has no further interest to me. I am going to be as dramatic as I like.'

He left the room and walked down the stairs to the garage.

As he strapped on a pair of skis, he thought of Juana. He wondered what she was doing. Probably, he thought, she was with some rich, fat American, her slender fingers stroking an ageing, hairy chest while the sun of Acapulco made patterns of light and shade around her. He tightened the last strap. His mind shifted in quick succession to Sam Wand, Ed Burdick, Mathison and finally to Vicki Marshall. He shook his head sadly as he realised that they had become shadowy, unreal figures, no more important to him than characters he had seen in some good movie. Then as he opened the garage doors, he thought of Adolfo Creel. The fat Mexican with the food stains on his suit, his smile, his kindness, and his loyal friendship became startlingly real and very close as Cade moved out into the moonlit snow.

He was just beginning to gain speed for his rush down the slopes to Aigle when one of Hardenburg's men spotted him.

The rifle sight lifted, a finger tightened. There was a bang and a flash as the bullet sped on its destructive way.

Cade was already dead as his skis churned up the snow in a disorderly, but artistic pattern that could be read as his epitaph.

THE END