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SIGNET
BOOKS

A Fast-Paced Thriller a la Spillane
by the author of *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*

I'll Bury My Dead

JAMES HADLEY CHASE



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I'll Bury My Dead
James Hadley Chase
1953

CHAPTER ONE

I

Harry Vince came into the outer office, and hurriedly shut the door behind him, cutting off the uproar of men's voices, each apparently trying to shout down the other, the sound of raucous laughter and the shuffling of many feet.

'Sounds like a zoo in there, doesn't it? And - phew! - it smells like one, too,' he said, as he crossed the room, moving between the empty desks to where Lois Marshall sat at the telephone switchboard. He carried a bottle of champagne and two glasses which he set down carefully on a nearby desk. 'You don't know what you're missing, staying out here. You couldn't cut the atmosphere in there with a hacksaw.' He mopped his face with his handkerchief. 'Mr. English says you are to have some champagne. So here it is.'

'I don't think I want any, thank you,' Lois said, smiling at him. She was a trim, good-looking girl around twenty-six or seven, dark, with severe eyebrows, steady brown eyes and the minimum of makeup. 'I'm not mad about the stuff, are you?'

'Only when someone else pays for it,' Vince returned as he expertly broke the wire cage and thumbed over the cork. 'Besides, this is an occasion. We don't win the Light Heavyweight Championship every day of the week.' The cork sailed across the room with a resounding pop! and he hurriedly tipped the foaming wine into a glass.

'Thank goodness we don't,' Lois said. 'How long do you think they're going to stay in there?'

'Until they get chunked out. They haven't finished the whiskey yet.' He handed her the glass. 'Here's to Joe Ruthlin, the new Champ. May he continue to flatten them as he did tonight.'

He poured champagne into the second glass.

'Here's to Mr. English,' Lois said quietly, and raised her glass.

Vince grinned.

'Okay. Here's to Mr. English.'

They drank, and Vince grimaced.

‘Maybe you’re right. Give me a straight Scotch any day. He put down his glass. Why didn’t you let Trixie look after the board? It’s her job.’

Lois lifted her elegant shoulders.

‘Think of the company she would have to mix in. They know better than to bother me, but Trixie. . .’

‘Trixie would have loved it. She likes a guy to pat her fanny occasionally. She thinks it proves she’s desirable. Anyway, those apes in there are more or less harmless. Trixie would have taken care of herself if you had given her the chance.’

‘Maybe, but she’s still a kid. Sitting around in an office until long past midnight isn’t the sort of life she should live.’

‘You talk like a grandmother,’ Vince said, grinning. ‘If anyone has to stay late, it’s always you.’

Lois shrugged.

‘I don’t mind.’

Vince studied her.

‘Doesn’t your boyfriend mind?’

‘Do we have to talk nonsense, Harry?’

Her steady brown eyes were suddenly cold.

Recognizing the danger signals, Vince said, ‘You were with Mr. English when he started this caper, weren’t you?’

‘Yes. We had only one small office, the typewriter was on hire and the furniture, what there was of it, wasn’t paid for. Now we have this place – thirteen offices and a staff of forty. Good going in five years, isn’t it?’

‘I guess so.’ Vince lit a cigarette. ‘He has the magic touch all right. It doesn’t seem to matter what he takes on. He has to make a success of it. Fight promotion this week, a circus last week, a musical show the week before that. What’s he going to do next?’

Lois laughed.

‘He’ll find something.’ She looked up at Vince, seeing a square-shouldered man of medium height, around thirty-three, with a crew haircut, pale brown eyes that looked worried and uneasy, a good mouth and chin and a straight narrow nose. ‘You’ve done pretty well for yourself, too, Harry.’

He nodded.

‘Thanks to Mr. English. I’m not kidding myself. If he hadn’t given me the

chance, I would have been still sweating my guts out as an accountant with no prospects. You know, sometimes, I just can't believe I'm his general manager. I can't make out why the devil he ever gave me the job.'

'He has a good eye for talent,' Lois said. 'He didn't give you the job because he liked the way you wear your clothes, Harry. You earn your money.'

'I guess I do,' Vince said, running his fingers through his close-cut hair. 'Look at the awful hours we keep.' He glanced at his wristwatch. Eleven—fifteen. 'This shindig's going on until two o'clock at least.' He finished his champagne, waved the bottle at Lois. 'Have some more?'

She shook her head.

'No, thank you. Does he seem to be enjoying himself?'

'You know what he's like. He's been standing around all evening watching the other guys drink. Every so often he puts in a word here and there. He acts like he has just dropped in on somebody else's party. Abe Mendelssohn has been trying to corner him for the past hour, but he's having no luck.'

Lois laughed.

'He wants Mr. English to finance his women wrestlers.'

'That's not a bad idea,' Vince said. 'I've seen some of those babes wrestle. I wouldn't mind getting a job as their trainer. I'd like to have the chance of showing them a few holds.'

'Better talk to Mr. English. He might give you the job.'

The telephone buzzer sounded.

Lois pushed in a plug and picked up the harness she had laid on the desk.

'English Promotions,' she said. 'Good evening.'

She listened while Vince watched her. He saw one of her dark eyebrows lift in surprise.

'I'll ask him to speak to you, Lieutenant,' she said, and laid down the harness. 'Harry, would you tell Mr. English Lieutenant Morilli of the Homicide Bureau is calling? He wants a personal word.'

'These coppers!' Vince said, grimacing. 'Wants some favour, I'll bet. A couple of fight dockets or free seats for a show. You don't want me to disturb Mr. English to talk to that chiseller, do you?'

She nodded, her eyes serious.

'Please tell him it's urgent, Harry.'

He gave her a quick look, then slid off the desk.

‘Okay.’

He went across the big room and pushed open the door that led into Nick English’s private office. The uproar of voices surged past him as he went in.

Lois said, ‘I’m getting Mr. English now.’

At the other end of the line Morilli grunted.

‘Better get his car to the door Miss Marshall,’ he said. ‘When he hears what I’ve got to tell him he’ll want some fast action.’

Lois thanked him, plugged in another line and told the garage attendant who answered to have Mr. English’s car at the front entrance right away. As she pulled out the plug, Nick English came out of his office, followed by Vince.

English was six foot three in his socks, and broad, giving the appearance of massiveness without fat. He was on the right side of forty, and his hair was jet—black, cut short and inclined to curl. There were white streaks on each side of his temples that helped to soften an otherwise hard and relentless face. He had a high broad forehead, a short blunt nose, a thin mouth and a square dimpled chin. His eyes were wide set, pale blue and piercing. He was arresting to look at without being handsome, and gave an immediate impression of granite-hard strength.

Lois moved away from the switchboard, indicating a telephone on a nearby desk.

‘Lieutenant Morilli is on that line, Mr. English.’

English lifted the receiver.

‘What’s on your mind, Lieutenant?’

Lois moved quickly over to Vince.

‘Better get Chuck out here, Harry. I think he’ll be needed.’

Vince nodded and went into the inner office.

Lois heard English say, ‘When did it happen?’

She looked anxiously at the big man as he leaned over the desk, frowning into space, his long fingers tapping on the blotter. She had known Nick English now for five years. She had first met him after he had thrown up an engineering job in South America and had opened a small office in Chicago to promote a gyroscope compass he had invented to be used in petroleum drilling operations. He had engaged her to run the office while he had walked the streets in search of the necessary capital to manufacture the compass.

There had been difficulties, but she had quickly learned that difficulties

and disappointments only made English work harder. She discovered he had an undefeatable spirit. There had been times when she had gone without salary and he had gone without food. His optimism and determination had been infectious. She knew he must succeed. No one who worked as hard as he did could fail to succeed. But it had been a year of no rewards and constant setbacks and had forged a link between them that she had never forgotten, but at times, she wondered if he had forgotten. Finally the compass had been financed and had proved a success. English had sold his invention for two hundred thousand dollars plus a royalty on future sales that still brought him in a comfortable income.

He had then looked around for other inventions to promote, and during the next three years he built up a reputation for himself as a man who could get money out of a stone. With his newly acquired capital, he broadened his scope, and went into the entertainment business, promoting small shows and nightclub cabarets, and then branching out to bigger and more ambitious shows.

Money began to pour in, and he formed companies. More money poured in and he took over the lease of two theatres and a dozen nightclubs. Later, when money became almost an embarrassment, he moved into the political field. It was his money that put Senator Henry Beaumont into power and was keeping him in office.

Looking at English now, Lois realized just how far he had come and what a power he had become, though she regretted his rise to a height where she could no longer be of real use to him, when she was just one of many who served him.

Vince came out of the inner office with Chuck Eagan, who drove English's car and did any job that English wanted done without argument or question. He was a small, jockey-sized man in his late thirties. He had sandy coloured hair, a red, freckled face, stony eyes and quick, smooth movements. He was looking at his worst at the moment: a tuxedo didn't suit him.

'What's cooking?' he asked out of the side of his mouth, edging up to Lois. 'I was enjoying myself.'

She shook her head at him.

English said into the telephone mouthpiece: 'I'll be right over. Leave things as they are until I get there. I'll be less than ten minutes.'

Chuck stifled a groan.

‘The car?’ he asked, looking at Lois.

‘At the door,’ she told him.

English hung up. As he turned the three stiffened slightly, their eyes on his, waiting for instructions. His solid suntanned face told them nothing, but his blue eyes were hard as he said, ‘Get the car, Chuck. I want to be away at once.’

‘It’s waiting, boss,’ Chuck said. ‘I’ll meet you downstairs,’ and he went out of the room.

‘Let those jackals finish the case of Scotch, and then get rid of them,’ English said to Vince. ‘Tell them I’ve been called away.’

‘Yes, Mr. English,’ Vince said and went into the inner office. As he opened the door the noise of laughter and voices came into the silent outer office with a violence that made English scowl.

‘Stick around, will you?’ he said to Lois. ‘I may need you tonight. If you don’t hear from me within an hour, go home.’

‘Yes.’ She looked searchingly at him. ‘Has something happened, Mr. English?’

He looked at her, then moving over to her, he put his hand on her hip and smiled.

‘Did you ever meet my brother, Roy?’

She showed her surprise as she shook her head.

‘You haven’t missed anything.’ He gave her hip a little pat. ‘He’s just shot himself.’

She caught her breath sharply.

‘Oh. I’m sorry.’

‘Save it,’ he said, and moved toward the door. ‘He doesn’t deserve your sympathy and he wouldn’t want mine. This could be messy. Stick around for an hour. If the press get it, stall them. Tell them you don’t know where I am.’

He took his hat and coat from a cupboard.

‘Did Harry give you some champagne?’ he asked, putting the hat on his head and giving the brim an irritable jerk.

‘Yes, Mr. English.’

‘Good. Well, so long for now. I may call you.’

He threw his coat over his arm and went out, closing the door behind him.

II

Chuck Eagan swung the big, glittering Cadillac into a downtown side street and reduced speed.

Halfway down the street on the right he saw two prowling cars parked outside a tall building that was in darkness, except for two lighted windows on the sixth floor.

He drew up behind the parked cars, cut the engine and got out as Nick English opened the rear door and untangled his long legs to the sidewalk.

Chuck looked enquiringly at him.

‘Want me to come up, boss?’

‘May as well. Keep in the background and keep your mouth shut.’

English walked across the sidewalk to where two patrolmen stood on either side of the entrance to the building. They both recognized him, and saluted.

‘The Lieutenant’s waiting for you, Mr. English,’ one of them said. ‘There’s an elevator that’ll take you up. Sixth floor.’

English nodded and walked into the dimly lit, stone-floored lobby. He moved through a smell of garbage, faulty plumbing and the acid reek of stale perspiration. Facing the entrance was an ancient elevator scarcely big enough to hold four people.

Chuck slid back the grill and followed English into the elevator. He thumbed the automatic button, and the cage started its jerky ascent.

English had left his overcoat in the car. He stood solidly on the balls of his feet, his hands thrust into the pockets of his tuxedo, a smouldering cigar between his teeth, his eyes brooding and cold.

Chuck glanced at him, then glanced away.

Eventually the elevator jerked to a standstill at the sixth floor and Chuck pulled back the grill.

English stepped into a dimly lit passage. Almost opposite him was an open door through which a light came, throwing a square of brightness on the dirty rubber floor of the passage. Further along the passage to the left was another door, showing a light through the frosted panel. To his right, at the end of the passage, was yet another door without glass. A light showed under the gap between the bottom of the door and the floor.

Lieutenant Morilli came through the open doorway. He was a thickset man in his late forties. His lean hatchet face was pallid, and his small moustache looked startlingly black against his white complexion.

‘Sorry to break up the party, Mr. English,’ he said, his voice pitched low. ‘But I thought you’d want to come down.’ He had the hushed, deferential manner of an undertaker dealing with a wealthy client. ‘A very sad business.’

English grunted.

‘Who found him?’

‘The janitor. He was checking to see if all the offices were locked. He called me, and I called you. I haven’t been here myself much more than twenty minutes.’

English made a sign to Chuck to stay where he was, and then walked into the shabby little room that served as an outer office. Across the frosted panel of the door was the legend: THE ALERT AGENCY, Chief Investigator: ROY ENGLISH.

The room consisted of a desk, a typist’s chair, a covered typewriter, a filing cabinet and a strip of carpet. On the walls hung dusty handcuffs and faded testimonials in narrow black frames, some of them dated as far back as 1927.

‘He’s in the other room,’ Morilli said, following English into the outer office.

Two plainclothes detectives stood around awkwardly. They both said in a ragged chorus, ‘Good evening, Mr. English,’ and one of them touched his finger to his hat.

English nodded at them, then walked across the room and paused in the doorway that led to the inner office. The room was a little larger than the outer office. Two big filing cabinets stood against the wall, opposite the window. A worn and dusty rug covered the floor. A big desk took up most of the room space. A shabby armchair for the exclusive use of clients stood near the desk. English’s eyes swept quickly over these details, noting with a little grimace the sordidness of the room.

His brother had been seated at the desk when he had died. He now lay across the desk, his head on the blotter, one arm hanging lifelessly, his fingers just touching the carpet, the other arm on the desk. His head and face rested in a pool of blood that had run across the desk and had conveniently dripped into the metal trash basket on the floor.

English looked at his brother for some seconds, his face expressionless, his eyes brooding.

Morilli watched him from the doorway.

English walked over to the desk, leaned forward to see the dead face more clearly. His shoe touched something hard, lying on the floor, and he glanced down. A .38 Police Special lay within a few inches of the dead man's fingers.

English stepped back.

'How long has he been dead?' he asked abruptly.

'A couple of hours at a guess,' Morilli told him. 'No one heard the shot. There's a news service agency down the passage. The teleprinters were working at the time, and the noise deadened the shot.'

'That his gun?'

Morilli lifted his shoulders.

'It could be. He has a pistol permit. I'll have it checked.' His eyes searched English's face. 'I don't think there's much doubt that it was suicide, Mr. English.'

English moved around the room, his hands still in his pockets. The fragrant smell of his cigar followed him as he moved.

'What makes you say that?'

Morilli hesitated; then, moving into the room, he closed the door behind him. 'Things I've heard. He was short of money.'

English stopped walking up and down and fixed Morilli with his cold, hard eyes.

'Don't let me hold you up any longer, Lieutenant. You'll be wanting to get some action in here.'

'I thought I'd wait until you came,' Morilli said uncomfortably.

'I appreciate that. But I've seen all I want to see. I'll wait in the car. When you're through here, let me know. I want to look the place over, have a look at his papers.'

'It could take an hour, Mr. English. Would you want to wait that long?'

English frowned.

'Have you told his wife yet?' he asked, jerking his head at the still body across the desk.

'I've told no one but you, Mr. English. Would you like me to take care of his wife? I could send an officer.'

English shook his head.

‘I guess I’ll see her.’ He hesitated, his frown deepening. ‘Maybe you don’t know it, but Roy and I haven’t exactly hit it off recently. I don’t even know his home address.’

‘I’ve got it here,’ Morilli said, his face expressionless. He picked up a wallet on the desk. ‘I went through his pockets as a matter of form.’ He handed English a card. ‘Know where it is?’

English read the card.

‘Chuck will.’ He flicked the card with his fingernail. ‘Did he have any money on him?’

‘Four bucks,’ Morilli said.

English took the wallet from Morilli’s hand, glanced into it, then put it in his pocket.

‘I’ll see his wife. Can you get one of your men to clean up here? I may be sending someone down to check his files.’

‘I’ll fix it, Mr. English.’

‘So you heard he was short of money,’ English said. ‘How did you hear that, Lieutenant?’

Morilli scratched the side of his jaw, his dark eyes uneasy. ‘The commissioner mentioned it. He knew I knew him, and he told me to have a word with him. I was going to see him tomorrow.’

English took the cigar from between his teeth and touched the ash off onto the floor.

‘A word about what?’

Morilli looked away.

‘He had been worrying people for money.’

English stared at him.

‘What people?’

‘Two or three clients he had worked for last year. They complained to the commissioner. I’m sorry to tell you this, Mr. English, but he was going to lose his licence.’

English nodded his head. His eyes narrowed.

‘So the commissioner wanted you to talk to him. Why didn’t the commissioner speak to me instead of you, Lieutenant?’

‘I told him he should,’ Morilli said, a faint flush rising up his neck and flooding his pale face. ‘But he isn’t an easy man to talk to.’

English smiled suddenly; it wasn’t a pleasant smile.

‘Nor am I.’

‘What I’ve told you, Mr. English, is off the record,’ Morilli said quickly. The commissioner would have my hide if he knew I . . .’

‘All right, forget it,’ English broke in. He looked at the body. ‘It won’t bring him back to life, will it?’

‘That’s right,’ Morilli said, relaxing a little. ‘Still off the record, he would have lost his licence at the end of the week.’

‘For trying to raise money from old clients?’ English asked sharply.

‘I guess he was pretty desperate for money. He threatened one party. She wouldn’t bring a charge, but it was near blackmail as damn it.’

The muscles either side of English’s jaw stood out suddenly.

‘We’d better have a talk about this some other time. I won’t hold you up now. I’ll see you in the morning.’

‘Yes, Mr. English,’ Morilli said.

As English crossed to the door, Morilli went on, ‘I hear your boy won his fight. Congratulations.’

English paused.

‘That’s right. By the way, I told Vince to put a bet on for you. A hundred’s brought you three. Look in tomorrow and see Vince. He’ll pay you cash.’ His eyes met Morilli’s. ‘Okay?’

Morilli flushed.

‘Why, that’s pretty nice of you, Mr. English. I meant to lay a bet.’

‘Yeah, but you didn’t have the time. I know how it is. Well, I didn’t forget you. I like to look after my friends. Glad you won.’

He walked into the outer office, and into the passage. He jerked his head at Chuck and stepped into the elevator.

Morilli and the two detectives stood in the doorway and watched the elevator descend.

‘Didn’t seem to care much,’ one of the detectives said as he walked into the office again.

‘What did you expect him to do?’ Morilli said coldly. ‘Burst into tears?’

III

English had only met Roy's wife once, and that casually at a cocktail party more than a year ago. He remembered he hadn't thought much of her, but was prepared to admit prejudice. She had struck him as a dolly-faced girl of nineteen or twenty with a strident voice and an irritating habit of calling everyone darling. But there was no doubt at the time that she had been very much in love with Roy, and he wondered, as he sat hunched up in the Cadillac, whether that love had survived.

It was characteristic of English not to let Morilli break the news to her of her husband's death. He never allowed himself to shirk any unpleasant task. It would have been easy to have let a police officer see her first, and then call on her, but he had no wish to avoid his responsibilities. Roy was his brother, and Roy's wife was entitled to hear the news from him, and from no one else.

He glanced out of the window.

Chuck had turned off the main road, and was driving with easy assurance down an avenue lined on either side by small, smart bungalows. Chuck had a brilliantly developed sense of direction. He seemed to know instinctively whether he was driving north or east as if his brain housed a compass. He never appeared to consult a map nor had English ever known him to ask the way.

'This is the joint, boss,' Chuck said suddenly. 'The white house by the lamppost.'

He slowed down, swung the car to the curb and pulled up outside a small, white bungalow.

A light showed in one of the upper rooms through the drawn curtains. English got out of the car, hunching his broad shoulders against the cold wind. He left his hat and coat in the car, and tossed his cigar into the gutter. For some seconds he looked at the bungalow, conscious of surprise and irritation. For someone who was desperately short of money, Roy had certainly picked himself a luxurious dwelling place. That was like Roy, English thought sourly, no sense of responsibility. If he wanted anything he had it and worried about paying for it after he had got it; if he worried at all.

English opened the gate and walked up the path to the front door. On either

side of the path were dormant rose trees. The neat flowerbeds were packed with daffodils and narcissi. He pressed the bell push and listened to the loud peal of chimes that the bell push started into life, and he grimaced. Those kind of refinements irritated him. There was a little delay. He stood in the porch, waiting, aware that Chuck was watching him curiously from the car. Then he heard someone coming, and the door opened a few inches on the chain.

‘Who is that?’ a woman’s voice asked sharply.

‘Nick English,’ he returned.

‘Who?’

He caught the startled note in her voice.

‘Roy’s brother,’ he said, feeling a surge of irritation run through him at having to associate himself with Roy.

The chain slid back and the door opened and an overhead light flashed up. Corrine English hadn’t altered a scrap since he had last seen her. Looking at her, he found himself thinking she would probably look like this in thirty years’ time. She was small and very blond, and her body was pleasantly plump with provocative curves. She was wearing a rose-pink silk wrap over black lounging pyjamas. When she saw he was looking at her, her fingers went hastily to her corn-coloured curls, patting them swiftly while she stared at him with a surprised, rather vacant expression in her big blue eyes that reminded him of the eyes of a startled baby.

‘Hello, Corrine,’ he said. ‘Can I come in?’

‘Well, I don’t know,’ she said. ‘Roy’s not back yet. I’m alone. Did you want to see him?’

He restrained his irritation with an effort.

‘I think I had better come in,’ he said as gently as he could. ‘You’ll catch cold standing here. I’m afraid I have some bad news.’

‘Oh?’ Her eyes opened a trifle wider. ‘Hadn’t you better see Roy? I don’t think I want to hear any bad news. Roy doesn’t like me to be worried.’

He thought how typical that was of her. She could live in this smart little bungalow, dress like a Hollywood starlet while Roy was apparently desperate for money, and could say without shame that he didn’t want her to be worried.

‘You’ll catch cold,’ he said, and moved forward, riding her back into the little lobby. He closed the door. ‘I’m afraid this bad news is for you, and only

for you.’ He saw her face tighten with sudden fear, but before she could speak, he went on, ‘Is this your sitting room?’ and he moved to a nearby door.

‘It’s the lounge,’ she said, her fear momentarily forgotten in the correction. She wouldn’t own a sitting room; it had to be a lounge.

He opened the door.

‘Let’s go in here and sit down for a moment,’ he said.

She went past him into a long, low-pitched room. The modern furniture was new and cheap looking, but it made a brave show. He wondered what it would look like in two or three years’ time. It would probably have fallen to pieces by then, but people like Roy and Corrine wouldn’t be interested in anything permanent.

There was a dying fire in the grate, and he went over to it and stirred it with the poker, then he dropped a log onto it while she came and stood at his side. In the hard light of the standard lamp, he noticed the rose-pink wrap was a little grubby at the collar and cuffs.

‘I think we ought to wait until Roy comes in,’ she said, lacing and unlacing her small, plump fingers. He could see she was desperately anxious to avoid any responsibility or to have to make any decision.

‘It’s because of Roy that I’ve come,’ he said quietly, and turned to look at her. ‘Sit down, please. I wish I could spare you this, but you’ve got to know sooner or later.’

‘Oh!’

She sat down suddenly as if the strength had gone out of her legs, and her face went white under her careful makeup.

‘Is - is he in trouble?’ she asked.

He shook his head.

‘No, he’s not in trouble. It’s worse than that.’

He wanted to be brutal and tell her Roy was dead, but looking at the doll-like face, seeing the terror in the baby-blue eyes, the childish quivering of her lips, the sudden clenching of her fists, made it impossible for him to do more than hint at what had happened.

‘Is he hurt?’ She met his eyes and flinched back as if he had threatened to hit her. ‘He’s - not dead?’

‘Yes, he’s dead,’ English said. ‘I’m sorry, Corrine. I wish I hadn’t to tell you this. If there’s anything I can do.’

‘Dead?’ she repeated. ‘He can’t be dead!’

‘Yes,’ English said.

‘But he can’t be dead!’ she repeated, her voice going shrill. ‘You’re saying this to frighten me! You never did like me! Don’t pretend you did. How can he be dead?’

‘He shot himself,’ English said quietly.

She stared at him. He could see at once she believed that news. Her dolly little face seemed to fall to pieces. She dropped back against the settee, her hand across her eyes. The white column of her throat jerked spasmodically as she struggled with her tears.

He looked around the room, then crossed over to an elaborate cellarette that stood against the wall. He opened it and found an array of bottles and glasses; the bottles labelled with neat ivory tickets. He poured some brandy into a glass and went over to her.

‘Drink this.’

He had to hold the glass to her lips, but she managed to get some of the brandy down before pushing his hand away.

‘He shot himself?’ she said, looking up at him.

He nodded.

‘Have you anyone who will stay with you tonight?’ he asked, not liking the dazed horror in her eyes. ‘You can’t be left here alone.’

‘But I am alone now,’ she said, and tears began to run down her face, smearing her makeup. ‘Oh, Roy! Roy! How could you do it? How could you leave me alone?’ It was the anguished cry of a child and it disturbed English. He put his hand gently on her shoulder, but she threw it off so violently that he stepped back, startled.

‘Why did he shoot himself?’ she demanded, looking up at him.

‘Try to get it out of your mind for tonight,’ he said soothingly. ‘Would you like me to send someone to you? My secretary.’

‘I don’t want your secretary!’ She got unsteadily to her feet. ‘And I don’t want you! You killed Roy! If you had been a proper brother to him, he would never have done this!’

He was so surprised by the suddenness of this attack, he remained motionless, staring at her.

‘You and your money!’ she went on, her voice strident. ‘That’s all you’ve ever thought about! You didn’t care what happened to Roy. You didn’t

bother to find out how he was getting on! When he came to you for help, you threw him out! Now, you've forced him to kill himself. Well, I hope you're satisfied! I hope you're happy you've saved a few of your dirty dollars! Now, get out! Don't ever come here again. I hate you!

'You mustn't talk like that,' English said quietly. 'It's quite untrue. If I had known Roy was in a jam, I would have helped him. I didn't know.'

'You didn't care, you mean!' she cried shrilly. 'You haven't spoken to him for six months. When he asked you for a loan you told him you weren't giving him another dollar. Help him? Do you call that helping him?'

'I've been helping Roy ever since he left college,' English said, his voice hardening. 'I thought it was high time he stood on his own feet. Did he expect me to keep him all his life?'

'Get out!' She stumbled to the door and threw it open. 'Get out and stay out! And don't try to offer me any of your dirty money, because I won't take it! Now, get out!'

English lifted his heavy shoulders in a despairing shrug. He wanted to take this little doll and shake some sense into her, but he knew that shock and the realization that her own extravagance had been partly the cause of Roy's death had turned her into this shrill fury, venting her conscience-stricken grief on him. He guessed that as on as he had gone, she would collapse, and he was reluctant to leave her alone.

'Haven't you someone . . .' he began, but she broke in, screaming, 'Get out! Get out! I don't want your filthy help or your sympathy! You're worse than a murderer. Get out!'

He saw it was hopeless to do anything for her, and he went past her into the lobby. As he opened the front door, he heard her sobbing, and he glanced back. She had thrown herself face down on the settee, her head in her arms. He shook his head, hesitated, then opened the door and walked down the path to the car.

IV

Lieutenant Morilli stood up as English came into his small office. A plainclothes detective who was with him left the room, and Morilli swung a chair around and pushed it forward.

‘Glad you looked in, Mr. English,’ he said. ‘Sit down, won’t you?’

‘Can I use your phone, Lieutenant?’

‘Sure, go ahead. I’ll be back in five minutes. I want to get the ballistics report on the gun for you.’

English said, ‘Did your men clean up the office?’

‘It’s all okay,’ Morilli said as he made for the door.

‘Thanks.’

When Morilli had closed the door after him, English called his own office. Lois Marshall answered the phone. ‘I want you to go to my brother’s office and look the place over,’ English

said. ‘Take Harry with you. Is it too late for you to go right away?’ He glanced at his wristwatch. The time was a quarter after midnight. ‘It shouldn’t take you long. Get Harry to drive you home.’

‘That’s all right, Mr. English,’ Lois said. ‘What do you want me to do?’

‘Take a look at the files. See if he kept any books, if he did, bring them to the office tomorrow morning. Get the atmosphere of the place. The atmosphere is more important than anything else. The business was supposed to be long established with a good connection when I bought it for him. He’s had it less than a year. I want to find out what went wrong.’

‘I’ll take care of it, Mr. English.’

‘Good girl. Sorry to ask you to work so late, but it’s urgent.’

‘That’s all right, Mr. English.’

‘Take Harry with you. I don’t want you to be there alone.’

Morilli came in.

‘Hold on a moment,’ English said, turned and asked Morilli, ‘Did you lock up when you left?’

Morilli shook his head.

‘I left a patrolman on duty. The keys are in the top left-hand drawer of his desk.’

English relayed this information to Lois.

‘The address is 1356 7th Street. The office is on the sixth floor. It’s called the Alert Agency.’

She said she would go over there right away, and hung up.

English put down the receiver, took out his cigar case and offered it to Morilli. When the two men had lit cigars, English said, ‘Is it his gun?’

Morilli nodded.

‘I’ve had a word with the doc. He says the wound was self-inflicted. Your brother’s prints are on the gun. There are powder burns on the side of his face.’

English nodded, his eyes thoughtful.

‘I’m satisfied if you are, Mr. English,’ Morilli said, after a short silence.

English nodded again.

‘Sounds all right. There’ll be an inquest?’

‘Eleven-thirty tomorrow morning. Did he have a secretary?’

English shrugged.

‘I don’t know. He may have had. His wife will be able to tell you, but don’t bother her now. She’s upset.’

Morilli fidgeted with the desk blotter, pushing it straight.

‘The coroner will want evidence that he was short of money. Unless the commissioner insists, I don’t want to give evidence myself, Mr. English. There’s no need to tell the coroner what your brother was up to.’

English nodded, his mouth hard.

‘The commissioner won’t insist. I’ll have a word with him tomorrow morning. I think I’d better get Sam Crail to talk to Mrs. English. There’s no point in telling the world he was short of money. He could have been worried by overwork.’

Morilli didn’t say anything.

English leaned forward and picked up the telephone. He dialled a number and waited, frowning.

Sam Crail, his attorney, answered the phone after some delay.

‘Sam? This is Nick,’ English said. ‘I have a job for you.’

‘Not tonight, I hope,’ Crail said, alarm in his voice. ‘I’m just going to bed.’

‘Yes, tonight. You act for Roy, don’t you?’

‘I’m supposed to,’ Crail said without enthusiasm, ‘but he hasn’t consulted me now for months. What’s he been up to?’

‘He shot himself about a couple of hours ago,’ English said soberly.

‘Good God! Why?’

‘He seems to have been short of money and was blackmailing some old clients. He was going to lose his licence so he took the quick way out,’ English said. ‘That’s the story, anyway. I’ve told Corrine he’s dead, but not why. She’s upset. I don’t want her left alone tonight. Can you get your wife to go over and stay with her?’

Crail suppressed a grunt of irritation.

‘I’ll ask her. She’s a good soul. Maybe she’ll go, but damn it! She’s in bed.’

‘If she won’t go, you’ll have to go yourself,’ English said curtly. ‘I don’t want Corrine to be left alone. Maybe you had better go yourself, Sam. Corrine blames me for Roy’s death. Of course, she’s hysterical, but she may make things difficult. She says I should have given him more money. You’d better talk her out of that attitude. If we have to tell the coroner anything, we’ll tell him Roy was overworking. Get that into her head, will you?’

‘Okay,’ Crail said wearily. ‘I wonder why the hell I work for you, Nick. I’ll take Helen with me.’

‘Keep the press away from her, Sam. I don’t want too much of a stink. Better come and see me around ten-thirty at my office, and we’ll straighten it out.’

‘Okay,’ Crail said.

‘And get over there fast,’ English said and hung up.

While he had been talking, Morilli had attempted to efface himself by going over to the window and staring down into the dark street. He turned when English hung up.

‘If Crail could find out where I can find your brother’s secretary, if he had one, we might get the information we want without bothering Mrs. English.’

‘What information do you want?’ English asked evenly.

‘Just that he was short of money or some reason why he killed himself,’ Morilli said uncomfortably.

‘You don’t have to bother about his secretary,’ English said. ‘I’ll send Crail down to the inquest. He’ll give the coroner all the information he wants.’

Morilli hesitated, then nodded his head.

‘Just as you say, Mr. English.’

V

As Chuck Eagan drove swiftly along Riverside Drive, he whistled soundlessly through his teeth. He knew he was on the last leg of his night's work, and he was looking forward to turning in. The day had been a long and exciting one. It was the first time he had ever had a ringside seat at a Championship match and the first time he had won a thousand dollars on a bet that he knew couldn't fall down.

He glanced at the illuminated dial of the clock on the dashboard and shook his head: 12:40. He wouldn't get to bed before 1:15, and the odds were the boss would expect him to pick him up again not later than 9:30: eight hours from now.

He swung the big car into the circular drive that led to an imposing apartment block overlooking the river, and brought the car to a standstill before the entrance. He got out and held the door open.

'I want to find out if my brother had a secretary or someone to help him in the office,' English said as he got out of the car. 'Go down to his office first thing in the morning and see if the janitor knows. I want her address. Be here not later than nine-thirty. We'll go and see her before we go to the office.'

'Yes, boss,' Chuck said dutifully. 'I'll fix it. Anything else I can do?'

English gave him a quick smile.

'No. Go to bed, and don't be late tomorrow.'

He walked across to the entrance to the building, pushed against the revolving doors, nodded to the night porter, who snapped to attention when he caught sight of him, and walked to the elevator. He thumbed the button below the label that read: Penthouse, and leaned against the wall while the automatic elevator bore him swiftly and smoothly up fifteen floors to the roof apartment he had rented for Julie. He walked down the corridor panelled with polished walnut and paused outside a front door also of polished walnut and equipped with gleaming chromium fittings. As he groped for his keys, his eyes shifted to the card in a chromium frame that was screwed on the door. It bore the single line of neat print: Miss Julia Clair.

He pushed the latchkey into the lock, opened the door and stepped into a small, lighted lobby. As he threw his hat and coat on a chair, the door

opposite him opened and a girl stood framed in the doorway.

She was tall and broad shouldered, with narrow hips and long legs. Her copper-coloured hair was silky and dressed high on top of her small head. Her big almond-shaped eyes were sea green and glitteringly alive. She had on olive-green lounging pyjamas with red piping, and her small feet were encased in high-heeled red slippers.

Looking at her, English thought how very different she was from Corrine. How much more beautiful, and how much more character she showed in her face, which he considered to be more pleasing to his eyes than any other woman's he had met. Her makeup, even at this late hour, he thought, was a masterpiece of understatement. He knew she wore makeup, but he couldn't see where it began or left off.

'You're late, Nick,' she said, smiling at him. 'I was beginning to wonder if you were coming.'

'Sorry, Julie,' he returned, 'but I've been held up.'

He went over to her, put his hands on her hips and kissed her cheek.

'So Joey won his fight,' she said, looking up at him. 'You must be very pleased.'

'Don't say you listened to the radio?' he said, leading her into the well-appointed sitting room. A big coal fire burned brightly, and the shaded lamps made the atmosphere at once intimate and cozy.

'No, but I heard it on the news.'

'You and Harry are a pair,' he said, sinking into a big overstuffed armchair and pulling her down on his knees. She curled up on his lap, slipping her arm around his neck, and resting her face against his. 'Believe it or not, although he handled most of the arrangements and worked like a dog for weeks, he stayed away from the fight. He's as squeamish as you are.'

'I think fighting is a beastly business,' she returned with a grimace. 'I don't blame Harry for not being there.'

He stared at the bright flames that licked over the coals, and his hand stroked her silk-clad thigh.

'Maybe it is, but there's a lot of money in it. Was the show all right?'

She lifted her shoulders in an indifferent shrug.

'I suppose so. They seemed to like it. I wasn't singing particularly well, but no one seemed to notice.'

'Maybe you want a vacation. Next month I may be able to get away. We

might go to Florida.'

'Let's wait and see.'

He looked at her sharply.

'I thought you would like that, Julie.'

'Oh, I don't know. I don't want to leave the club just yet. Tell me about the fight, Nick.'

'There's something else I have to tell you. Do you remember Roy?'

He felt her stiffen.

'Yes, of course. Why do you ask?'

'The fool shot himself tonight.'

She half sat up, but he pulled her down against him again.

'Don't move, Julie.'

'Is he dead?' she asked, her fingers gripping his arm.

'Yes, he's dead. That was one job he did manage to do efficiently.'

She shivered.

'Don't talk like that, Nick. How dreadful! When did it happen?'

'About half-past nine. Morilli phoned me in the middle of the party. What a break for him! Of all that damned Homicide mob, he had to be the one to find Roy. And he made sure I knew he was doing me a favour.'

'I don't like that man,' Julie said. 'There's something about him.'

'He's just a cop on the lookout for some easy money. That's all that's the matter with him.'

'But why did Roy?'

'Yeah, that puzzles me. Do you mind if I walk up and down? You're taking my mind off business.' He lifted her, and got up, set her gently in the chair, then moved over to the fireplace. 'Why, Julie, you look pale.'

'I suppose it's the shock. I wasn't expecting to hear anything like this. I don't know if you're upset, Nick, but if you are, I'm sorry.'

'I'm not upset,' English said, taking out his cigar case. 'Maybe it was a shock, but I can't say I'm particularly sorry. Roy's been a damned nuisance ever since he was born. I guess he was born lazy. He was always getting into jams. My old man and he were a pair. Did I ever tell you about my old man, Julie?'

She shook her head. She was leaning back, staring into the fire, her fingers laced around her knee.

'He was no good, like Roy was no good. If my mother hadn't gone out and

worked when we were kids we would have starved. I wish you could have seen my home, Julie. It was a three-room hovel in the basement of a tenement. In the winter the walls ran with water, and in the summer it stank to high heaven.'

Julie leaned forward to drop a log on the fire, and English touched the back of her neck gently.

'Oh, well, I guess that's past history,' he went on. 'But I can't understand Roy shooting himself. Morilli says he was short of money and was trying to raise the wind by threatening two or three of his old clients. He was going to lose his licence at the end of the week. I would have been willing to bet Roy wouldn't have killed himself because of that. I shouldn't have believed he would have had the nerve to kill himself no matter how bad a jam he was in. Its damned odd. Morilli says he's satisfied, but I still don't believe it.'

Julie looked up quickly.

'But surely, Nick, if the police say so.'

'Yeah, I know, but it foxes me. Why didn't he come to me if he was so hard up? Maybe I did throw him out last time, but that has never stopped him before. I've thrown him out a score of times and he's always come back.'

'Perhaps he was too proud,' Julie said quietly.

'Proud? Roy? My dear sweet, you don't know Roy. He had a hide like a tank. He'd take any insult so long as he got money out of me.' English lit his cigar and began to move slowly about the room. 'Why did the business collapse like that? When he got me to buy it for him, I took the trouble to investigate it pretty thoroughly. It was paying well then. It was a well—established business. He couldn't have wrecked it so soon, unless he did it deliberately.' He made an impatient gesture. 'I was a fool to have had anything to do with it. I might have known he wouldn't have worked at it. Imagine Roy a private detective. Why, it's laughable. I was a mug to have given him the money.'

Julie watched him pace the room. There was a wary, alert expression in her eyes that English didn't notice.

'I've sent Lois to check up at his office,' English went on. 'She has a nose for that kind of thing. She'll be able to tell me what went wrong.'

'You sent Lois there tonight?' Julie said sharply.

'I wanted her to have a look at the place before Corrine takes it into her head to go up there.'

‘You mean Lois is actually there now?’

English paused in his pacing and looked at her, surprised at the sharpness of her tone.

‘Yes. Harry’s with her. She doesn’t mind how late she works. You sound surprised.’

‘Well, after all it is nearly half-past one. Couldn’t it have waited until tomorrow?’

‘Corrine might go up there,’ English said, frowning. He didn’t like his orders questioned. ‘I want to know what Roy’s been up to.’

‘I think she must be in love with you,’ Julie said, moving so that her back was turned to him.

‘In love with me?’ English said, startled. ‘Who? Corrine?’

‘Lois. She acts as if she were your slave. No other girl would tolerate working for you, Nick.’

English laughed.

‘Nonsense. I pay her well. Besides, she isn’t the kind of girl to fall in love with anyone.’

‘There’s never been a girl who wouldn’t fall in love if she’s given the chance,’ Julie said quietly. ‘I should have thought you would have more insight, Nick, than to say a thing like that.’

‘Never mind Lois,’ English said a little impatiently. ‘We were talking about Roy. I went to see Corrine tonight.’

‘That was nice of you. I’ve never seen her. What’s she like, Nick?’

‘Blond, plump and dumb-looking,’ English said, coming to sit on the arm of her armchair. ‘She told me I was responsible for Roy’s death and threw me out of the house.’

‘Nick!’ Julie looked quickly at him, but was reassured by his smile.

‘I guess she was hysterical, but to be on the safe side I got Sam out of bed and sent him down to talk to her. I’ve got to be careful there isn’t a stink about this business, Julie. I have a big pot on the boil at the moment.’ His brown hand slid over her shoulder and his fingers gently stroked her throat. ‘In a few weeks the senator is going to break the news that I’m the man behind the new hospital. The committee knows, of course, but the press haven’t got it yet. The idea is to name the hospital after me.’

‘Name it after you?’ Julie repeated blankly. ‘But why, for goodness’ sake?’

English grinned a little sheepishly.

‘Sounds crazy, doesn’t it? But I want it Julie. I want it more than anything I’ve ever wanted.’ He got up and began to pace up and down. ‘I’ve made a fair success of my life, Julie. I started from scratch, and now I’m as good as the next man as regards to money, but money isn’t everything. If I drop dead this moment Julie, no one would remember me in a week’s time. It’s the name people leave after them that counts. If the hospital was named after me - well, I guess I wouldn’t be forgotten quite so easily. And then there’s another thing, more important. I promised my mother I’d make a name for myself, and she believed me. She didn’t live long enough to know I had started on the way up. When she died I was still fooling around with that compass and getting nowhere, but I told her it was going to be a success, and I told her I was going way ahead, and she believed me. She would have got a big bang out of knowing the hospital is going to be named after me, and I’m soft in the head enough to think she’ll still get a big bang out of it.’

Julie listened in a hypnotized silence. She had never had any idea that English could think and talk like this. She wanted to laugh, but instinctively she knew he would be furious with her if she did. To want a hospital to be named after him! All this sentiment about his mother! It was unbelievable and completely out of character. She thought, not without alarm, that she didn’t know him as she had thought she did. She had always regarded him as a completely ruthless businessman whose god was money. This new side of him startled her.

‘Go ahead and laugh if you want to,’ English said, smiling at her. ‘I know it’s funny. I laugh myself sometimes, but that’s what I want, and that’s what I’m going to have. The English Memorial Hospital! Sounds pretty good, doesn’t it?’

Julie put her hand on his arm.

‘If that’s what you want, Nick, I want it, too.’

‘I guess that’s right,’ he said, suddenly thoughtful. ‘But this business of Roy’s may slap a lid on it.’

‘But why?’

‘Believe it or not, Julie, it took me a hell of a time to persuade the commission to let me finance the hospital. You wouldn’t believe that, would you?’

‘What commission?’

‘The City Planning Commission,’ he said patiently. ‘It’s unbelievable what

a bunch of stuffed shirts they are. All from the best families, of course, but not one of them has ever earned a dime. They've inherited what money they have, and they're damned miserly with it, too. Although I bet their private lives wouldn't stand investigation, on the surface they are about the finest collection of plaster saints you've ever set eyes on. They didn't approve of me. Two of them even said I was a gangster. The senator had to talk pretty sharply to them to get them to accept my money. At the time, nothing was mentioned that the hospital was to be named after me. If it turns out that Roy was in bad trouble, that he did blackmail his clients, the chances of my name being used is as remote as the snows of Everest. Morilli knows that. The police commissioner knows it, too. They'll expect to be taken care of if this is to be hushed up. But Corrine's the difficulty. She may try to cut off her nose to spite my face. If she lets on that I wouldn't finance Roy, and Roy was forced to raise money by blackmail, I shall be ruled out. A scandal like that will make the commission give birth to pups.' He tossed the cigar into the fire and went on in a suddenly harsh voice, 'Why couldn't the louse have shot himself next month when this was in the bag?'

Julie stood up.

'Let's go to bed, Nick,' she said, and slipped her arm through his. 'Don't let's think any more about it tonight.'

He gave her bottom an affectionate little pat.

'You're full of good ideas, Julie,' he said. 'We'll go to bed.'

VI

At the back of a modest walkup apartment house on 45th East Place, a small, shrub-infested garden ran down to an alley hedged in on either side by a six-foot brick wall. During the summer months this alley was popular among courting couples as it had no lights and was shunned by pedestrians during the hours of darkness.

For the past two hours, a man had been waiting in the alley, his eyes fixed on a lighted window on the third floor of the apartment house. He was a man of middle height, with broad and powerful shoulders. He wore a wide-brimmed brown slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, and in the dim light of the moon, only his thin-lipped mouth and square-shaped chin could be seen. The rest of his face was hidden by the black shadow cast by the hat brim.

He was expensively dressed. His brown lounge suit, his white silk shirt and polka-dotted bow tie gave him the appearance of a well-to-do dandy, and once when he lifted his arm to consult a gold—strap watch, he showed two inches of white shirt cuffs and the tail of a white silk handkerchief he wore tucked up his sleeve.

While he waited in the alley, he remained motionless. He chewed a strip of gum, his jaws moving rhythmically and continuously. His two-hour vigil was conducted with the patience of a cat waiting for a mouse to appear. A few minutes after midnight, the light in the third-floor window suddenly went out and completed the darkness of the rest of the apartment house.

The man in the brown suit remained motionless. He leaned his broad shoulders against the brick wall, his hands thrust into his trousers' pockets while he waited a further half-hour. Then, after consulting his watch, he reached down into the darkness and picked up a coil of thin cord that lay near his feet. A heavy rubber-covered hook was fastened to one end of the cord.

He swung himself over the wall and walked silently and rapidly up the cinder path that led through the uncared for garden to the back of the apartment house.

In the light of the moon, the iron staircase of the outside fire escape showed up sharply against the white stucco of the building.

The man in the brown suit paused under the swing-up end of the escape

that was some five feet above his outstretched hand. He uncoiled the cord and tossed the hook into the air. The hook caught in the ironwork of the escape and held. He gently tightened his grip on the cord, then pulled. The end of the escape came down slowly and silently, and bumped to the ground.

He released the hook, recoiled the cord and left it on the bottom step where he could pick it up quickly on his way down.

He went up the escape, two steps at a time, without hesitation or without looking back to see if anyone happened to be watching him. He reached the third-floor window he had been watching for the past two hours, and saw with satisfaction that the window was open a few inches at the top and bottom. He noticed also the curtains across the windows were drawn. He knelt down by the window, his ear to the gap between the window frame and the sill and listened. He remained like that for several minutes, then he put his fingers under the window frame and gently exerted pressure. The window moved up inch by inch, making no sound.

When it was fully opened, he glanced over his shoulder and looked down into the dark garden and the darker alley. Nothing moved down there, and except for his own well-regulated breathing, he could hear no sound.

The curtains hung well clear of the window, and he slid into the room without disturbing them. Cautiously, he turned and began to close the window, again moving it inch by inch, and again in silence. When the window was as he had found it, he straightened, turned and parted the curtains a few inches. He looked into darkness. The oversweet smell of face powder, stale perfume and cosmetics told him he had made no mistake as to the room. He listened, and after a moment or so, he heard quick light breathing not far from where he stood. He took out a pencil-thin flashlight, and shielding the bulb with his fingers, he switched the flashlight on. In the faint light, he saw a bed, a chair on which were some clothes, and a night table by the bed on which stood a small shaded lamp, a book and a clock.

The back of the bed was to the window. He could see the outline of a figure under the blankets. Hanging on the bedpost was a silk dressing gown. Careful to keep the shielded light of his flashlight away from the sleeper in the bed, the man in the brown suit reached forward and gently pulled the silk cord of the dressing gown through its loops until he had disengaged it. He tested its strength, and, then satisfied, he reached forward and picked up the book that was lying on the night table.

With the dressing gown cord and the flashlight in his left hand and the book in his right, he stepped behind the curtains again. He turned off the flashlight and slipped it into his pocket, then, still keeping behind the curtains, and holding one of them aside with his left hand, he tossed the book high and wide into the air. The book landed on the polished boards of the floor. Coming down flat side up, it made a loud slapping noise that was intensified by the silence that brooded over the whole apartment.

The man in the brown suit closed the curtains and waited, his jaws moving rhythmically as he chewed. He heard the bed creak, and then a girl's voice said sharply, 'Who's that?'

He waited, unmoved, his breathing normal, his head a little on one side as he listened.

The bedside lamp went on, sending a soft glow of light through the curtains. He opened them slightly so he could see into the room.

A dark, slim girl in a blue nylon nightdress was sitting up in the bed. She was looking toward the door, her hands clutching the blankets, and he could hear her rapid, alarmed breathing.

Silently he took one end of the dressing gown cord in his right hand, and the other end in his left. He turned sideways so that he could push aside the curtains with his shoulder. He watched her, waiting.

She saw the book on the floor, and she looked quickly at the night table, and then back to the book again. Then she did what he was hoping she would do. She threw back the blankets and swung her feet to the floor, her hand reaching out for her dressing gown. She stood up and began to slide her arms into the sleeves of the dressing gown, turning her back on the window as she did so. The man in the brown suit pushed aside the curtains with his shoulder and stepped silently into the room. With a movement too quick to follow he whipped the cord over the girl's head, crossed the cord and tightened it around her throat. His knee came up and drove into the small of her back, sending her down on her hands and knees. He dropped on her, flattening her to the floor. The cord bit into her throat, turning her wild scream into a thin, almost inaudible cry. He knelt on her shoulders and his two hands tightened the cord.

He remained like that, chewing steadily, and watching the convulsive heaving of her body and the feeble movement of her hands scrabbling at the carpet. He was careful not to use too much violence, and kept the cord just

tight enough to stop blood flowing to her head and air getting to her lungs. He had no difficulty in holding her down, and he saw with detached interest her movements were becoming less convulsed, until only her muscles twitched in a reflex of agony.

He remained kneeling on her, the cord tight, for three or four minutes, then when he saw there was no longer any movement, he carefully took the cord from her throat and turned her over on her back.

He frowned when he saw that a trickle of blood had run down one nostril and had made a smear on the rug. He put his finger on her eyeball, and when there was no answering flicker, he stood up and dusted his trousers' knees while he looked quickly around the room.

He went to the door opposite the bed, opened it and looked into a small bathroom. He noted with a nod of his head the sturdy hook screwed to the back of the door.

He spent the next ten minutes or so arranging the scene to his satisfaction. His movements were unhurried and unruffled. When he had finished what he was doing, he surveyed the scene with quick, bright eyes that missed no detail nor overlooked anything that might afford a clue.

Then he turned off the lamp and went to the window. He opened it, turned to adjust the curtains, stepped out on the fire escape and pulled down the window, leaving it as he had found it.

CHAPTER TWO

I

The following morning, a few minutes to nine-thirty, Chuck Eagan drove the Cadillac into the circular drive leading to Julie's Riverside apartment block, and pulled up outside the main entrance.

As he got out of the car, Nick English came through the revolving doors. Chuck was wearing his favourite black suit, black slouch hat and white tie. This get-up, which Chuck regarded as the nearest to a uniform he would condescend to wear, set him off as a good frame can very often set off an indifferent picture. In a tuxedo he had looked like a third-rate waiter, but in this black lounge suit and slouch hat tilted over one eye at a jaunt angle, he looked what he was: hard, tough and dangerous.

'Morning, Chuck,' English said as he got into the car. 'What's the good word?'

'I went down and talked to the janitor like you said,' Chuck announced, leaning against the side of the car and looking down at English as he sank into the car seat. 'A Joe named Tom Calhoun. He seemed a helpful sort of a guy after I had clinked some money by his ear. Your brother had a secretary. Her name's Mary Savitt, and she's got an apartment on 45th East Place.'

'Okay,' English said. 'Let's go there. Snap it up, Chuck. I want to catch her before she leaves.'

Chuck got into the Cadillac and set it in motion. While he drove rapidly through the traffic-congested streets, English glanced at the newspapers he had brought down with him.

All of them devoted considerable space to Roy's suicide, coupling his name with Nick's. At least Sam Crail had done a good job, English thought; there was no mention of Corrine. Morilli also appeared to be earning his keep. He had given out that Roy had been overworking, and it was believed he had shot himself in a fit of depression, following a nervous breakdown. The story sounded a little thin, but English was satisfied it would stand up so long as someone didn't come along to challenge it.

Before leaving Julie's apartment, English had called his office. Harry had told him newspaper reporters were at the office waiting for him, and he had told him to stall them until he arrived.

He wondered irritably if he were wasting his time going to see Mary Savitt. There was a lot to do. He had to see Senator Henry Beaumont and calm his fears. He had to have a word with the police commissioner. He had to talk to Sam Crail, and then there were the news hounds to deal with. But he was pretty sure if anyone knew why Roy had killed himself, this girl, Mary Savitt, would know. A private secretary had more opportunities than anyone to know the inside workings of her employer's mind, and unless she was a featherbrain, she must have some idea what had gone wrong.

Chuck said, 'Running up now, boss. This joint on the left.'

'Don't stop at the door,' English said. 'Drive on a half a block, and we'll walk back.'

Chuck did as he was told, then stopped the car. The two men got out.

'You'd better come with me,' English said, and set off with long, quick strides to the brownstone apartment house Chuck had indicated.

A row of mailboxes in the lobby, each with the owner's name on it, told English Mary Savitt's apartment was on the third floor. The entrance to the apartments was guarded by a door by which was a row of buzzers. Chuck thumbed the third-floor buzzer, and waited for the latch to click up. Nothing happened, and after pressing the buzzer three times, he looked over at English.

'I guess the nest's empty,' he said.

'She's probably seen the newspapers and has gone down to the office,' English returned, frowning.

At this moment the door to the stairs opened and a girl came into the lobby. She was smartly dressed, and she looked sleepy and pale in the hard morning light. She stared at English, and her eyes opened wide. Her fingers went hastily to her hair, tucking in a stray curl under her hat. English watched her reaction indifferently. He had had his photograph so often in the newspapers, he had become used to being recognized by strangers.

He raised his hat.

'Pardon me, I was hoping to find Miss Savitt. She's out, I guess?'

'Oh, no, she's not out, Mr. English,' the girl said, smiling. 'It is Mr. English, isn't it?'

‘That’s right,’ English returned, holding his hat in his hand. ‘Clever of you to recognize me.’

‘Oh, gee! I’d know you anywhere, Mr. English. I saw *The Moon Rides High* last week. I thought it was a terrific show.’

‘I’m glad,’ English said, and somehow he managed to convey that he was glad, and her opinion was something to cherish. ‘Maybe Miss Savitt’s still asleep. I’ve buzzed her three times.’

While he was speaking, Chuck was examining the girl with unconcealed interest. His sharp eyes admired her long, slim legs and he pursed his lips in a soundless whistle.

‘Perhaps her buzzer’s on the blink,’ the girl said, unaware of Chuck’s scrutiny. She had only eyes for English. I know she’s in. Her milk’s still outside the door and her newspaper’s there, too. Besides, she never leaves before ten.’

‘Then I guess I’ll go up and knock on the door,’ English said. ‘Thank you for your help.’

‘You’re welcome, I’m sure.’

He gave her a warm, friendly smile that left her looking a little dazed, and moved past her to the stairs, followed closely by Chuck.

As they walked up the stairs, Chuck said wistfully, ‘Brother! If only I could pull stuff like that. Did you see the way she looked at you - like jelly going into a faint! All you had to do was to snap your fingers, and she would have . . .’

‘Cut it out!’ English said curtly.

‘Sure, boss,’ Chuck said, rolling his eyes. As he climbed the stairs, his lips moved as he continued to talk silently to himself.

A bottle of milk and a folded newspaper lay outside Mary Savitt’s front door.

English jerked his head toward the door, and Chuck rapped sharply on it.

No one answered. Again Chuck knocked, again no one answered.

‘Think you could open the door, Chuck?’ English asked, lowering his voice.

For a moment Chuck looked surprised, then he examined the lock.

‘Nothing to it, but maybe she’ll squawk for the cops.’

‘Go ahead and open it,’ English said.

Chuck took out a small metal lever from his pocket, inserted it into the

lock, fiddled for a moment, then pushed open the door.

English stepped into a neatly kept sitting room - small, well-furnished and bright with spring flowers.

‘Is anyone here?’ he called, raising his voice.

He waited in silence, then crossed the room and knocked on a door facing him.

Chuck entered the room and quietly shut the front door.

English knocked again, then opened the door and looked into a darkened room. Enough light filtered through the drawn curtains to show him that it was a bedroom. He looked toward the bed; it was empty and the blankets were thrown back.

‘I believe she’s out,’ he said to Chuck.

‘Maybe she’s having a bath,’ Chuck said. ‘Want me to go and see?’

English ignored his eagerness and moved into the bedroom, turning on the light as he did so.

He came to an abrupt standstill.

To the right of the door leading into the bedroom was another door. Against this door, and hanging by a white silk cord which had been thrown over the top of the door and fastened to something on the other side, was the body of a dark haired girl in her early twenties. She was wearing a white silk dressing gown that hung open to show a blue nylon nightdress. What beauty she might have had was spoilt now by her waxen colour and her swollen tongue that protruded

from her open mouth. Dried blood made a red thread from her nose to her chin. Chuck drew in a sharp breath.

‘Holy mackerel! What did she want to do that for?’ he said in a tight, low voice.

English went over to her and touched her hand.

‘She’s been dead about seven hours at a guess,’ he said. ‘This is getting complicated, Chuck.’

Chuck came and stood at his side, his eyes appraising the dead girl.

‘It sure is,’ he said, then went on, ‘That’s exactly the kind of nightie I want my girl to wear, but she won’t wear anything but pyjamas.’

English wasn’t listening. He stood staring at the dead girl, his mind busy.

‘We’d better get out of here, boss,’ Chuck said after a long silence.

‘Shut up, will you?’ English snapped, and began to move around the room.

Chuck went over to the door and waited, his small, hard eyes on English.

‘On the mantel, boss,’ he said suddenly.

English looked at the mantel. Among the usual junk people keep on mantels was a silver-framed photograph of his brother Roy.

He picked it up.

Written in white ink across the lower part of the photograph in his brother’s big sprawling hand was the legend: “Look at me sometimes, darling, and remember what we’re going to be to each other. Roy.”

English swore softly under his breath.

‘So he had to fall in love with her!’ He looked over at Chuck. ‘He’s certain to have written to her. His kind always does. Get busy and see if you can find any letters.’

Chuck went into action smoothly, quickly and with professional thoroughness.

English stood aside and watched him go through the various drawers and cupboards in the room. In a very short time Chuck had unearthed a packet of letters done up in blue ribbon which he handed to English, and then continued his search.

English glanced through the letters, recognizing his brother’s handwriting. He had only to read two or three of them to know that Roy and Mary had been passionately in love with each other, and that Roy had been planning to leave Corrine and go away with Mary.

With a wry grimace, he shoved the letters in his pocket as Chuck closed the last drawer.

‘That’s the lot in here, boss.’

‘Take a look in the other room,’ English said, and when Chuck left the bedroom he picked up the framed photograph of his brother and dropped it into his pocket.

Five minutes later, English and Chuck left the apartment, went down the stairs and walked to the car.

‘The office, and snap it up,’ English said as he climbed to the car. ‘And keep your mouth shut about this, Chuck.’

Chuck inclined his head, slid under the steering wheel and sent the Cadillac shooting down the road.

II

The intercom on English's vast mahogany desk buzzed into life, and reaching forward, he pressed down the switch.

'Mr. Crail is here, Mr. English,' Lois told him.

'Send him in, and when he's gone, come in yourself,' English said, and pushed back his chair.

A moment later the door opened and Sam Crail came in.

Crail was nearly as tall as English, and immensely fat. His hair was black and thick and smoothly oiled. His complexion was pallid and his eyes sharp and beady. His smooth, fat jowls were blue with constant shaving, and his pudgy hands were hairy, his nails immaculately manicured.

Although his appearance wasn't prepossessing, he was the smartest attorney in town, and had handled all English's legal work ever since English had begun to climb.

'Hello, Nick,' he said as he pulled up a chair. 'This is a bad business.'

English grunted, pushed his cigar box across the desk and eyed Crail speculatively.

'How's Corrine?' he asked abruptly.

Crail grimaced. He selected a cigar, pierced it with a gold cigar pin, lit it and blew smoke to the ceiling.

'She's difficult, Nick, and she's going to make trouble.'

'No she isn't,' English said shortly. 'What do you imagine you're on my payroll for? It's your job to stop her making trouble.'

'What do you think I've been doing ever since I got there last night?' Crail said a little heatedly. 'But she won't play. Her story is Roy is in debt. He came to you for money, and you threw him out.'

English snorted.

'He came to me for a loan six months ago,' he said. 'That's not much of a story. Why didn't he shoot himself sooner?'

'She maintains he came to you the day before yesterday.'

'Then she's lying.'

'Roy told her he came to you.'

'Then he was lying.'

Crail examined the cigar thoughtfully.

‘Might be difficult to prove, Nick. The press are only waiting for something to break. She says because you wouldn’t help him, he had to go to some of his old clients to raise the wind. One of them phoned the police. She says you told the police commissioner to withdraw Roy’s licence. With no future in front of him, he shot himself. Her story makes you directly responsible for his death.’

English frowned.

‘Did Roy tell her this or is she making it up on her own initiative?’

‘She says Roy told her, and that’s the story she’s going to tell the coroner. The inquest’s in an hour, Nick.’

‘Yeah.’ English stood up and paced over to the window. ‘She doesn’t like me, does she?’

‘No, I guess she doesn’t. She says her life’s ruined, and she doesn’t see why yours shouldn’t be either.’

‘The fool! Why does she think my life would be ruined by a yarn like this?’ English said, turning from the window. ‘What put that idea into her empty head?’

Crail shrugged.

‘It wouldn’t ruin you Nick, but it would cause a stink. People think you are rolling in money. Public opinion is a dangerous thing to come up against. She says Roy wanted four thousand to get him out of his mess. Four thousand wouldn’t have scratched your pile. She could make it sound pretty sordid, Nick.’

‘He wanted ten thousand and he wouldn’t tell me why,’ English said. ‘I turned him down because I thought it was time he stopped sponging on me. He would have kept on and on if I hadn’t shown him he couldn’t come to me whenever he ran short of money. Look at the way he was living. He didn’t attempt to economize. Why the hell should I keep him and his wife?’

‘Sure,’ Crail said, ‘but now he’s shot himself, he gets the sympathy. This could put paid to the hospital idea, Nick. They are only waiting for an excuse to double-cross you.’

‘I know.’ English came back to the desk. ‘Now listen, the story is that Roy was overworking. The business was a disappointment. He tried to hold it together, but it was too much for him. Instead of coming to me, he tried to handle it himself, cracked under the strain and shot himself. That’s the story

I've given the press this morning, and that's the story you are going to give the coroner. Corrine will go with you and say amen.'

Crail looked startled.

'She won't do it. I've talked to her, and I know. She's made up her mind to be difficult.'

'She'll do it,' English returned, his voice hardening. 'If she doesn't like that story, then I'll give the press another she'll like a lot less. Roy had a secretary; a girl named Mary Savitt. They were lovers. They planned to run away together, and leave Corrine out on a limb. Something went wrong; probably Roy couldn't get enough money to quit. Being the weakling he was, he shot himself. The girl must have gone to the office and found him. She went home and hanged herself.'

Crail stared at him.

'Hanged herself?'

'Yes. I went to talk to her this morning, and found her dead. No one knows yet. Sooner or later they'll find her, but I'm hoping the inquest will be over before they do.'

'Did anyone see you there?' Crail asked anxiously.

'I was seen going up the stairs. My story is I rang on the bell, and getting no answer, assumed she had gone down to the office.'

'Are you sure they were lovers?'

English opened a drawer, took out the photograph he had found in Mary Savitt's bedroom and pushed it across the desk. He tossed the packet of letters into Crail's lap.

'There's all the proof. If Corrine thinks she can mess up my pitch by telling a snivelling yarn like this, she's got another think coming. Tell her to toe the line or this muck goes to the press.'

Crail paused long enough to read two or three of the letters, then he put them in his briefcase, together with the photograph.

'This is going to be a shock to her, Nick,' he said slowly. 'She was crazy about Roy.'

English regarded him, his eyes hard.

'She doesn't have to know. That's up to you. Persuade her to toe the line if you're all that anxious to spare her feelings.'

'I guess she'll have to see these letters,' Crail said. 'All the same I don't like it.'

‘You don’t have to do the job,’ English said. ‘I can always get another attorney, Sam.’

Crail shrugged his fat shoulders.

‘Oh, I’ll do it,’ he said. ‘I wouldn’t like to be as hard as you are, Nick.’

‘Let’s skip the sentiment. Did Roy leave a will?’

‘Yes. He left everything to Corrine. As far as I can see it amounts to a flock of debts. He had a safe deposit, and I hold the key. I haven’t had time to examine it, but I don’t reckon to find anything in it.’

‘Let me know how his estate stands before you tell Corrine,’ English said. ‘We could arrange to find an insurance policy in his safe deposit. Fix it that she has a couple of hundred bucks a week for life. I’ll pay.’

Crail grinned.

‘Who’s going soft now?’ he asked, getting to his feet.

‘Get over to the coroner’s office,’ English said curtly, ‘and make that story stand up.’

‘I’ll make it stand up,’ Crail said, nodded and crossed the room to the door. ‘I’ll call you as soon as it’s over.’

III

A minute or so after Crail had gone, Lois left her desk, crossed the room to English's office door and tapped as she opened it. English was staring at his cigar with cold, brooding eyes. He looked up and gave her a little nod.

'Come on in and sit down,' he said, and hunched his massive shoulders as he leaned across the desk. 'What time did you get to bed this morning?'

Lois smiled as she pulled up a chair to the desk and sat down.

'It was after four, but I don't need much sleep.'

'Nonsense. Of course you do. Go home after lunch and go to bed.'

'But really, Mr. English. . .' she began.

'That's an order,' he broke in curtly. 'Let the work wait. You're always working. Let Harry do what's necessary.'

'Harry was late, too,' she reminded him quietly. 'It's all right, Mr. English. I'm not a bit tired. We're working on the fight figures.'

English ran his fingers through his dark hair and scowled.

'Damn it! I'd forgotten about the fight. What was the take?'

'Harry will have the figures for you in about half an hour.'

'Good. Now about last night. What did you think of the setup there?'

'Not much, Mr. English. I went through all the files. There's been no new business since August.'

English frowned.

'Are you sure? Let's see, I bought the business for him in March, didn't I?'

'Yes, Mr. English. I've found correspondence dated up to July 31st, but nothing since then.'

'What was he doing then for the past nine months?'

Lois shook her head.

'The place might just as well have been closed. Nothing came in, and nothing went out. At least, there are no copies of letters in the files.'

English rubbed his jaw thoughtfully.

'How about his cases? Did he keep any record of those?'

'He handled eighteen cases from April to the end of July. Twelve of them were divorce cases, three missing people cases and three husband-and-wife watching. But after the end of July there are no records of him having any

other cases.'

'What about his books?'

'There was a set in the safe. I took copies of the details from March to July. I thought the police mightn't like it if I took the books away. I have the copies if you would like to see them.'

'What was his net average take?'

'Around seventy-five a week.'

English grimaced.

'That's nothing. Did the books show anything after July?'

She shook her head.

'Then how in the world did he manage to run a house like that on seventy-five a week?' English said blankly. 'You mean to tell me that since August the business hasn't earned a dime?'

'He may have kept another set of books, Mr. English, but according to the one I found, nothing came in since August.'

English shrugged.

'Well, okay. What else did you find?'

'There was a card index holder in one of his desk drawers. It had a few blank cards in it. I have an idea the cards that were in use have been taken away.'

English studied her, his eyes interested.

'What makes you say that?'

'From the appearance of the box. The bottom of it was very dusty, and by the marks in the dust it was pretty obvious that there had been a number of cards in the box. I'm just making a guess, but it did strike me that a number of cards had been recently removed.'

'Maybe the box belonged to the previous owner.'

'It looked new to me, Mr. English.'

English pushed back his chair and stood up. He began to prowls around the office, his brows wrinkling into a frown.

'It's damned funny, isn't it?' he said after a long silence. 'So no business at all was done in the office from August of last year to date. Is that right?'

'Yes, unless copies of letters and dossiers covering that period have been taken away.'

'Any sign of any paper having been burned in the office?'

'No.'

‘Well, all right, Lois, thanks a lot. Sorry to have kept you out of bed so late. Be a good girl and go home after lunch. What’s important for me today?’ You have two interviews this afternoon - Miss Nankin and Mr. Burnstein. You are lunching with the senator at one-thirty. There’s the mail and a number of contracts for your signature, and Harry would like you to see the balance sheet and figures of the fight.’

‘Let’s have the mail first. Then send Harry in to me. English glanced at his watch. I have an hour and a half before I need worry about the senator.’

‘Yes, Mr. English.’

She went out and returned almost immediately with the mail. She sat down at the desk with her notebook ready for his dictation.

Working with his usual speed, English polished off the mail, glanced through a number of contracts that had been initialled by Sam Crail, signed them, then pushed the pile of papers over to Lois.

‘Let’s have Harry in now,’ he said.

Harry Vince came in with slightly dragging feet. He looked pale, and there were smudges under his eyes.

English gave him a quick glance, then grinned.

‘Late hours don’t seem to suit you, Harry,’ he said. ‘You look like something the cat dragged in.’

‘I guess I feel like it, too,’ Harry said with a wan smile. ‘I have the figures for you. We have a net take of two hundred and seventy-five thousand.’

English nodded.

‘That’s not so bad. Did you put a bet on Joey, Harry?’

Harry shook his head.

‘I guess I forgot.’

English gave him a sharp look.

‘What’s the matter with you? Don’t you want to pick up some free money? I told you you couldn’t go wrong.’

‘I meant to, Mr. English,’ Harry said, flushing, ‘but in the rush it went out of my mind.’

‘Chuck made himself a thousand. Didn’t Lois back Joey?’

‘I don’t think she did.’

‘You two are hopeless,’ English said with a resigned shrug. ‘Well, it’s your own funeral. I can’t do more than put the opportunity to make some money in front of you. That reminds me. Morilli will look in some time this morning.’

Give him three hundred out of my expense account. He's supposed to have won it on the fight.'

'Yes, Mr. English.'

English stubbed out his cigar.

'Ever thought of getting married, Harry?' he asked abruptly.

Harry stiffened. His eyes shifted away from English.

'Why, no. I guess I haven't.'

'Haven't you even got a girl?' English asked, smiling.

'I just haven't had time to get around to girls yet,' Harry said in a low, flat voice.

'Well, for God's sake! You're - what? Thirty-two or three?'

'Thirty-two.'

'You'd better buck up,' English said, and laughed. 'Why, when I was half your age I had a string of girls.'

'Yes, Mr. English.'

'Maybe I'm working you too hard. Is that it?'

'Oh, no, Mr. English. Nothing like that.'

English stared at him, puzzled, then he shrugged.

'Well, it's your life. Better send that balance sheet over to Asprey, and get him to certify it. I have a lunch date with the senator, worse luck.'

As Harry moved to the door, the buzzer on the desk sounded. English pressed down the switch.

'Lieutenant Morilli is here, Mr. English,' Lois said. 'He would like a word.'

'Harry will see him,' English said. 'I'm going to lunch.'

'He particularly wants to see you, Mr. English. He says it's important and urgent.'

English hesitated, frowning.

'Okay, send him in. I've still got ten minutes. Tell Chuck to have the car ready.' As he released the switch, he said to Harry, 'Get his money ready and give it to him as he goes out.'

'Yes, Mr. English,' Harry said and opened the door and stood aside to let Morilli enter the office.

'You've caught me at a bad time,' English said as Harry went out, shutting the door behind him. 'I've got to go out in five minutes. What's on your mind?'

‘I thought I ought to have a word with you,’ Morilli said, coming over to the desk. ‘We’ve located your brother’s secretary. A girl named Mary Savitt.’

English looked at him, his darkly tanned face expressionless.

‘So what?’

‘She’s dead.’

English frowned and stared at Morilli, who stared back at him.

‘Dead? What - suicide?’

Morilli lifted his shoulders.

‘That’s what I’ve come to see you about. It could be murder.’

IV

For a long second, English stared at Morilli, then waved him to a chair. 'Sit down, and let's hear about it.'

Morilli sat down.

'I telephoned Mrs. English this morning,' he said, 'to find out if Mr. English had a secretary. She gave me the girl's name and address. I and a sergeant went down there. She has an apartment on 45th East Place.'

He paused and looked hard at English.

'I know,' English said, taking his cue from Morilli's look. 'I went there myself this morning. I couldn't get an answer. I thought she must have gone down to the office.'

Morilli nodded.

'That's right,' he said. 'Miss Hopper, who lives in the apartment above Miss Savitt's, said she had seen you.'

'Well, go on,' English said curtly. 'What happened?'

'We didn't get an answer to our buzz. There was a bottle of milk and a newspaper outside the door, and that made me suspicious. We got a passkey and found her hanging on the bathroom door.'

English pushed his cigar box across the desk after taking one himself.

'Go ahead and help yourself,' he said. 'What's this about murder?'

'On the face of it, it looked like suicide,' Morilli said. 'The police surgeon said it was a typical suicide.' He rubbed his bony nose and added softly, 'And he still thinks it's suicide.' Then he went on. 'After the body was removed, I had a look around the room. I was on my own, Mr. English, and I made a discovery. Near the bed was a damp patch on the carpet as if it had been recently washed. When I examined it carefully I found a small stain. I gave it a benzidine test. It was a bloodstain.'

English took his cigar from between his lips and frowned at the glowing end.

'I don't reckon to be as smart as you, Lieutenant, but I fail to see how that makes it murder.'

Morilli smiled.

'A faked suicide is very often difficult to spot, Mr. English,' he said.

‘We’re trained to look for the giveaway. That stain on the carpet was a pretty complete giveaway. You see, when I cut the girl down I noticed she had bled from the nose. There were no marks on her nightdress, and I expected to find at least a drop or two of blood somewhere about her clothes. Then I find a stain on the floor. That tells me she died on the floor, and not hanging from the door.’

‘You mean she was strangled on the floor?’

‘That’s right. If someone surprised her, slipped the dressing gown cord around her throat and tightened it she would have lost consciousness very quickly. She would have fallen face down on the carpet, and while the killer was exerting pressure on the cord, it is likely she would bleed from the nose, making a stain on the carpet. Having killed her, it would be simple for him to string her up against the bathroom door to give the appearance of suicide.’

English thought about this, then nodded.

‘I guess that’s right. So you think it’s murder?’

‘I won’t swear to it, but how else did the stain get on the carpet?’

‘You’re sure it’s blood?’

‘No doubt about it.’

English glanced at his wristwatch. He was already four minutes late for his appointment.

‘Well, thanks for telling me, Lieutenant,’ he said. ‘This is unexpected. I don’t know what to make of it. Maybe we can talk about it later on. Right now I have a date with the senator. He got to his feet. I’ve got to be running along.’

Morilli didn’t move. He sat looking up at English, an odd expression in his eyes that English didn’t like.

‘What’s on your mind?’ English asked curtly.

‘It’s up to you, Mr. English, but I should have thought you would have wanted to settle this business right now. I haven’t put my report in yet, but I’ll have to within the next half-hour.’

English frowned.

‘What’s your report got to do with me?’

‘That’s for you to say,’ Morilli returned carefully. ‘I like to help you where I can, Mr. English. You’ve always been pretty good to me.’

English had a sudden idea that there was something very wrong behind Morilli’s visit.

He leaned forward and flicked down the intercom switch.

‘Lois? Get hold of the senator and tell him I’m going to be late. I shan’t be with him until two o’clock.’

‘Yes, Mr. English.’

He released the switch and sat down again.

‘Go ahead, Lieutenant. Do some talking,’ he said, his voice hard and quiet.

Morilli hitched his chair forward, and looking English straight in the face, said, ‘I don’t have to tell you how the D.A. feels about Senator Beaumont. They’ve been sworn enemies ever since the senator got into office. If the D.A. can do anything to discredit the senator he’s going to do it. Everyone knows you’re behind the senator. If the D.A. can make things tough for you, he’ll do it in the hope it’ll eventually hit the senator. If he can involve you in a scandal, he’s not going to be too particular how he does it.’

‘For a lieutenant of homicide, you keep remarkably well informed about politics,’ English said. ‘All right, we’ll take that as read. What has it got to do with Mary Savitt?’

‘It could have plenty to do with her,’ Morilli said. ‘Doc Richards told me your brother died between nine and half past ten last night. He couldn’t put it nearer than that. He says Mary Savitt died between ten o’clock and midnight. Miss Hopper tells me she saw your brother leave Mary Savitt’s apartment at nine forty-five last night. It’s not going to take the D.A. long to arrive at the conclusion these two had a suicide pact. That your brother murdered the girl, then went down to his office and shot himself. If he does arrive at that conclusion there’s going to be quite a stink in the press, and it’s going to come this way and bound off you onto the senator.’

English sat still for a long moment, staring at Morilli, his eyes like granite.

‘Why are you telling me all this, Lieutenant?’ he asked at last.

Morilli lifted his shoulders; his small dark eyes shifted away from English’s face.

‘No one but me knows it’s murder, Mr. English. Doc Richards says it’s suicide, but then he didn’t see the stain on the carpet. If he knew about that, he’d change his mind, but he doesn’t know, nor does the D.A.’

‘But they’ll know when you’ve put in your report,’ English said.

‘I guess they will, unless I forget to mention the bloodstain.’

English studied Morilli’s white, expressionless face.

‘There’s Miss Hopper’s evidence,’ he said. ‘You say she saw Roy leave

the apartment. If she starts talking, the D.A. will investigate. He might even find the stain.'

Morilli smiled.

'You don't have to worry about Miss Hopper,' he said. 'I've taken care of her. I happen to know what she does in her spare time. She wouldn't want to go into the box and give evidence. Some smart attorney like Sam Crail might turn her inside out. I mentioned that fact to her. She isn't going to talk.'

English leaned forward to knock ash off his cigar.

'You realize the chances are a hundred to one that Roy killed the girl, don't you?' he said quietly. 'If she was murdered, then someone is going to get away with it, if it wasn't Roy.'

Morilli shrugged.

'It'll be your brother who murdered her if the D.A. hears about the stain, Mr. English. You can bet your bottom dollar on it. Either way the killer gets away with it. He made a little gesture with his hand. It's up to you. I'll put the stain in my report on your say-so, but since you've taken care of me in the past, I thought it was only right I should give you a break when the chance came my way.'

English looked at him.

'That's pretty nice of you, Lieutenant. I shan't forget it. Maybe it would be better to forget about the stain.'

'Just as you say,' Morilli said, getting to his feet. 'Only too glad to be of help, Mr. English.'

'Let me see,' English said absently, 'you have a bet to collect, haven't you? How much was it, Lieutenant?'

Morilli ran his thumbnail along his narrow, starkly black moustache before saying, 'Five thousand, Mr. English.'

English smiled.

'Was it as much as that?'

'I guess that was the sum,' Morilli returned, his face expressionless.

'In that case I'd better pay you. I always believe in paying my debts. I guess that's right, and I always believe in giving value for money. You would prefer cash I expect?'

'It would come in handy.'

English leaned forward and pushed down a switch on the intercom.

'Harry? Never mind about that little matter I mentioned to you just now.'

I'm looking after Lieutenant Morilli.'

'Yes, Mr. English.'

English released the switch, stood up and went over to the wall safe.

'You've a pretty good organization here Mr. English,' Morilli said.

'Nice to know you approve,' English said dryly. He opened the safe and took out two bundles of notes and tossed them on the desk. I won't ask for a receipt.'

'You won't need one,' Morilli returned, picked up the two bundles, checked the amount with a quick flick of his fingers and stowed them away in his overcoat pockets.

'Of course the D.A. might not trust your report,' English said, going back to the desk and sitting down. 'He might send up one of his people to check the room, and he might find the stain.'

Morilli smiled.

'I like to kid myself that my service to you, Mr. English, is a pretty good one. The stain doesn't exist anymore. I've fixed it.' He moved over to the door. 'Well, I guess I mustn't hold you up any longer. I'd better get over to the stationhouse and write my report.'

'So long, Lieutenant,' English said. When Morilli had gone, English drew in a deep breath. 'Well, I'll be double damned!' he said softly. 'The blackmailing sonofabitch!'

V

From the door of the restaurant, English spotted the senator sitting alone at a corner table, his thin elfish face puckered in a frown of impatience and irritation.

Senator Henry Beaumont was sixty-five years old, small, wiry and thin. His face was wrinkled and the colour of old leather, and his eyes were steel-grey and as sharp as needles. He was a man of insatiable ambition; his ultimate aim was to become president. He had started life washing bottles in a drug store, and he was inordinately proud of the fact. World War I had given him the chance he was looking for, and he proved himself an able leader of men, coming out of the Army with the rank of major and two minor decorations. By chance he had been taken up by the boss of the Democratic machine ruling Chicago at that time, and had been given the job of overseer of highways in recognition of his war service. It was while he was holding this appointment that he met Nick English, who was trying to finance his gyroscope compass. Beaumont introduced him to his circle of wealthy businessmen. It was through Beaumont's introduction that English financed his compass. When English finally settled in Essex City, he remembered Beaumont and wrote to him, offering to finance him if he cared to run for the post of county judge. Beaumont jumped at the offer, and with English's money behind him, he was elected.

English was quick to realize that as his business expanded and his kingdom grew, it was essential to have a powerful friend in the political machine. Although Beaumont was no ball of fire, he was at least sharply aware of his debt to English, and was willing to pull strings when English wanted them pulled.

The next move, English had decided, was to get Beaumont elected senator. The opposition was stiff, but again with English's money and coupled with his ruthless determination, Beaumont became senator. Now, he was to come up for reelection in another six months' time, and English knew Beaumont was uneasy as to what the results would be.

The maître d'hôtel came hurrying over to English as he stood in the doorway, and deferentially led him down the long aisle to the senator's table.

As he followed the maître d'hôtel, English was aware that everyone in the luxury restaurant had stopped talking and was looking at him with curious eyes.

He was used to being stared at, but today he felt those stares were accentuated by something more than curiosity. The news of his brother's suicide had caused a sensation, and people were already beginning to gossip about the reason for the suicide.

The senator half rose from his seat at English joined him.

'I thought you were never coming,' he said in his shrill, waspish voice.

English gave him a hard, cold look and sat down.

'I got held up,' he said shortly. 'What are we going to eat?'

While the senator was choosing his meal, the maître d'hôtel slipped an envelope into English's hand.

'This came for you about ten minutes ago,' Mr. English, he murmured.

English nodded, ordered a rare steak and green peas and half a bottle of claret, then ripped open the envelope and glanced at the scrawled message.

Everything under control. Corrine put on a beautiful performance. Verdict: suicide while mind was unbalanced. There'll be no kickback. Sam.

English slipped the note into his pocket, a hard little smile lighting his face.

'What's this I hear about your brother?' the senator asked as soon as the maître d'hôtel had gone away. 'What the hell was he playing at?'

English looked at him, a surprised expression on his face.

'Roy's been heading for a breakdown for weeks now,' he said quietly. 'I warned him he was working too hard. Well, it got too much for him, and he took the easy way out.'

The senator snorted. His leathery complexion turned a dark red.

'Don't feed me that crap!' he said fiercely, keeping his voice down. 'Roy never did a hard day's work in his life. What's this about blackmail?'

English shrugged.

'There's bound to be all kinds of rumours,' he said indifferently. 'There are plenty of people who would like to make a stink out of it. You don't have to get hot under the collar. Roy shot himself because he was worried about his business. That's all there's to it.'

'Is it?' Beaumont said, leaning forward to glare at English. 'There's talk he tried to blackmail some woman, and he was going to lose his licence. How true is that?'

‘Every word of it,’ English said, ‘but no one’s going to say so unless he wants a lawsuit with me about it.’

Beaumont blinked and sat back.

‘Like that, is it?’ he said, a look of admiration coming to his eyes.

English nodded.

‘The police commissioner started this. I’ve had a word with him. He’s not taking it any further. You’ve got nothing to worry about, Beaumont.’

The waiter brought the steaks, and after he had gone, Beaumont said, ‘Maybe I haven’t anything to worry about, but you have. This’ll kill the hospital business.’

English cut his steak, then glanced up.

‘What makes you say that? If the commission thinks they can double-cross me, they have another thing coming.’

‘Now look, Nick, you’ve got to be reasonable,’ Beaumont said anxiously. ‘You can’t get away from it. This rumour is going the rounds, and it’s a damned ugly rumour. You know what the commission’s like. They’ll throw a fit if I tell them you want the hospital named after you.’

‘Then don’t tell them until this has blown over. It’ll blow over in a few weeks.’

‘But they’ve called a meeting next week to choose a name for the hospital.’

‘Tell them to postpone the meeting,’ English said, and reached for his wineglass. ‘This is damned good claret. You should try it instead of drinking Scotch at every meal.’

‘Never mind the claret,’ Beaumont said, shifting uneasily on his chair. ‘The meeting can’t be postponed. You know that as well as I do.’

‘It’s going to be postponed,’ English said. ‘Who built the hospital? Who financed it? What do you mean - the meeting can’t be postponed? I say it’s going to be postponed, and you can tell them I said so!’

Beaumont ran his finger around his collar.

‘Now look, Nick, you can’t treat the commission like that. They’ve called the meeting, and you can’t do anything about it. You can’t treat them like a bunch of schoolboys. Why, damn it! They’re the most important and influential people in this city.’

English grinned.

‘Are they? That’s very funny. Then why couldn’t they finance the

hospital? Why did they have to come to me? Important? Don't make me laugh! They're a bunch of stuffed shirts. Now listen to me, Beaumont, you are going to see Rees and tell him to call the meeting off. Tell him I said so. If he tries to kick, tell him I'll withdraw my support. See how he likes that. He's in this up to his neck, and so are the rest of them. They are committed up to a million and a half dollars. Where's the money coming from without my guarantee? Let them work that out. Do you think the banks would advance all that dough on the security that bunch of dumb clucks can offer? Not damned likely! The meeting is to be postponed until I say it can go ahead. Do you understand?'

The senator started to say something, then caught the look in English's eyes. He lifted his shoulders in a despairing shrug.

'Well, all right, I'll see what I can do, but I warn you, Nick, they won't like it.'

English laughed.

'Do you think I care what those deadbeats like or dislike? To hell with them!'

'Now look, Nick,' Beaumont said, leaning forward. 'I know you're flying high, and I admire you for it. I'm flying high myself. I know you're not going to stop at this hospital business. You have other ideas. You're going to make Essex City remember you. I've been watching you for a long time now, and I'm getting to know your methods. There's the Westside bridge project you have your eyes on, and if I remember rightly, you've been thinking about building an opera house. Well, okay. A hospital, a bridge and an opera house is pretty good going for one man, but the commission won't like it. They've lived here a damn sight longer than you have. Their fathers, their grandfathers and their great grandfathers were here long before you were ever thought of. Money isn't everything. In this straight-laced city a sound reputation is more important than money, and scandal is as lethal as poison gas to anyone who gets into the limelight. Up to now, you've got by, but watch out. Rees, the D.A. and the commission hate your guts. If they can pin anything on you, they will, and if they do, bang will go your hospital, your bridge and your opera house.'

English pushed aside his plate, and took out his cigar case. He offered it to Beaumont.

'Don't worry about me, Beaumont,' he said quietly, 'I'm big enough to

look after myself.'

'Maybe you are, but I'm hooked up with you, and if anything happens to you, it'll automatically happen to me,' Beaumont said gravely. 'I can't afford to stick my neck out, even if you can.'

'What's the matter with you - cold feet?

Beaumont shrugged.

'Call it what you like. I've got to be careful. Are you sure you've taken care of this suicide business?'

'That angle's all right, but there's another angle that may hit the headlines tomorrow. Roy had a secretary, a girl named Mary Savitt. She also committed suicide last night.'

Beaumont's eyes bulged.

'Good grief! Why?'

English smiled grimly.

'Maybe she was also overworking.'

'Do you think anyone's going to believe that? What were these two to each other? Was it a suicide pact?'

'That's what it could be called, but there's no proof. If we get a break, no one's going to connect the girl with Roy. Morilli's leaning over backward on my side. He cost me five grand this morning.'

Beaumont swallowed convulsively. His Adam's apple flopped about like a frog on a hot stove.

'You gave Morilli five thousand? Suppose he tells the commissioner? This could be a trap, Nick. Bribing a police officer is a serious charge. That's the kind of charge they would love to hang on you. It'd finish you.'

'Don't be so dramatic,' English said curtly. 'Morilli's all right. He's got ambitions, and he knows by sticking with me, he stands a chance to get somewhere. Anyway, he can't prove I've given him anything. I paid him in cash, and the bills can't be traced. He pushed back his seat. Well, I've got to get back to the office. Don't worry your brains about this. It'll blow over.'

Beaumont got to his feet.

'But what made these two kill themselves?' he asked. 'There must have been some reason.'

English signed the check the waiter laid on the table and left a liberal tip.

'Sure, there's a reason,' he returned. 'And I intend to find out what it is.'

VI

A few minutes after six o'clock, the same evening, and after English had finished dictating the last letter of the day, Lois put her head around the door to tell him Sam Crail was waiting, and wanted to see him.

English glanced at his wristwatch, frowning. He had promised to take Julie to a movie, and then drive her to the Garden of Eden Club where she sang. He had promised to pick her up at half past six.

'Send him in,' he said, 'and get off home yourself. You should have been gone hours ago.'

'Yes, Mr. English,' Lois said, and turned to beckon to Crail, who was impatiently waiting behind the barrier.

'Come on in, Sam,' English said as he caught sight of him. 'You'd better ride down with me. I promised Julie I'd take her to a movie tonight, and I don't want to be late.'

'I don't imagine you'll want to go to any movie when you've heard what I'm going to tell you,' Crail said, lowering his bulk into an armchair. 'Sorry, Nick, but you may even want to call Julie and break the date.'

English stared at him.

'It'll have to be pretty important for that. This is the second time I've stood Julie up this week. What is it?'

'I've opened Roy's deposit box,' Crail said. 'There's twenty thousand dollars in it - in cash.'

English gaped.

'Twenty thousand?'

'Yep, in hundred bills. How do you like that?'

'Well, for God's sake! Where did he get it from?'

Crail shook his head.

'Search me. I thought you'd want to know right away.'

'Yes.' English stood staring down at the carpet, rubbing the back of his neck with his hand while his eyes brooded, then, shrugging, he went over to the telephone, lifted it and said, 'Get me Miss Clair's apartment, will you, Lois?'

Crail reached out and helped himself to a cigar.

'I could do with a drink if there's one within sight,' he said. I've had quite a day.'

English motioned to the big cellarette that stood against the wall.

'Help yourself.' Then into the telephone he went on, 'Julie? Nick. I'm held up again. Yeah, I'm sorry, but I can't make that movie. That's the way it is. Sam's just come in with some news - about Roy. I'll tell you later. Sorry, Julie. I seem to be always standing you up. What are you going to do? Look, would you like Harry to go with you? He's still in the office, and he'd be tickled pink.' He listened for a moment, frowning, then said, 'Well, all right. I thought maybe you would like a little company. I'll meet you at the club at nine. So long for now.'

He hung up with a little grimace.

Crail passed him a whisky and soda.

'You know your business best, Nick,' he said, 'but I'll be damned if I'd let an attractive girl like Julie go to the movies with Harry Vince; he's far too good looking to take a chance like that.'

English stared blankly at him.

'Why not? It would have made a change for Julie.' Then he smiled. 'You don't think Julie would run off with a kid like Harry, do you? Don't talk nonsense. What's Harry got to offer her? The trouble with you, Sam, is you've got a mind like a cesspit.'

'I guess that's right,' Crail admitted and laughed. 'But it pays off in the long run. Is she going with him?'

'It's none of your business,' English returned, sitting down, 'but to put your mind at rest, she isn't. She prefers to wait until I can take her.'

'You're a lucky guy,' Crail said enviously. 'Whenever I take a girl out I have to give her a mink coat before she'll come.'

'You want to get some of that fat off,' English said brutally. 'You're not cut out for romance. What else did you find in the deposit box?'

Crail lit his cigar and blew carefully on the lighted end.

'Looks as if he was ready to skip,' he said. 'There were two air tickets to Los Angeles, the money, his will and a gold and platinum wedding ring.'

'How the devil did he manage to lay his hands on all that money?' English asked, frowning down at his snowy blotter.

'Why the devil did he commit suicide?' Crail said. 'That's the important question.'

English nodded. He sat silent for several moments, then asked abruptly, 'How did Corrine react, Sam?'

Crail grimaced.

'It hit her where she lives, but she finally toed the line. I'm sorry for that girl. All right, she's dumb, but I didn't like telling her about Roy. It was like killing a mouse with a sledgehammer. She wouldn't believe it until I showed her some of the letters, then she went to pieces. I guess she doesn't like you a lot. You'd better keep an eye on her. If she could do you dirt, she'll do it.'

English lifted his broad shoulders.

'She and twenty thousand other people. So what? Did the coroner take it all right?'

'Sure, but then he's so dumb he doesn't know his base from his apex. All he wanted was a good reason, and I gave it to him - nervous depression brought on by overwork.'

English reached forward and took a cigar. He lit it and tossed the match into the trash basket.

'Mary Savitt was murdered, Sam.'

Crail stiffened.

'What makes you say that?'

'I had a visit from Lieutenant Morilli. You know Morilli? He's worked it out as murder,' English said, and went on to tell Crail about the bloodstain on the carpet.

'Was it Roy?' Crail asked, his fat face alarmed.

'Why do you say that?'

'I don't know,' Crail returned, frowning. 'The idea automatically jumped into my mind. Let me see - these two were lovers. They were going away. Maybe the girl suddenly decided it wasn't good enough. Roy was married. She would be left out on a limb. She says she's not going at the last moment. Roy loses his temper, and strangles her, then makes it look like suicide. He goes down to his office, gets cold feet and shoots himself.'

English smiled; his eyes turned frosty.

'You worked that one out fast enough.'

'And so will the D.A.,' Crail said soberly. 'This is bad, Nick.'

'Not as bad as it sounds. Morilli's agreed to keep his mouth shut. To save his conscience I gave him five thousand.'

Crail whistled softly.

‘That copper has big ideas.’

‘Anyone worth a damn has big ideas. I don’t begrudge the money. He’s pulled me out of a nasty jam.’

‘Do you think it was Roy?’

English shook his head.

‘Not a chance. Not a chance in hell. Roy wouldn’t kill anyone. I knew him as well as I know myself. And another thing - Roy wouldn’t kill himself either.’ He got to his feet and began to pace the floor. ‘If Mary Savitt was murdered, Roy was murdered, too. How do you like that?’

‘Why, that’s crazy! The police say Roy shot himself. His prints.’

‘Be your age, Sam. Someone faked Mary Savitt’s suicide. Someone also faked Roy’s suicide. It was easy enough. All he had to do was to get hold of Roy’s gun, shoot Roy with it, put Roy’s dead fingers around the butt, and walk out.’

‘Who would want to kill Roy?’

English spread out his hands.

‘A lot of people, Sam. Roy wasn’t an endearing type.’

‘That’s right, but who would want to kill him and the girl? Why the girl?’

‘I don’t know. Maybe Roy was blackmailing someone. Maybe Mary Savitt knew the details. They worked together in the office. Maybe the killer thought he’d be safe and wipe them both out. It could be, Sam.’

Crail took a drink of whisky.

‘How about Corrine?’ he asked. ‘The outraged wife angle. She has the motive if those two really were murdered.’

English shook his head.

‘No. Corrine wouldn’t have had the strength to have hoisted that girl up against the bathroom door. It isn’t the kind of setup a woman would tackle.’

‘Maybe she got someone to do it?’

Again English shook his head.

‘You’re forgetting the twenty thousand. That could be blackmail money, Sam. Suppose Roy had been blackmailing someone in a big way, and decided to make a final killing before he went away. Suppose he turned the screw too far. Suppose the guy he was blackmailing decided he’d stop Roy once and for all, and while he was about it, stop Mary Savitt, too. If you’re looking for a theory, try that one on for size.’

Crail scratched the side of his fat neck with a carefully manicured

fingernail.

‘Are you going to talk to Morilli about this?’

‘No. Do you think I want my brother branded as a blackmailer?’

Crail shrugged.

‘Maybe the killer figured the thing would be hushed up for just that reason. If he did, he’s played it smart.’

English showed his teeth in a mirthless smile.

‘I wouldn’t be surprised. Have you told Corrine about the money, Sam?’

Crail shook his head.

‘I thought I’d better talk to you first.’

‘You did right. Sit on that money for a while. Keep it in the safe deposit. In the meantime go ahead with that insurance idea of mine. See Corrine’s fixed up, and let me know what I owe you. If that money turns out to be proceeds for blackmail, Corrine mustn’t have anything to do with it.’

‘Okay. I’ll fix it,’ Crail said. ‘One thing more, Nick. I’ve had an offer for the business. Four thousand, cash down. Want me to sell?’

English paused in his pacing and turned around.

‘Who’s the buyer?’

Crail shrugged.

‘It’s come through Hurst. He wouldn’t give the name of his client.’

‘He’s a lawyer, isn’t he?’

‘That’s what he calls himself. I have another name for him.’

‘Four thousand?’

‘That’s right. Corrine wants to sell.’

‘How does she know about it before I do?’

‘Hurst went direct to her. He phoned her at nine o clock this morning. He didn’t want to deal with me. Fortunately, Corrine was still having a weep. She put him onto me. I told her to wait a few days. I said we were certain to get a better offer.’

‘Who would want to buy a business like that for four thousand without even asking to check the books?’

‘The world is full of crazy people. I’ve given up wondering about them.’

‘Well, I haven’t,’ English said grimly. ‘When someone offers that amount of money for a business that hasn’t had a client in nine months, I think the buyer knows more about the business than I do. Tell Hurst the business isn’t for sale. I’ll find a buyer for you, and the price is seven thousand. Tell

Corrine, and give her your check. Do it first thing tomorrow morning.'

'Who's the buyer?' Crail asked, staring.

'His name's Ed Leon. He'll call on you some time tomorrow, give you his check, and all the details you want,' English said. 'And remember, Sam, I don't know Leon, and he doesn't know me. Understand?'

'Now wait a minute, Nick. Don't keep me in the dark. What exactly are you planning?'

English came over and stood in front of Crail.

'Someone killed Roy. Someone wants to buy Roy's business in a hurry. I want to find out if the killer and the buyer are one and the same. That's called working a hunch. Ed Leon's the guy to find out for me. That's what I'm planning to do.'

'Well, you know best, but what can you do if you do find out who killed Roy?'

English's cold, brooding eyes stared at Crail for a long minute.

'This is a personal matter. Someone killed my brother. I don't like that. If the police can't take care of it, then I'll bury my own dead. That's what I can do about it.'

Crail got to his feet.

'Watch out, Nick,' he said seriously. 'That kind of talk is dangerous. If you took my advice, you'd let it lie. You have too many commitments to start a caper like that. Let's face it. Roy didn't mean a thing to you. If you start to dig up his past, you may unearth something you can't bury again. Suppose he was a blackmailer? Wouldn't it be better to forget about it? You've got your career to think of.'

English slapped Crail on his broad back.

'I know you mean well, Sam, but even if Roy was a louse, he was my brother. No one's going to murder him and get away with it. I'll work it so it remains a personal and private matter between me and the killer. Take care of Corrine, and I'll take care of Roy's killer.'

When Crail had gone, English went into the outer office. Lois was still there, amid the empty desks, sitting at the switchboard, busily writing up English's appointment book from a batch of letters she held in her hand.

'For the love of Pete! Didn't I tell you to go home hours ago?' English said, coming over to her.

'I guess you did, but I thought I'd stay on until you were ready to go.'

‘I don’t know what I’d do without you, Lois,’ English said, standing beside her and looking down at her glossy dark head. ‘If I had come out and found you gone, I guess I’d have felt like a man with no arms.’

She smiled, pleased.

‘It wouldn’t have been as bad as that, Mr. English. Is there anything I can do?’

‘See if you can get Ed Leon on the phone. He’s in Chicago some place. I don’t know his number.’

‘I’ll get him for you,’ Lois said, and turned briskly to the switchboard.

English went back to his office and closed the door. He began to pace up and down, his face thoughtful. Ten minutes later, his telephone rang and he picked up the receiver.

‘Mr. Leon’s on the line now, Mr. English,’ Lois told him.

‘Good girl. Put him on, will you?’

There was a click, and English said, ‘That you, Ed?’

‘Well, if it isn’t, some other louse is wearing my suit,’ a voice said in his ear. ‘You’re interrupting a session with a blonde. It’s taken me two solid months to persuade her to come up and look at my etchings, and now you have to bust in at the psychological moment. What’s on your mind?’

‘I want you,’ English said. ‘Catch the first plane out tomorrow morning. I have a job for you that’s right up your street.’

‘I don’t want a job. I want to be left in peace,’ Leon said, his voice alarmed. ‘If that’s all you want I’ll hang up before this frill breaks her way out with an axe.’

‘I said I want you,’ English snapped. ‘This is a big job, Ed. Something right up your street or I wouldn’t have called you. When you reach town, give me a call. I’ll meet you somewhere. I don’t want anyone to know you and I are working together. Do you understand?’

‘Not a word, Leon said, sighing, but if it’s like that, I guess I’ll have to do something about it. Is there any money in it for me?’

‘Five grand,’ English said.

Leon gave a long, low whistle.

‘The buzzing you hear in your ears is my helicopter landing on your roof,’ he said excitedly and hung up.

CHAPTER THREE

I

Julie had long ago learned never to keep English waiting, so she was dressed and ready to leave when he telephoned to tell her their movie date was off.

When he hung up, she slowly replaced the receiver, and stood staring at her reflection in the mirror above the mantel. Absently she told herself that she was looking at her best, and the green scarf she had knotted at her throat set off her eyes and her copper-coloured hair with even more effect than she had imagined. She was also pleased with the way her tight camelhair coat accentuated the width of her shoulders, and looking down, she thought her new reverse calf shoes made her feet look even smaller than they were.

English had said he would have dinner with her at the club at nine o'clock. She looked at her strap watch. It was now fifteen minutes past six. She had nearly two hours before she joined him.

She picked up the telephone and dialled English's office.

Lois answered, and Julie's mouth tightened. She disliked Lois intensely. Anyone could see Lois was in love with English, except English himself, but then he would never notice a thing like that. The way Lois allowed English to make her his tame slave infuriated Julie. Besides, Julie knew Lois also disliked her. She was sure that Lois considered she wasn't good enough for English, and whenever they met, Lois always seemed able to make Julie feel uncomfortable. Her cool, serene eyes seemed to be saying, 'You have nothing to be proud of. You only sleep with him, any good-looking, brainless woman could do that, but I work with him and I help him, and I have known him much, much longer than you have.'

'Oh, Lois, this is Julie,' Julie said brightly. 'Is Harry there? I wanted some tickets for the show.'

'Yes, he's here,' Lois returned, her voice cold. 'Hold on a moment, Miss Clair.'

It was always Miss Clair, although Julie had repeatedly asked Lois to call

her by her Christian name.

There was a click on the line, and Harry's voice said, 'Hello, Julie. I was just going. Anything I can do?'

'I want two tickets for the show on Saturday, Harry,' Julie said, trying to speak calmly. 'I was going to ask Nick to bring them, but our date's off. He won't be free until nine o'clock, and I'm meeting these people before then. Can you leave them at Nick's club, and I'll pick them up?'

'Of course. I'll be glad to. I'm on my way home now. I'll put them in an envelope for you with your name on it.'

'Thanks so much, Harry,' Julie said, and hung up.

Moving quickly, she picked up her handbag and gloves and left the apartment. She rode down in the elevator, and asked the night porter to get her a taxi. While she waited, she lit a cigarette, and was annoyed to see her hands were shaking.

'Where to, madam?' the night porter asked, coming into the lobby.

'The Athletic Club.'

He opened the taxi door, put his hand on her arm to help her in, and told the driver where to go.

The taxi made fast time through the evening traffic, and as the driver was about to turn into Western Avenue, Julie leaned forward and said, 'I've changed my mind. Drive me to 5th and 27th Street, please.'

'Okay, miss,' the driver said, and looked over his shoulder at her, grinning. 'My old man always said it's because dames change their minds so often that they've got cleaner ones than us men.'

'He's probably right,' Julie said, and laughed.

After ten minutes fast driving, the driver slowed down and pulled up.

'Here we are, miss.'

Julie paid him, thanked him, and set off briskly along a quiet, dimly lit street that eventually led to the river. Every so often, she glanced over her shoulder, but the street was deserted, and she saw no one. Suddenly she slowed her pace, stopped and turned.

She looked quickly to the right and left, then up at the dark buildings opposite. Satisfied that no one was watching her, she went down a narrow, dimly lit alley that led to the waterfront.

A thin white mist was coming off the river, and as she moved along in the dark shadows, a tugboat's siren hooted dismally from the other side of the

river. Again she paused; again she looked to the right and left, then she stepped into the doorway of a tall, narrow building, pushed open the door and stepped into a dark lobby. She moved without hesitation through the darkness as if she had been here so often she knew exactly where to go.

She heard a door open near her.

‘Julie?’

‘Yes.’

She stepped into a dark room, and the door closed behind her. Then the lights sprang up, and she turned, smiling, as Harry Vince caught her in his arms.

‘What a bit of luck, darling,’ he said. ‘I was resigning myself to a dull evening. I thought he was taking you to the movies.’

She put her arms around his neck, and pressed her face against his. ‘Sam turned up at the last moment,’ she said. ‘Oh, Harry, it seems such a long time. Kiss me.’

Harry kissed her, holding her to him while his heart hammered against his side.

‘We have such a little time, darling,’ she said, pulling back and looking up at him. ‘Don’t let’s talk now. Don’t let us waste a minute.’

‘I’ve been waiting as impatiently as you for this moment, too,’ Harry said. ‘Let me take your coat. There’s a fire in the other room. Let’s go in there.’

She slipped out of her coat and going ahead of him entered the comfortable bedroom where a blazing fire greeted her. The room was lit only by the warm orange flames, casting shadows and firelight, giving the room an intimate atmosphere she had grown to love.

‘Don’t turn on the light, Harry.’

He closed the door and leaned against it, watching her. It fascinated him to see how quickly she slipped out of her clothes. She pulled a zip here and a zip there, and in a moment she was standing naked and lovely before him.

‘Julie, you are the most beautiful thing,’ he said with a catch in his voice.

She knelt by the fire, her back to him, her hands going out toward the blaze.

‘Only you can say that to me, Harry, and make me believe it.’

He went over to her, and kneeling beside her, slipped his arm around her, turning her and pulling her against him.

‘These are the only moments I live for,’ he said. ‘It’s as if the world has

stood still, and only you and I are left alive.'

She looked up at him, her arms slid around his neck, and pulling his head down, she crushed her mouth against his.

The clock on the mantel struck eight, and Julie half sat up.

'Don't move, darling,' Harry said out of the darkness, and his arm went around her. 'You have an hour yet.'

'No, only half an hour. I mustn't keep him waiting.'

'Julie, we can't go on and on like this,' Harry said, his face against hers. 'Can't you talk to him? Can't you tell him you don't want to go on with him anymore?'

He felt her stiffen, and there was a note of alarm in her voice when she said, 'Why, Harry, what are you saying? Nick would never give up. You know that. Besides, how would we live? Don't let's go over this again. You know it never gets us anywhere.'

'But this is dangerous. If he ever found out . . .'

'He won't find out,' Julie said.

'But he may. He's no fool. For all we know he suspects us now.'

'Of course he doesn't. Why, tonight, he even suggested you should take me to the movies.'

'Good Lord! What did you say?'

'I told him I didn't want to go to the movies with anyone but him.'

Harry remained silent for a moment. He stared across the room at the flames of the fire that cast dancing shadows on the ceiling.

'If he ever found out,' he said, voicing a fear that had been haunting him for weeks, 'he'd kill us. He wouldn't stop to think. He'd kill us first and let Crail fix it afterward.'

'Oh, darling, you're talking nonsense,' Julie said, touching his face. 'Nick wouldn't do a thing like that. He's far too wrapped up in his own career to risk ruining it. Why, he told me he wants the hospital named after him. Of course he wouldn't.'

Harry wasn't convinced.

'I'm not so sure. If he caught us.'

'But he won't. Please don't be silly about this, Harry. He won't find out - not now.'

Harry half sat up.

'What do you mean - not now?'

‘Now Roy’s dead.’

‘What’s Roy got to do with us?’

She hesitated, then speaking rapidly as if to force out the words, she said, ‘Roy knew. He’s been blackmailing me for the past six months.’

Harry stiffened, and cold fear clutched at his heart. He realized then how frightened he was of English, and how much he dreaded English finding out that Julie and he were lovers. He got off the bed and slipped on a dressing gown, then he turned on a shaded lamp.

‘Roy knew about us?’ he repeated, and in the light of the lamp Julie saw he had gone white.

She turned on her side, her hands covering her breasts.

‘Yes, he knew. Now he’s dead I can tell you.’

Harry felt sick.

‘Why didn’t you tell me before?’ he said, his voice going up a note.

‘I was frightened of losing you. I know how you feel about Nick. I understand it. If you thought Roy knew, you might have stopped seeing me, and I couldn’t have borne that, Harry.’

Harry moved over to a cellarette and poured himself a stiff whisky. His hand was unsteady.

‘Will you have one?’ he asked, suddenly realizing he should have asked her before pouring his own.

‘No, darling. Don’t look like that. It really is all right now Roy’s dead.’

Harry drank the whisky, then lit a cigarette and came over and sat on the bed. He gave Julie a cigarette, and not trusting his shaking hand, he dropped the lighter beside her.

‘When did it happen? You say he was blackmailing you?’

She nodded as she lit the cigarette.

‘It’s been hell, Harry. I thought I’d go out of my mind. One day, Roy came to see me. It must have been six or seven months ago. I couldn’t understand why he should have come. As you know, I scarcely knew him. He didn’t beat about the bush. He said, You are to come to my office every Friday with two hundred dollars, Julie. I can’t make you come, of course, but I can tell Nick you’re having an affair with Harry Vince. Are you going to pay me or am I to tell Nick? That’s all there was to it. I was so frightened I didn’t even ask him how he had found out. I said I would pay, and every Friday since then I’ve paid.’

‘The louse!’ Harry said furiously, clenching his fists. ‘So it is true. They’re saying he was a blackmailer. The dirty, rotten louse!’

‘You can’t imagine how relieved I was when Nick told me he had shot himself,’ Julie said. ‘It’s been a nightmare these past months. Having to go to that beastly little office and hand him the money while he sat at his desk and grinned at me, and that cheap bitch of a girl of his grinning at me, too.’

Harry was scarcely listening. His mind was seething with alarm.

‘Do you think he told Corrine?’ he asked. ‘Suppose she goes to Nick?’

‘Why should he tell her?’ Julie said a little impatiently. ‘It wasn’t anything to be proud of. Besides, Corrine would have told Nick before now if Roy had told her. I’m sure only he and that girl of his knew, and they’re both dead. I’m sure of it, Harry. I wouldn’t have told you, but if you only knew what a relief it is to tell someone.’

‘You poor darling,’ Harry said, taking her in his arms. ‘You should have told me before. Anyway, I’m going to pay you back. How much did he get out of you?’

‘Please, Harry, I don’t want to talk about it. I managed with the money I earned. Let’s forget it. She slid off the bed. I’ve got to get dressed.’

‘But I can’t let you lose all that money,’ Harry protested.

‘Don’t let’s talk about it,’ Julie said. ‘It’s paid, and I’ve forgotten it. So, please, Harry.’

Harry began to pace up and down.

‘Julie, can’t we run away together?’ he asked abruptly. ‘Must we go on taking these risks? It’s not as if he’s married to you.’

She paused with one stocking on and the other in her hand, her eyes wary.

‘What would happen to us? Nick’s so powerful. I’d never get another engagement, and you’d never get another job. He would see to that. He’s so ruthless and possessive. He’d find us, and he’d make our lives miserable for the rest of our days. Let’s be patient, Harry. Let’s be thankful we can see each other like this from time to time. Something may turn up. Don’t let us do anything silly and dangerous.’

‘But this is even more dangerous,’ Harry said. ‘We’re cheating him now, but if we went away together, he couldn’t accuse us of that.’

‘He would find us, Harry. He would never let me go.’

‘He’s not God,’ Harry said. ‘I know he’s pretty powerful, but damn it! He couldn’t stop me earning a living. That’s nonsense, Julie.’

Julie slipped into her dress, put on her shoes and crossed over to the dressing table. She sat down and began to make up her face.

‘Say something Julie,’ Harry said anxiously. ‘Don’t you see this is even more dangerous than going away?’

She turned and faced him.

‘All right, Harry, I’ll tell you the truth. For weeks now I knew we should have told Nick and gone away together, but I can’t face it. I can’t give up all the things that mean so much to me. I don’t suppose you’ve ever thought what it means to me to have Nick behind me. If it wasn’t for Nick I wouldn’t be singing at the best nightclub in town. I wouldn’t have that lovely penthouse or all the clothes I’ve got. I wouldn’t have accounts at all the big stores. I wouldn’t be able to buy what I like when I like without thinking of where the money is coming from. I wouldn’t have all the important men in town fawning round me wherever I go. I wouldn’t have the car I’ve got. If I walked out on Nick, I’d walk into a different life, and I wouldn’t like it.’

Harry winced and sat down. He stared into the fire, his right fist grinding into the palm of his left hand.

‘I see,’ he said in a flat, tired voice. ‘No, I hadn’t thought of it quite like that Julie.’

‘I want my cake and I want to eat it,’ Julie said, not looking at him. ‘I love you, Harry, more than any other man on earth. Sometimes I wish I had never met you. I wish I had never fallen in love with you. It would have saved so much pain and worry and cheating. But I did meet you and I did fall in love with you, so there it is. You have got to take me as I am or leave me. Now you know the truth, Harry, you’d better tell me if you want to see me again. I wouldn’t blame you if you now hate the sight of me, as I hate the sight of myself. I know I’m selfish, grasping and dishonest. I’m the worst kind of a bitch, but I can’t help it. I would do anything for you, except give up the life Nick gives me. I don’t suppose you’d believe that, but I would. I would even keep away from you if you wanted me to, and that would be the hardest thing of all I’d do for you.’

Harry got up and went over to her; bending, he lifted her face and kissed her.

‘I’m not going to give you up, Julie. You mean too much to me for that. All right, darling, we’ll go on as we’ve gone on. Perhaps one day, something will turn up, and we can be together for good.’ He forced a little laugh. ‘Who

knows? One of these days I may be as rich and as powerful as English is. If he could do it, why can't I?'

Julie got to her feet and clung to him.

'Darling Harry, I love you so, and I'll try to make you happy. Be patient. I'm sure it'll come right in the end. Now, darling, I must go. I'll come again as soon as I can. Get my coat, will you? I'm going to be late if I don't hurry.'

A few minutes later, Julie moved quietly to the mouth of the alley and looked quickly to the right and left. The street was deserted. Moving forward briskly, she went in search of a taxi.

In a dark doorway, a youngish man in a brown suit and a brown slouch hat, stood with his back against the wall, watching her, his jaws moving slowly as he chewed. He remained in the shadows until she was out of sight, then he came out of the doorway, and walked quickly toward the river, his lips pursed in a soundless whistle.

II

Ed Leon took possession of the Alert Agency two days after English had summoned him from Chicago. Leon was tall and rangy, all legs and arms, and he had a deceptive appearance that led most people to assume that he was a harmless dimwit. He had a pleasant suntanned face, and at first glance you might have mistaken him for a not too prosperous farmer up for the day to see the sights of the city. He wore his clothes as if he had slept in them, not for one night, but for many nights, and he had a habit of wearing an old battered slouch hat far at the back of his head. His hair, naturally unruly, had everything its own way as he made no attempt to control it except to have it cut on rare occasions and to pass a comb through it when he could find a comb, which wasn't often.

No one would have believed that he was one of the smartest private investigators in the country. Beginning life as a crime reporter, he had showed so much talent for ferreting out news concerning the criminal activities of politicians and their ilk that the district attorney decided that he would be less of a nuisance working in his office than for a newspaper. He persuaded Leon to become a special investigator attached to his office, and for a time Leon did excellent work to the satisfaction of the D.A., but at little profit to himself.

Leon met English soon after English had sold his gyroscope compass, and they had become friends. Leon had suggested that English might consider financing him so he could set up his own agency. English knew Leon's reputation, and thought the investment might turn out to be a sound one. He backed Leon, and after a couple of years, Leon was able to buy English out with a handsome profit to them both. His agency was now one of the most efficient in

Chicago, and before three years had passed, Leon was employing four investigators, three legmen and a bevy of smart young women.

As he wandered around the small, shabby office that had once belonged to Roy English, Leon wasn't overly pleased that he had allowed himself to be talked into taking this assignment by English. Of course the money was good, but he didn't relish spending much time in these two rooms after the luxury

of his air conditioned office in Chicago.

He pulled at his long nose thoughtfully as he wandered around the room, his face thoughtful, his eyes missing nothing. He spent the next two hours going through the files, examining drawers and cupboards with the methodical care he had developed after years of experience that had taught him nothing was unimportant, that there was a reason for everything, and that if you kept looking, sooner or later you would find something to interest you.

It was not until he examined the fireplace that he made any worthwhile discovery. He found a small object lodged in the chimney that made him raise his heavy eyebrows and take from his pocket a pencil-thin flashlight. He played the beam on the object, and saw it was a small, but highly sensitive microphone. The wires attached to it went through a crack in the chimney and into the outer office. He strolled into the outer office, and after a lengthy search, found the wires again, neatly hidden between the floorboards, and traced them across the room to the door leading into the passage. He returned to his office and washed the soot and grime off his hands while he whistled happily under his breath.

He decided he had made a fair beginning. Someone was interested in listening to any conversation that might take place in this office. From the look of the microphone it had been installed for some time. Someone therefore had wanted to know what Roy English had been doing, what he had said, and what had been said to him.

Leon wondered if the microphone was still alive, and if this someone would be interested to listen in to his conversations. At a more convenient time – when the building was closed for the night - he decided he would make an attempt to trace the wires further. But not during office hours.

English had told him the janitor, Tom Calhoun, seemed cooperative, and Leon thought it might be an idea to go down and talk to him before settling down to a day's work in the office.

He left the office, locking the door behind him, and took the elevator to the basement.

He found Tom Calhoun in the boiler room industriously carving a model boat from a chunk of soft wood, and with the aid of a murderous looking pocketknife.

Calhoun was big and fat with a heavy moustache that reminded Leon of a bunch of dry seaweed. He wore a dusty Derby set square on his bullet head,

and he had some interesting looking food stains on his vest which he wore open and held together by a heavy gold watch chain. He eyed Leon with mild interest and gave him a brief nod.

‘Morning,’ he said. ‘Anything I can do for you?’

Leon hooked a chair toward him and folded his long length into it. ‘I got an ulcer,’ he said. ‘At noon every day I give it a feed of whisky. The trouble is I don’t approve of drinking alone. Once a guy gets into the habit of secret drinking he might just as well step into his box and let them screw him down. I thought maybe you might care to join me, but if you’re a non-drinking man, just say the word and I’ll go elsewhere.’

Calhoun laid down the boat and sat forward.

‘You’ve come to the right man, mister, but I wouldn’t have thought whisky would have done an ulcer much good.’

Leon produced a half-pint flask of Johnny Walker and waved it in the air. ‘A guy has got to show his independence,’ he said. ‘If I gave my ulcer what was good for it, it’d stay with me for the rest of my days. The whisky’s good for me so I drink it. Got a glass? Two might be an idea.’

Calhoun produced two paper cups from a shelf.

‘Best I can do,’ he said apologetically, after blowing the dust from them. He watched Leon pour two liberal shots, and eagerly took one of the cups and sniffed it. ‘Good whisky, mister. Your very best health,’ and he took a long pull, sighed, smacked his lips, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and set the cup down.

Leon scarcely tasted his, but leaned forward to refill Calhoun’s cup.

‘I’m your new tenant,’ he said. ‘The name’s Ed Leon. I’ve taken over the Alert Agency.’

Calhoun looked surprised.

‘Glad to know you. I’m Tom Calhoun. Alert Agency, huh? That’s fast work.’

‘My mother was a fast woman,’ Leon said lightly. ‘It runs in the family.’ He frowned, shook his head, went on, ‘Business seems a little flat this morning. No one’s been near me.’

‘It’ll pick up,’ Calhoun said encouragingly, and took another drink. ‘I reckon that guy English knew what he was doing. He kept mighty busy. Why he shot himself beats me. Of course that shooting might damp things down for you, but not for long.’

Leon took out two cigarettes, rolled one across the table and lit the other.

‘I was beginning to wonder if I had been sold a pup. With a face like mine, people treat me like I was a dog catcher.’ He shook his head gloomily. ‘Man! If you knew the pups some guys have tried to swing on me! You really think that’s good business?’

‘I’m certain sure of it,’ Calhoun said. ‘It stands to reason. Look at the people who went up there to see him, as many as thirty people on some days; if that ain’t brisk business then I’m a monkey’s uncle.’

Leon regarded him with a kindly smile.

‘Not as bad as that, pally - maybe not his uncle, but as stepfather you’re doing all right.’

‘What was that?’ Calhoun asked, his bloodshot eyes popping.

‘Nothing. I was talking through my hat. See these?’ He took off his hat and pointed to the ventilation holes in the crown, stubbing at them with a long finger. ‘I had those put in so people could hear me better - deaf people, that is. It’s ideas like that that make a guy a fortune.’

‘I guess that’s right,’ Calhoun said, looking a little dazed.

‘Well, well,’ Leon went on and lifted his feet onto the table. ‘Mind if I get some blood up to my head? If I don’t do this some time during the day, I’m likely to pass out. My mother was the same. Come to that my old man hadn’t much in his head either. So it looks like I’ve come into a good business. Who were these people who came to see English?’

Calhoun lifted his big, lumpy shoulders.

‘I wouldn’t know. Some of them would come every week. Some of them were trash, but most of them looked as if they had a sack of dough.’

‘Were you in the building when he knocked himself off? Leon asked casually and leaned forward to fill Calhoun’s paper cup again.

‘Sure,’ Calhoun said. ‘Go easy on that stuff, mister. It’s got a lot of authority.’

‘Don’t tell me a big boy like you can’t drink a little Scotch,’ Leon said. ‘They tell me he shot himself between nine and ten-thirty. Did anyone call on him around that time?’

‘Three people went up to the sixth floor. But I wouldn’t know if they called on him. Why?’

‘I’m always asking questions,’ Leon said, and closed his eyes. ‘I like the sound of my own voice. What’s Sinatra got that I haven’t? You should see

the way the frills fall over when I whisper in their ears. You don't have to sing to get a frill in a tizzy. He opened his eyes and stared at Calhoun. Who were these three?'

'Two guys and a girl,' Calhoun told him. 'I took them up to the sixth floor myself. I've seen the girl before, but not the two guys.'

'Who else is on the sixth floor?'

'Well, there's the Associated News Service. Maybe you've already heard their teleprinters. Hell of a racket they make. Then there's your office, and then there's Miss Windsor.'

'What's she do?'

'She's what they call a silhouette artist,' Calhoun told him. 'She cuts out your silhouette in paper, mounts and frames it. What else she does up there I don't ask, but I do know she has only men clients.'

Leon perked up, his eyes showing interest.

'Like that, is it?' he said. 'And my next door neighbour. Well, well, maybe I'd better go along and let her look at my silhouette. She might even show me hers.'

'She's a nice dish,' Calhoun said, 'but it's strictly for cash. Me - I prefer to waste my money on horses, but it takes all types to make up the world.'

'Don't go philosophical on me,' Leon said. 'Let's get back to these two guys and the girl. They could have called on either Miss Windsor, this News Service or English - that right?'

'The girl went to see English,' Calhoun said. 'I've seen her a number of times before.'

'What's she look like?'

Calhoun sipped his Scotch and eyed Leon doubtfully.

'You're asking an awful lot of questions, mister. What makes you so interested?'

'Now look, let me do the talking. You've got the Scotch, so try to make yourself useful.'

Calhoun shrugged.

'Well, okay, it's no skin off my nose. She had sort of light brown hair, a good figure, and she was pretty enough to be in the movies.'

'What a description! Do you realise there are two million frills within a thirty-mile radius of this damn city who look just like that? How was she dressed?'

‘She was pretty smart,’ Calhoun said, screwing up his eyes as if trying to create a picture of the girl in his mind. ‘She wore a black coat and skirt with wide white lapels, black and white gauntlet gloves and a black and white skullcap affair for a hat. And she had one of those charm bracelets. You know the ones, a gold chain with little charms hanging from it.’

Leon nodded approvingly.

‘Now you’re talking. That’s fine. You’ll make a detective yet. How about the two guys?’

‘One of them was just a punk, a kid about eighteen. He had on a leather jacket and flannel trousers. He had a parcel under his arm. I have an idea he was going to the News Service, but the other one was in the money. He was a youngish fella, around twenty-seven or eight, in a brown suit and a brown slouch hat. I noticed he wore his handkerchief in his sleeve - a nice touch, that.

If ever I could lay my hands on a clean handkerchief, that’s where I’d wear it. He was chewing gum, and I thought at the time he was letting himself down. When a guy can afford clothes like that, he shouldn’t chew gum.’

Leon sighed.

‘You should write a book on etiquette. There’s a big market for a book that’d tell you not to chew gum in a brown suit.’ He lowered his feet to the floor. ‘Just to get the record straight, when did these people arrive - who came first?’

‘The girl, then the guy in the leather jerkin, then the guy in the brown suit.’

‘What time did the girl arrive?’

‘It was nine-fifty,’ Calhoun said. ‘I know because she asked me the time.’

‘And the other two?’

‘The fella in the leather jacket was waiting to go up as I came down from taking the girl up. The guy in the brown suit came along about fifteen minutes later.’

‘Did you see any of them leave?’

Calhoun shook his head.

‘I take them up, but I don’t reckon to bring them down. That’s what they’ve got legs for.’

‘I guess that’s right,’ Leon said and stood up. ‘The automatic elevator wasn’t working?’

‘I lock it up at seven o’clock. I like to know who comes into the building

after that time.'

Leon nodded again.

'Well, that's very interesting. You'd better keep what's left of that half-pint. If I took it up with me I'd be laying myself open to temptation. I guess I'd better go along and call on Miss Windsor. Nothing like being neighbourly. Who knows? She might even be lonely.'

'If that dame's ever lonely, then I'm Judy Garland's mother,' Calhoun said. 'And watch it. It's strictly for cash.'

Leon propelled his lanky frame to the door.

'Not for me, brother,' he said, pausing at the door. 'I'm going to explain to her the principles of lease-lend, and he continued on his way to the elevator.'

III

As Leon stepped out of the elevator, he saw a short, shabby-looking man in a wrinkled blue overcoat and a dusty grey hat, knocking on his office door. The shabby man looked quickly over his shoulder as he heard the grill close. He was a man of about sixty, grey-faced, tired-looking with a scrubby, grey moustache. He looked uneasily at Leon as he wandered along the passage, then he rapped on the door again, and turned the handle. Finding the door locked, he backed away, obviously surprised, and in two minds what he should do.

‘Hello, pally,’ Leon said, coming to rest beside the shabby man. ‘Looking for me?’

The shabby man gave Leon a startled look, and backed against the banister rail.

‘No, thank you,’ he said. ‘It wasn’t you I was looking for. I wanted to see Mr. English. Never mind. I’ll come again. He doesn’t seem to be in.’

‘Maybe I can do something,’ Leon said. ‘I’m looking after Mr. English’s affairs at the moment.’ He took out his door key and pushed it into the lock. ‘Come on in. It’s all right,’ the shabby man returned, and his tired, bloodshot eyes showed alarm.

‘I wanted to see Mr. English. It’s a personal matter. Thanks all the same,’ and turning, he walked hurriedly toward the head of the stairs.

Leon started after him, then stopped as he remembered the hidden microphone in his office. That room wasn’t the place in which to persuade someone to talk. He turned and made quickly for the elevator, stepped into it and sent the cage down to the ground floor.

As he stepped into the lobby, he could hear the shabby man running down the stairs. He had one more flight to go before he reached the lobby. Moving quickly, Leon went into the street and took up a position in a nearby shop doorway.

He watched the shabby man come out into the spring sunshine and set off along the street. He moved slowly, his feet dragging, and walked for some time toward 22nd Ward.

Leon moved along behind him, taking care to keep out of sight. He saw the

shabby man pause outside a cafe, hesitate, then walk in. As Leon passed the cafe, he glanced in. There were only three or four people in the cafe and he spotted the shabby man sitting at a table at the far end of the room.

Leon waited a few seconds, then pushed open the door and walked in. The shabby man glanced up, but didn't seem to recognize Leon. He was stirring a cup of coffee aimlessly, his face frowning and his eyes worried. Leon inspected the other people in the cafe. There were two men at a table by the door, a girl reading a paperback book at a table near the counter, and a man hidden behind an open newspaper at the end of the room on the opposite side to where the shabby man was sitting.

Leon sat down at the shabby man's table. The shabby man looked up and stared at him. Recognition swam into his eyes, and his face went a greyish—white. He half started up, then dropped back onto his chair, nearly upsetting his coffee as he did so.

'Keep your clothes on,' Leon said and smiled. 'I'm not going to bite you.' He turned and waved to the girl behind the counter. 'Bring me a cup of Java, honey, and put some coffee in the water, will you?'

The girl poured the coffee, flounced over and slapped the cup down in front of him.

'I'll have you know we serve the best coffee on the street,' she said. 'If you don't like it, you can go elsewhere.'

'Thanks, honey,' Leon said, and smiled his slow, lazy smile. 'Maybe I'll just rinse my hands in it.'

She tossed her head and returned to the counter where she watched him, her eyes angry.

'No sense of humour,' Leon said to the shabby man. 'Well, well, can't always expect to get a laugh. What did you want to see English about?'

The shabby man ran his tongue over his dry lips.

'See here, mister,' he said with feeble fierceness. 'You have no right to follow me. Mr. English and me have a private deal on. It's nothing to do with you or anyone.'

'It is to do with me,' Leon said. 'I've taken over the business. English isn't with us anymore.'

The shabby man stared at him.

'I wasn't told,' he muttered. 'I've got nothing to say to you.'

'I'm telling you,' Leon said, stirring his coffee. 'I'm in charge now. Come

on, what's it all about?'

'You mean you're taking the money in the future?'

'Don't I keep telling you?' Leon said roughly. 'What do you want me to do, set it to music and sing it to you?'

'Where's Mr. English then?'

'He's gone to a warmer climate. Are you going to deal with me or do you want to get tough?'

'That's all right,' the shabby man said hurriedly. 'I just didn't know.' He took out a soiled envelope and slid it across the table. 'Here it is. Now I've got to go.'

'Sit still!' Leon snapped, and picked up the envelope. On it was scribbled: *From Joe Hennessey. \$10.*

'Are you Hennessey?' he asked.

The shabby man nodded.

Leon ripped open the envelope and took out two five-dollar bills. He studied Hennessey for a long moment.

'What's this in aid of?' he asked at last.

'What do you mean? It's all right, isn't it?'

'Maybe. I wouldn't know. What are you giving me this for?'

Hennessey's face began to glisten with sweat.

'Give me back that money!' he said, keeping his voice low. 'I knew you were a phoney. Give it back to me!'

Leon slid the money across the table.

'Don't spill your milk. I don't want it,' he said soothingly. 'I just want to know why you're parting with this dough. From the look of you, you can't afford to give ten bucks away.'

'I can't!' Hennessey said bitterly. He stared at the two bills lying before him, not touching them. 'I'm not going to talk to you! I don't know who you are.' He began to push back his chair.

'Take it easy,' Leon said, and flicked one of his cards onto the table. 'That's who I am, pally, and I can help you if you'll let me.'

'A copper!' Hennessey said when he had looked at the card. His eyes went dark with alarm. 'No, thank you. There's nothing you can do for me, mister. I'll be getting along.'

'Sit still!' Leon said, and, leaning forward, went on, 'English is dead. He shot himself three nights ago. Don't you read the newspapers?'

Hennessey stiffened, his fists clenched and his mouth fell open.

‘I don’t believe it!’

‘I can’t help that. It was in the papers,’ Leon said, and half turning in his chair, he spotted a pile of newspapers on a table. ‘Maybe the account is in one of these.’ He got up and went over to the newspapers, shuffled through them, found what he wanted and brought it over to the table. He dropped it in front of Hennessey and sat down again.

Hennessey read the account, his breath whistling through his nostrils. Then when he had finished, he dropped the newspaper on the floor and drew in a long, deep breath. The look of fear went out of his eyes like the light in a window when the blind is drawn.

‘So he’s really dead,’ he muttered under his breath. ‘I wouldn’t have believed it. It sounds too good to be true.’

‘He’s dead all right,’ Leon said. ‘Now listen to me. I’m investigating his death. You can help me. Why are you paying him money?’

Hennessey hesitated, then shook his head.

‘It’s nothing to do with you, mister,’ he said. ‘The less said about it the better. I think I’ll be getting along now.’

‘Wait a minute,’ Leon said, his voice hardening. ‘Do you want me to take you down to the station? You could be held as a material witness. You’d better talk, and talk fast. English was murdered!’

Hennessey went white again.

‘It says he shot himself.’

‘Never mind what it says. I’m telling you he was murdered. Why were you paying him money?’

‘He was blackmailing me,’ Hennessey blurted out. ‘I’ve paid him ten dollars a week for eleven months, and if he hadn’t died I would have gone on paying him.’

‘What had he got on you?’

Hennessey hesitated, then he said, ‘Something I did years ago, something bad. He was going to tell my wife.’

‘Were all the other people who called on English paying blackmail money?’ Leon asked.

‘I guess so. I never talked to any of them, but I’ve seen the same faces every time I went to that office. Why else should they go and talk to a rat like English?’

Leon took out two cigarettes and rolled one of them across the table. He lit his and held the match so Hennessey could light his. This was news Nick wouldn't be glad to hear, Leon thought as he flicked out the match.

'Know who any of them are?' he asked.

'There's a girl who lives on my street. I've seen her leaving English's office.'

'What's her name and address?'

'I don't know if I should tell you that. I wouldn't want to get her into trouble.'

'She won't get into trouble. I just want to check on your story. You've got to tell me, Hennessey. You've gone too far to stop talking now.'

'I don't know what you mean!' Hennessey blustered. 'I don't reckon I'm going to talk anymore.'

'You're kidding yourself,' Leon said quietly. 'English was murdered. You've got a motive for killing him. You've got to talk to me or to the police - please yourself.'

Hennessey wiped his sweating face.

'Her name's May Mitchell. She lives at 23A Eastern Street.'

'Now we're getting somewhere,' Leon said. 'How did English contact you?'

'A fella came to my shop. He told me he knew about what I'd done, and if I didn't pay ten dollars a week he would tell my wife. He told me to take the money every Thursday to the Alert Agency, and that's what I did.'

'It wasn't English?'

Hennessey shook his head.

'No, but English took the money. This other fella was the outside man. I reckon English was the boss.'

'What was this fella like?'

'A big tough-looking guy. He had a nasty scar from his right ear to his mouth - looked like an old razor wound - and he had a cast in his left eye. He was big and powerful - not the kind of fella you'd argue with.'

'Let's have your address,' Leon said. 'I might want to talk to you again.'

'I'm at 27 Eastern Street.'

'Okay, pally, now relax. You're okay. There's nothing for you to worry about. English is dead. Go home and forget about him and blackmail. Forget it ever happened.'

‘You mean I don’t have to pay any more money?’

Leon reached out and patted his arm.

‘No. If the tough guy shows up, stall him and tell me. I’ll take care of him, and I’ll see you’re in the clear. That’s a promise.’

Hennessey got slowly to his feet. He looked suddenly five years younger.

‘You don’t know what this means to me,’ he said, a break in his voice. ‘Ten dollars was skinning me. The wife and I couldn’t even go to the movies, and all the time I had to tell her lies about how badly the business was doing.’

‘Consider it taken care of,’ Leon said. ‘I’m here to help you if you want help, and listen, I don’t promise anything, but I may be able to get some of your money back for you. Ten dollars a week for eleven months, was that it?’

Hennessey stared at him as if he couldn’t believe his ears.

‘Yes, that’s right,’ he said hoarsely.

‘Don’t count on it,’ Leon said, ‘but I’ll see what I can do.’

He got up, went over to the counter and paid for the two coffees.

‘You haven’t drunk yours,’ the girl pointed out, snatching the dollar bill he offered her.

‘I’ve got a fussy ulcer,’ Leon returned, tipping his hat. ‘Coffee like that would start a battle in my gut that even the Secretary of State wouldn’t be able to smooth over. But thanks for the chair. I’ll come again when I want to rest my feet.’

He went out into the street, followed by Hennessey.

The man who had been sitting at the table near Hennessey’s and who had been hidden behind a newspaper, lowered the paper and looked after Leon, his jaws moving rhythmically as he chewed. He put the paper aside and got up, crossed over to the counter and gave the girl a couple of nickels.

She smiled warmly at him, impressed by his faultlessly fitting brown suit and the silk handkerchief he wore tucked in his sleeve. He looked at her and her smile faltered. She had never seen such eyes. They were amber coloured with small pupils and the whites were the colour of blue-white porcelain. They were as compelling and as expressionless as the eyes of an owl, and looking into them, she felt a little chill run up her spine. He watched her reaction with cat-like interest, then turned and moved briskly to the door.

He stood looking after Leon and Hennessey as they walked down the street together. Then he ran across the road to where a dusty, shabby Packard was parked. He got into the car, started the engine and waited. He watched

Hennessey and Leon pause for a moment at the corner. Leon shook hands with Hennessey, and then went off up town. Hennessey walked away in the opposite direction.

The man in the brown suit shifted into gear and sent the car rolling slowly after Hennessey.

Hennessey walked with a light step. He was anxious to get back to his shop. It wasn't much of a shop, but it provided a fair living for his wife and himself, although the business wouldn't run to any hired help.

Hennessey's wife had a bad heart, and he was anxious to get back so he could take over and let her sit down for a while. He stepped out, swinging his short arms, his mind seething as he thought of what Leon had said.

I don't promise anything, but I may be able to get some of your money back for you.

Even if he got only a quarter back - and now that he no longer had to payout ten dollars a week - he would be able to afford an assistant and let his wife take it a bit easier.

The man in the brown suit drove along near the curb, his amber-coloured eyes fixed on Hennessey's distant back, his jaws moving as he chewed. He drove patiently, keeping out of the way of the faster traffic, and every now and then he looked searchingly at the number of the shops as if he were hunting for a particular number to explain his slow crawl.

At the end of the street there was a narrow alley, a shortcut to Eastern Street. It was an alley dwarfed by high warehouses, and even in daylight it was shadowy and dark. Few people used it, but to save his legs, Hennessey always went home that way.

The man in the brown suit knew this and he accelerated slightly as he saw Hennessey cross the street to enter the alley. As Hennessey began to walk down the long, narrow alley he heard a car behind him, and looking round sharply saw the Packard swing into the alley. No cars ever came this way. The alley was far too narrow. There was only a foot clearance on each side of the car's wings. Hennessey realized the car was coming after him, and fear clutched at his heart, for a moment paralyzing him.

He stood in the middle of the alley, hesitating, looking frantically to the right and left. Ahead of him, some two hundred paces, was an archway, leading to a courtyard. The archway was too narrow for a car, but a haven for him. He began to run toward the archway, his old blue overcoat flapping and

his breath rattling at the back of his throat. He was too old and stiff to make much headway, but he did his best.

The man in the brown suit pushed down on the gas pedal and sent the Packard surging forward. For a few seconds the running, stumbling man and the swiftly moving car seemed to remain equidistant. Hennessey looked over his shoulder. He saw the car rushing down on him. He cried out in fear and desperation as he made a frantic effort to reach the archway. He was within ten yards of it when the car hit him.

It hit him the way a charging bull hits a matador. It threw him high into the air and forward so he came down on his back within a few yards of the car.

The man in the brown suit trod on his brake and stopped the car within a yard of Hennessey, who turned his head to stare at the car, seeing only the two wheels and the dusty hood. A thin trickle of blood ran out of his mouth and he felt a terrible pain tearing at his chest.

The man in the brown suit glanced into the driving mirror. He could see the dim length of the alley stretching out behind him. It was empty and silent. He engaged gear and reversed the car, stopping it when it was some twenty to thirty feet from where Hennessey was lying, then he shifted the gear-stick into second, let in the clutch and sent the car forward slowly, leaning out of the window so he could see what he was doing.

Hennessey screamed wildly as the car came toward him. He tried to crawl out of the way, but the effort was too much for him.

The man in the brown suit moved the steering wheel a trifle. He leaned far out of the car. Hennessey looked up into the big amber-coloured eyes that were as indifferent to him and as expressionless as the headlamps of a car. The onside front wheel went over Hennessey's upturned face. Keeping his course the man in the brown suit felt the rear wheel lift and thud down, and he gave a pleased little nod.

He slightly increased his speed, reached the end of the alley, swung into the main street and headed uptown.

IV

Nick English paced the floor of his office, his hands clasped behind his back, his chin down, his face hard and frowning.

The time was six minutes after seven. Everyone, including Lois, had gone home, and only he and Ed Leon remained in the office. He had listened to Leon's report with growing alarm, although he didn't reveal the fact to Leon.

Leon lolled in an armchair, his long fingers laced around one knee. His hat rested on the back of his head, and he talked in a low voice, marshaling his facts and bringing them out clearly.

'Well, I guess that's about all, he wound up. Tomorrow I'm going to call on this Mitchell girl. Maybe she'll have some facts for me. I don't know how you feel about Hennessey, Nick, but I gave him a hint he might get some of his money back. He's been bled for close on five hundred bucks.'

'I'll write a check,' English said, and moved over to the desk. 'Find out how much the Mitchell girl had to pay. I'll square her, too.'

'This could be an expensive business,' Leon reminded him. 'Calhoun said some days as many as thirty people called on him.'

'I just can't believe it!' English said, sitting down. 'Organized blackmail! It was bad enough when we thought he was putting pressure on a couple of his old clients, but thirty people a day! Who's this fella with the scar?'

'I don't know, but I'll find out if you want me to. From what Hennessey said he was just Roy's stooge.'

'I don't believe that either. Roy hadn't it in him to organize a racket like this. If anyone was the stooge, he was the one.'

Leon didn't say anything. He took out a cigarette and lit it carefully, put the match in the bronze ashtray.

'If this gets out, Ed, I'm sunk,' English went on. 'But these people should be found and paid back. This fella with the scar should be put out of business. Maybe he was the one who shot Roy.'

'I've checked on that angle,' Leon said. 'Three people went up to the sixth floor around the time Roy was supposed to have shot himself. Two fellas and a girl - the girl was the only one Calhoun was sure had gone to see English. The other two called on the news service agency. I checked on them. The

young one was a messenger from the Associated Press. The other fella wanted information about the service these people sell.'

English frowned.

'Funny time to call for information, wasn't it?'

'That's what I thought, but the manager of the News Service said they never close and people come in at all hours. Still, this guy might be worth checking on. He might have gone first to this News Service and then along to shoot Roy. It would have given him an alibi if Calhoun had reported his presence to Morilli.'

'Is it likely a killer would have used the elevator?' English said. 'I doubt if he or the girl shot Roy. The killer wouldn't want to be seen. He would slip into the building and walk up the stairs.'

'Maybe,' Leon said, 'but on the other hand, he might be a smooth operator, and anticipate that was what people would think. He might figure he would be unlikely to be suspected if he used the elevator and let Calhoun have a good look at him, so long as he could prove he had been to the News Service.'

'Yes, that's a smart bit of reasoning. You'd better see if you can find out something about him. Have you got a description?'

'Yep, and a good one. He's around, twenty-seven or eight, and he wore a brown suit and brown hat. He carries a silk handkerchief tucked up his sleeve and he chews gum. But for all that, it won't be easy to find him.'

'Think so?' English said. 'I think I can give you his name and tell you where he lives right now. If I'm not mistaken, his name's Roger Sherman and he lives in Crown Court.'

Leon stared at him.

'A friend of yours?'

English shook his head.

'No, I haven't even spoken to him, but I've seen him often enough. He has an apartment on the same floor as mine. The description fits him like a glove. What does he do for a living?'

'I don't know. Nothing as far as I can see. He's what used to be known as a dilettante. He's interested in art and music. You'll always find him at previews of fashionable galleries, and he has a private box at the Sheldon Hall where he takes in all the important concerts. I might have a talk to him myself. I can't imagine he even knew Roy, let alone want to shoot him, but

he might have seen someone on the landing or heard the shot. Yes, I think you can leave him to me. You talk to this Mitchell girl.'

Leon nodded, slowly got to his feet and stretched.

'Well, I guess I'll get along. I want to find somewhere to sleep. The hotel I'm staying at gives me the horrors. The room I've got is so small I have to use a folding toothbrush.'

'What about the girl who called on Roy? You haven't told me about her yet,' English said.

'According to Calhoun, she was good looking enough to be in the movies,' Leon said, stubbing out his cigarette. He said she was wearing a black and white skullcap, a black suit with wide white lapels, black and white gauntlet gloves, and a charm bracelet.'

English paused in his pacing and looked sharply at Leon.

'A charm bracelet?'

'That's right, a gold chain with little charms hanging from it.'

'Well, I'll be double-damned!' English said under his breath, and he ran his fingers through his hair.

'Don't say you know her, too?'

'I don't know. I might. I'll let you know, Ed. Okay, come and see me after you've had a talk with this Mitchell girl. Here, wait a minute, let me write a check for Hennessy. Cash it yourself and give him the money, and don't let him know where it comes from.'

'I'll do just that thing.'

Leon waited until English had written the check, slipped it into his pocket and made for the door.

'I guess I'll go back to the office and see if I can find out where those microphone wires lead to,' he said. 'If I make a startling discovery I'll phone you. Where will you be?'

'Phone me at my apartment after midnight,' English said, glancing at his watch. 'Or maybe you'd better leave it until tomorrow morning.'

'I'll do that,' Leon said. 'So long for now.'

When he had gone, English turned off the lights, put on his overcoat and went down to where Chuck was waiting with the car.

'Miss Clair's apartment,' English said curtly.

'Want the evening paper, boss?' Chuck asked, offering it.

'Thanks,' English returned, got into the car and turned on the reading

lamp. He read through the paper as Chuck drove toward Riverside Drive. A small paragraph caught his eye. He read it, frowning, read it again, then said, 'Get me to a telephone quickly, Chuck.'

'One just ahead,' Chuck said, swung over to the curb and pulled up outside a drug store.

English got out of the car and hurried across the sidewalk to a row of phone booths. He called the Alert Agency.

Leon answered.

'I've only just this second got in,' he said, startled to hear English's voice so soon.

'That old fella you were telling me about, was his name Joe Hennessey?'

'That's right. Why?'

'27 Eastern Street?'

'Yep.'

'He's dead. It's in the paper. He was killed by a hit-and-run driver in an alley that's barred to traffic.'

'For crying out loud!'

'Listen, Ed, I don't like the sound of this. It may be a coincidence, but I don't think so. It seems to me you two were seen together, and someone decided Hennessey talked too much. I want you to go right away and get hold of the Mitchell girl. The same guy might have heard Hennessey telling you about her. Get hold of her and bring her to my apartment. Keep her there until I get back. I won't be much longer than a couple of hours.'

'Okay, I'll do that right away,' Leon said. 'Where can I call you if anything goes wrong?'

'I'll be with Miss Clair,' English said, and gave Leon Julie's number. 'Get after her right away,' and he hung up.

Ten minutes later he was letting himself into Julie's apartment, which he found in darkness. He stood in the lobby, frowning.

'Julie?'

There was no answer, and taking off his hat and coat, he went into the sitting room. He crossed over to the bedroom, pushed open the door and turned on the lights.

He stood looking around the room, then walked across to the big built-in wardrobe, opened the double doors and glanced in. Among the many frocks, suits and coats hanging in an orderly line, he spotted the black suit with the

wide white lapels. Above it on a shelf were a pair of black and white gauntlet gloves and a small black and white hat.

He closed the doors, stroked his jaw thoughtfully and returned to the sitting room. He stirred the fire, went over to the cellarette and poured himself a whisky and soda. Then he sat down before the fire, lit a cigarette and waited, his eyes brooding and cold. Some ten minutes later, he heard Julie come in.

‘Oh, Nick!’ she said as she opened the sitting room door. ‘Have you been waiting long? I had a rehearsal, and there was some dope who couldn’t get anything right. I’m so sorry I’m late.’

English got up and kissed her, smiling at her.

‘That’s all right. I was a little early, come to that. How are you, Julie? You’re looking pretty good.’

‘I’m fine, but tired,’ Julie said, taking off her camelhair coat and sinking into an armchair. ‘I’m dying for a drink. Would you get me a martini?’

He began to mix the martini, shooting a searching glance at her from time to time. He thought she looked tired, and the usual sparkle in her eyes was missing.

‘What’s been happening to you?’ she asked, leaning back and closing her eyes. ‘Have you had a good day?’

‘Oh, all right,’ English said, and came over and gave her the martini. ‘I hope that’s not too dry.’

‘It’s perfect,’ Julie said. She drank half the martini, sighed and put down the glass. ‘What are you doing tonight?’

‘I’m afraid I have a date in about an hour,’ English said. ‘Something important. Sorry, Julie.’

‘Oh, well, never mind. I don’t have to be at the club until ten-thirty. I’ll take a bath and a snooze. I don’t feel like having dinner. I’ll have something when I get back.’

English gave her a cigarette, lit it for her, and then moved slowly over to the fire.

‘Julie, why did you go and see Roy the night he died?’ he asked quietly.

He saw her stiffen and go as white as a fresh fall of snow. She looked at him, her eyes opening wide, and it startled him to see the utter fear in her eyes.

‘Now look, Julie,’ he went on, ‘you mustn’t ever be scared of me. I know you went there, and I want to know why, but that doesn’t mean you have to

be frightened.'

'No, I - I suppose not,' Julie said huskily, and made an effort to control herself. How much did he know? she asked herself, her mind cold with panic. Did he know about Harry? Was this only the opening gambit? 'You startled me, Nick. I didn't think anyone knew about that.'

He smiled.

'No one does except me. Was Roy blackmailing you?'

For a moment Julie thought she was going to faint. Her heart seemed to turn over, and she felt sick.

'I found out this afternoon that Roy had been blackmailing a number of people,' English went on. 'You were seen going up to the sixth floor, and I recognized the description of that suit - the magpie one I like so much. I wondered if you, too, were paying Roy money.'

Was that all he knew? she wondered, her tongue touching her dry lips.

'Yes, he was blackmailing me,' she said, and her mind darted about trying to think of a reason he would believe.

'For God's sake!' English exclaimed. 'Why didn't you tell me? I would have broken his neck!'

'I didn't want to tell you. I was too ashamed of myself.'

'But, my dear girl, you needn't have told me why he was blackmailing you. I don't want you to tell me now. All I'm interested in is the fact he was blackmailing you.'

Julie went limp, He didn't know! The relief was so great she wanted to cry.

'He's been blackmailing me for the past six months,' she said. 'I had to go to his office and pay him two hundred dollars every week.'

'You should have told me,' English said, his face hard. 'The little rat! I know he was a weakling and a louse, but I never realized he had sunk as low as that. Julie, for goodness' sake, don't hide things like that from me again. I could have fixed Roy in a moment.'

'I couldn't tell you,' Julie said. 'But I want to tell you now.'

She realized she had to tell him some story. If she didn't, sooner or later he would become suspicious of her. He might even have her watched. She wasn't deceiving herself that his present sympathetic attitude would last. She knew him too well for that. She remembered sharing a room with a girl years ago in Boston. She remembered what had happened to the girl and, unable to think of a convincing story, she decided to borrow from the girl's experience.

‘You don’t have to tell me anything,’ English said, and came over and sat on the arm of her chair. He put his arm around her shoulders. ‘Is there anything I can do to help?’

‘Not now, it’s past history,’ Julie said. ‘It was when I was in Boston, years ago. I was only seventeen, and I was hard up. I got an audition. It came out of the blue just when I thought I would have to give up and go home. I had nothing decent to wear. I knew if I went as I was, I wouldn’t get the job. The woman who ran the boarding house always kept money in the house. I stole it. I thought I would be able to put it back before she found it, but she caught me in the act. She sent for the police, and I was given a week in jail.’

English patted her shoulder.

‘You needn’t have told me that, Julie. So what? Most of us have done something at one time or other that could have landed us in jail if we were caught. You were unlucky. Do you mean to tell me Roy was blackmailing you for that?’

‘He threatened to tell the press. I would have lost my job, and then they would have got at you through me, Nick.’

English’s eyes hardened.

‘I guess that’s right. Does anyone else know about this?’

She shook her head.

‘Then we’ll forget it. How much did you pay Roy?’

‘I don’t want to discuss that part of it,’ Julie said quickly.

‘Nonsense. I intend to return the money to you. How much was it?’

‘Please, Nick, I don’t want you to do that.’

‘What was it - five thousand?’

‘Yes, about that, but I won’t take it. I mean that. It’s nothing to do with you. I’ve paid, and I’ve forgotten about it.’

‘We’ll see,’ English said and stood up. ‘Julie, when you went up there, was Roy alive?’

She nodded.

‘Yes, he was alive.’

‘You realize, don’t you, that a few minutes after you had gone, he died?’

Again she nodded, and her hands turned into fists.

‘Would you say he looked like a man who was about to commit suicide?’

‘Oh, no. He was smiling and joking. He even tried to make a pass at me. It was the first time I had been with him alone in the office. Usually the girl was

there, too.'

English's mouth tightened.

'What happened?'

'He tried to kiss me, but I got out of his way. I gave him the money and left.'

'You gave him the money? Two hundred dollars?'

'Yes.'

'You're sure about that, Julie? It's important.'

'Yes, I gave it to him.'

'It wasn't found. He had only four dollars on him. Lois went through the office very carefully. She didn't find any money anywhere.'

'Well, I gave it to him. He put it on his desk and put a paperweight on top of it.'

English stroked his jaw, his eyes brooding.

'I think that about clinches it,' he said, half to himself. 'Roy was murdered.'

Julie closed her eyes.

'Did you see anyone or hear anything when you were up there?' English went on, watching her.

'No, nothing. Only the machines in the office along the passage. They were making a lot of noise.'

'Well, someone shot him and took the money,' English said. 'It didn't walk out of the office on its own. Someone took it.'

'What will happen, Nick?' she asked, her eyes scared.

'I have a man working on it,' English said, tossing his cigarette into the fire. 'There's nothing for you to worry about, Julie. No one knows you went up there and no one is going to know. You can forget about it.'

'But if someone murdered him, shouldn't the police be told?'

'If it gets out that Roy ran an organized blackmail racket, I'm sunk,' English said quietly. 'I'm not telling the police a thing. It's up to them to find out for themselves. My man may find the killer, and if he does, we'll have to decide what to do with him. There's nothing for you to worry about in any way.' He went over to her and took her hand in his. 'Now I must run along, Julie. Have a rest and forget about this. I'll see you tomorrow. Maybe we can take in that movie.'

'Yes, Nick.'

She got up and went with him into the lobby. While she was putting on his coat, she stood near him, watching him, her eyes uneasy.

‘Nick, wouldn’t it be better if you forget all about this yourself? Must you hunt for this man? If you did find him you couldn’t hand him over to the police. He might talk and give Roy away.’

English smiled at her.

‘Don’t worry your head about that. I have to find him first. Roy may have been a louse and a rat, but no one’s going to murder one of my family and get away with it. I’ll think of a way of fixing this guy when I’ve found him. Bye now.’ He kissed her and patted her hip. ‘Don’t worry.’

He went down to where Chuck was waiting patiently.

‘Take me home,’ English said, and got into the car.

As Chuck drove rapidly through the dark streets, English sat still, his face thoughtful, his mind busy. He went straight up to his apartment, let himself in and tossed his coat to a maid.

‘Anyone waiting to see me?’ he asked.

‘No, sir.’

‘No phone calls?’

‘No, sir.’

English nodded and went into his luxuriously appointed study. He sat down at the desk and reached for a cigar. When he had lit it, he sat thinking for a few minutes, then he picked up the telephone.

‘Get me Police Captain O’Brien, Police Headquarters, Boston,’ he told the girl at the switchboard. ‘As quick as you like.’

‘Yes, Mr. English.’

He hung up and got to his feet, and began to pace slowly up and down. After a little delay, the telephone bell rang and he picked up the receiver.

‘Hello, Mr. English. Well, well, you are a stranger,’ O’Brien’s voice boomed over the line.

‘Hello, Tom. How are you?’

‘I’m fine. How’s yourself?’

‘Oh, I’m alive. I was expecting you at the fight. Why didn’t you come?’

‘You know how it is. I got a couple of murders on my hands right now. Glad your boy won. Seems like a good scrap.’

‘It was all right. Look, Tom, I want a quick favour.’

‘Anything you say, Mr. English.’

‘Some eight years ago a girl named Julie Clair was arrested for stealing money from her landlady. She drew a week in jail. Can you check that?’

‘I guess so,’ O’Brien returned. ‘Give me three minutes.’

English sat on the edge of the desk, swinging his leg, his eyes brooding, cigar smoke drifting past his face.

In less than three minutes, O’Brien came on the line again.

‘No one of that name was arrested, Mr. English. We have no record of her.’

Nick’s face hardened.

‘Any record of any girl arrested for stealing money from her landlady about that time?’

‘I’ll see,’ O’Brien said, and there was a long pause. Then he said, ‘A girl named Doris Caspary - she got a week in jail because she had been caught shoplifting the previous month.’

English remembered Julie had once mentioned sharing rooms with a girl called Doris Caspary. Once he had heard a name he never forgot it.

‘Julie Clair was a witness for the defence,’ O’Brien went on. ‘But she wasn’t charged.’

‘Thanks, O’Brien, I must have got my facts muddled,’ English returned. ‘Don’t forget to let me know when you are coming to town. So long for now.’

He hung up and frowned down at the carpet. He had had an idea Julie had been lying the moment she had started telling him the story of the theft.

‘Now I wonder what you’ve been up to, Julie?’ he said half aloud. He slid off the desk and resumed his slow, restless pacing.

CHAPTER FOUR

I

Ed Leon ran out onto the sidewalk and waved at a cruising taxi. '23A Eastern Street,' he said, jerking open the door, 'and snap it up.'

'Okay, chum,' the driver said, slammed the door and let in his clutch so violently that Leon landed in a heap on the floor of the cab.

'I didn't tell you to break my goddamn neck!' Leon yelled as he scrambled onto the seat.

'When a guy says snap it up, I snap it up,' the driver said, and sent his hack racing through the dark streets.

For the space of ten minutes or so, Leon sat with his heart in his mouth, sorry he had given the impression he was in a hurry. But when the driver reached 22nd Ward with its narrow streets, its fruit stalls and its aimless crowds overflowing into the gutters, he was forced to reduce speed almost to a crawl.

'If you're in all that hurry,' he said suddenly, 'there's an alley just ahead that takes you into Eastern Street. It'll be quicker for you to get out here and walk.'

'Why do you think I hired this heap if I wanted to walk?' Leon said, remembering English had told him this was the alley where Hennessey was killed. 'Keep going, and don't run anyone down.'

'I'd like to run down some of these jerks, the driver growled, and started honking on his horn.

Leon lit a cigarette. It was all very well for English to tell him to get hold of the Mitchell girl and bring her to English's apartment, but it was easier said than done. Probably the girl would think he was going to kidnap her, and would yell for the police.

Leon grimaced and squirmed forward on the edge of the seat.

'How much farther have we got to go?'

'Just ahead of you.'

'Okay, stop at the corner.'

The driver drew up and Leon paid him, tipping him liberally.

‘Want me to stick around? You’re not likely to get another cab back. This ward doesn’t use many cabs.’

‘Well, okay,’ Leon said. ‘I may be a little while. If I don’t show up in half an hour, you’d better blow.’

‘I’ll get myself a bite to eat,’ the driver said, and climbed out of his cab. ‘I’ll be right here.’

Eastern Street was no better than a slum. It was flanked on either side by tall tenement buildings, their soot-grimed fronts crawling with rusty iron fire escapes and balconies. Garbage cans stood along the curbs. The streetlights were dirty, and threw dim pools of light on the greasy sidewalks. Every few yards men lounged in doorways or against the iron railings, giving the street a somewhat sinister atmosphere. Toward the end of the street, Leon could see a few shops, their grimy windows still lighted, and he moved briskly toward them.

He passed No. 27, and paused to look up at the shop. The fascia bore the legend: Joe Hennessey. General Store. The shop was in darkness, and Leon shook his head as he moved on.

He came upon a walk-up apartment house, and saw it was numbered 23. He paused again. As he did so, a black car slid out of the darkness and slowed down within a few feet of him.

‘Hey, you!’ a voice called.

Leon turned.

A man was beckoning to him from the car.

‘Know where 23A is?’ the man asked.

Leon walked toward the car. The man behind the steering wheel was in the shadow, but he leaned forward to look up at Leon and the street light fell directly on his face.

Leon knew at once who he was. The thin white scar running from his right ear to his mouth, the cast in his left eye and the blunt, brutal features were unmistakable. This was the man who had called on Joe Hennessey and had put the screws on him.

Leon was startled, but he seldom allowed himself to be flustered, and he showed no sign that he had recognized the man.

‘23A?’ he repeated. ‘Well, I guess it must be at the other end of the street. This is two hundred and twenty-three.’

The man with the scar grunted, engaged gear and drove rapidly down the road. As the car moved away, Leon caught sight of another man, hunched up in the back seat, a slouch hat pulled well down over his eyes.

There could be only one reason why these two men were looking for 23A Eastern Street. English had guessed right. They had silenced Hennessey; now they were going to silence May Mitchell.

Leon wished he had a gun with him. He spun around and ran back to the building and up the steps to the door. By the door was a card rack. Each rack was lettered A. B. C. D. E. and against each letter was the name of the tenant. A quick glance told him May Mitchell's apartment was on the top floor. He glanced back down the street. The car had stopped about two hundred yards away, and the man with the scar was standing on the sidewalk, looking toward him.

Leon pushed open the front door of the building and stepped into a dimly lit lobby that smelt like a hen coop. Facing him was an ancient automatic elevator, scarcely large enough to hold three people.

He jerked back the grill door, stepped inside the cage, slammed the grill to and thumbed the button marked A. For a second or so nothing happened, then the elevator shuddered as if coming to life, and began a slow, painful crawl upward.

Leon found he was sweating a little. He knew he hadn't much more than a three-minute start before the man with the scar and his boyfriend would find the building. It would take them perhaps five minutes to walk up to the top floor, and in that time, he had to get the girl into the elevator and downstairs. He hoped that as the two men climbed the stairs they wouldn't notice the descending elevator. It was going to be a close thing, and if the girl didn't cooperate, it was going to be just too bad. The elevator took four minutes to reach the top floor. It came to a creaking standstill as if it were thankful the journey was over.

Leon slid back the grill, and leaving it open, stepped onto a small landing.

Facing him was a front door, equipped with a knocker and bell. A light came through the transom above the door.

He dug his thumb into the bell push and kept it there. Somewhere behind the door, he could hear the bell ringing. He waited, breathing quickly, his thumb increasing pressure, his ears cocked for any sound of feet on the stairs. Nothing happened; no one answered the door.

He changed from the bell to the knocker and banged four times as hard as he could, sending a violent wave of sound down the shaft of the staircase. He began to wonder if the girl had gone out, and had left the light burning.

Leaving the door, he stepped to the banister rail and looked down into the dimly lit well. Far below him, he could see the lobby. It was deserted. Then as he hung over the rail, he heard the sound of quick footsteps on the stairs below - they sounded unpleasantly close.

‘Whatta’s matter?’ a voice said behind him.

He jumped around, his nerves twanging like banjo strings. A girl stood in the open doorway, facing him - a girl with platinum blond hair that reached to her shoulders. She was wearing a pair of black nylon pyjamas that were as transparent as a sheet of glass. She was around twenty-three or four, and she had big blue eyes, a retroussé nose and high cheekbones.

The sight of her slim, young curves made Leon’s hair stand on end.

‘Whatta’s matter?’ she repeated, leaning against the doorpost, seemingly unaware of her transparent nakedness. ‘Is the joint on fire or is it only you, handsome?’

The sound of footsteps were distinct now. The two men were mounting to the fifth floor. There was no time to explain. The thought of taking this girl into the street dressed as she was dismayed Leon, but only for a split second. He had to get her into the elevator and get the elevator moving before the two men came into view. He reckoned he didn’t have much more than five seconds to do it.

‘I want you,’ he said and grabbed at the girl.

He caught her by the wrist and jerked her forward, but she grabbed hold of the doorway, braced her feet and leaned back.

‘Who do you think I am - one of the Sabines?’ she said and giggled.

He realized then that she was as drunk as she could ever be, and he was so startled he allowed her to wrench her wrist free.

‘Cool down, handsome,’ she said. ‘We’re in the twentieth century now - remember?’

‘For the love of Mike, two guys are coming up and they’re after you. Your only chance is to come with me,’ Leon blurted out.

‘Two more guys? Let them all come! Bring them in and come in yourself. We’ll have a party.’

Leon reached forward to grab her again, but she jumped back.

‘If the other two are anything like you I’m going to have a lot of fun,’ she said, swaying unsteadily on her feet. ‘Come on in and stake the first claim.’

Leon stepped to the door, sweat was running down his face.

‘Hey, you!’

He had been waiting for that. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the man with the scar appear at the head of the stairs. Behind him Leon caught a glimpse of the other man, shorter and fatter.

Leon stepped into the apartment, slammed the door and turned the key. He shot the bolts at the foot and head of the door.

‘You’re kidding yourself if you think you’re going to have me all to yourself,’ the girl said. ‘You may not think it to look at me, but I’m not that sort of a girl. Open up, and let those two guys in.’

‘Now, listen to me . . .’ Leon began.

‘Well, if you’re not going to let them in, then I will!’ the girl declared and staggered over to the door.

‘Don’t be a fool!’ Leon said, shoving her back. ‘Those two . . .’

‘Who are you calling a fool?’ the girl said shrilly. ‘Get out of my way!’

‘Will you listen to me?’

She swerved around him and pulled back the top bolt before he could grab her.

There came a loud knocking on the door.

‘Don’t start pawing me!’ the girl exclaimed, pulling away from Leon.

‘Those two guys are going to murder you, you little fool!’ Leon snarled, and blocked her rush to the door again. He took her by the shoulders and shook her. ‘They’re the fellas.’ He broke off with a grunt of anguish as she slapped him across the eyes. For a second or so he was blinded. She had pulled the bottom bolt back and her hand was on the key when he dragged her away and threw her into an armchair. He jumped to the door and slammed back the bolts again as a shoulder was driven against the door.

The door bulged under the impact, but held. Leon didn’t think it would withstand much more of that treatment.

The girl scrambled out of the chair and threw herself at him, pounding his chest and face with clenched fists. For a moment he had all he could do to control her flying fists. Finally, he caught her wrists and, holding them against his chest, he shouted to her to stop fighting.

‘Will you listen to me, goddamn it! Those are the guys you’re paying

blackmail to!’

She seemed too drunk to understand what he was saying, and pushing forward, she butted him under his chin and kicked his shin. Swearing under his breath, he swept her off her feet and rushed her into the far room.

It was a small room with a narrow bed standing under the window. There was a heavy wardrobe along one side of the wall, and a dressing table along the opposite wall.

He tossed her on the bed, turned, shut the door, twisting the key and taking it out of the lock. The girl bounced off the bed and came at him again, her eyes furious and face white.

He caught hold of her, smothered her flying arms, carried her back to the bed and slammed her down so hard she would have bounced onto the floor if he hadn’t held her.

She lay gasping for breath, too stunned for the moment to move, and he took the opportunity to run over to the wardrobe and he began to manoeuvre it to the door. It was a solid piece of furniture, and it was as much as he could do to move it. He struggled with it, panting, moving it inch by inch.

‘Don’t you dare touch my things!’ the girl wailed from the bed. ‘Stop it, do you hear?’

Leon ignored her. He got his shoulder against the wardrobe and heaved it across the door. As he was shifting the far end into position, he heard a sharp splintering of wood in the next room. The front door had been forced open. Well, they wouldn’t force this door open so quickly, he thought. He opened the wardrobe, snatched out a fur coat and threw it at the girl.

‘Put that on, and snap it up!’

‘You get out of here!’ she stormed and threw the coat on the floor.

He went over to her and jerked her to her feet.

‘Put it on!’

She swung at him, her fingers like claws, but he caught her wrist, spun her around and slammed her face down on the bed. He drove his knees in her back to hold her, caught up the coat and tried to get her arms into the sleeves, but she struggled so violently he had to give up.

He was angry now. Every second counted, and he knew those two would get into the room before long. He released her and stood back, setting himself. She bounced off the bed, her eyes blazing, and came at him with flying fists. He swept aside her arms and hit her solidly, turning his wrist as

his fist cracked against her jaw.

Her eyes rolled back, her knees buckled and she collapsed into his arms.

He swung her onto the bed and bundled her into the fur coat, then leaving her, he jumped to the window and threw it up. He gave a gasp of relief when he saw the fire escape platform a few feet below him.

‘He’s going out by the window!’ he heard the man with the scar growl. ‘I’m going down. You get this door open.’

Leon didn’t hesitate. The man with the scar had the elevator, but it travelled at a crawl. He would then have to come around to the back of the building. It would be a close race, but it would be better than being trapped in this room. He caught up the unconscious girl and bundled her out of the window onto the platform. He scrambled out himself as the door creaked ominously.

He paused to look down into the dark alley, trying to see where it led to, but he could see only the dim outline of a high wall fading into darkness. He looked up, but the roof was well out of his reach. He had to go down.

He swung the girl over his shoulder and started down the iron stairs. Holding on to the rusty rail, he went down as fast as his legs could take him. The girl was no light weight, and by the time he reached the third-floor platform he was gasping for breath, but he kept on, nearly falling, grabbing at the rail, slithering down the steps, intent only on reaching the alley before the man with the scar showed up.

He reached the last platform, his breath rasping at the back of his throat and his knees buckling. But he kept on, feeling the end of the escape swing down as he put his weight on it.

He reached the alley and leaned against the wall for a second or so while he struggled to get his breath back. He looked to the right and left. The alley went away into the darkness like a tunnel, and he could see no lights at either end. He started off to the right, half running, half staggering. He hadn’t gone more than a few yards when a sound behind him made him swing around.

Some distance from him a door had opened and a shaft of light fell into the alley. He could see the broad, tall figure of the man with the scar move swiftly and silently through the open doorway into the alley. Leon began to move forward slowly, making no sound, and holding his breath.

The man with the scar stood listening, looking from right to left, trying to make up his mind which way Leon had gone.

Moving now at a crawl, Leon edged on into the darkness, ready to break into a run if the man with the scar headed his way.

Suddenly and without warning he collided with a wall. He stumbled, recovered his balance and groped feverishly. His hands slid over the face of a brick wall. The alley was a cul-de-sac. He had come the wrong way, and had walked into a trap!

He leaned against the wall, looking down the long length of the dark alley to the patch of light that came through the open doorway. He saw the man with the scar look in his direction, then start toward him. As he passed out of the patch of light, Leon saw he had a gun in his hand.

II

The sound of traffic and the haze of light in the sky told Leon he wasn't all that far from a main street. He reckoned that if he had turned left instead of right he would have come out at the bottom end of Eastern Street.

But now the man with the scar, plus a gun, blocked his exit. He slid the unconscious girl off his shoulder and gently let her down to the ground. He propped her up against the wall. He could see the man with the scar outlined against the patch of light that lit up the alley and wall opposite the open door.

Leon knew he couldn't be seen, and the man with the scar was only guessing that this was the way he had come, nor could he know that the alley ended in a cul-de-sac.

Moving silently, Leon crept forward, bent double to meet the man with the scar as he came down the alley. The man moved slowly, not quite sure where he was heading, his ears pricked for any sound that would tell him he was moving in the right direction.

When Leon got about twenty yards from where he had left the girl, he stopped and went down on hands and knees, pressing himself against the wall. The man with the scar was about fifteen yards from him, moving forward, his gun thrust out, his left hand touching the wall opposite to the one by which Leon was crouching. As he came nearer, Leon held his breath, ducking his chin down to hide his white collar.

The man with the scar was within a few feet of him now, Leon could hear him breathing softly, and smelt a faint and sickly perfume of hair oil. The looming shadow passed within a foot of him, not seeing him, moving forward with the same slow, steady pace, and Leon had to admire the nerve of the man to walk into such pitch blackness not knowing if a trap was being laid for him. Leon twisted round on his heels, half stood up, braced himself and threw himself on the broad back as it moved away from him.

The man with the scar gave a startled grunt, stumbled forward and dropped his gun. Leon got his arm round the man's throat. He caught his own wrist with his right hand, pulling it back into the man's throat with all his strength. The man with the scar arched his back and lifted Leon off his feet. Leon gritted his teeth and tightened his grip. He hung on, knowing that if he could

retain his grip for a minute or so, his opponent must black out.

The opposition was alarming. It was like trying to hold a wild cat. The man with the scar slammed Leon against the wall, kicked back, bent, straightened and slammed Leon against the wall again.

Leon felt as if his ribs were being crushed, and his breath was driven out of his body, but he hung on, frantically retaining his grip, and making a desperate effort to tighten it.

The man with the scar reached back and groped for Leon's head. His fingers brushed Leon's eyes, but before he could screw his thumbs into Leon's eyeballs, Leon, realizing the danger, had buried his face into the other's shoulder. Fingers closed around his ears and twisted them, sending white-hot pain tearing into Leon's skull. He heaved forward, driving the man with the scar onto his knees, forcing him to let go of Leon's ears to save his own face from hitting concrete.

Leon rammed his knee into the man's back, and with the extra leverage pulled savagely back onto his arm. For a moment the man with the scar heaved convulsively, but Leon had the grip he wanted now, and he kept increasing the pressure. Then suddenly the man with the scar went limp and flattened out on the ground. Leon retained his pressure for another two or three seconds, then he cautiously eased his grip, straightened and stepped back. The man with the scar lay motionless.

Leon glanced down the alley, wondering if the fat man would come this way. He groped around in the darkness until he found the gun the man with the scar had dropped. Then he ran back to where he had left the girl, hoisted her on his shoulder and started off toward the patch of light coming through the open doorway.

He held the girl around the back of her knees with his left hand and the gun in his right.

As he neared the patch of light, he slowed down, keeping close to the wall, and began to edge forward, his ears cocked for the slightest suspicious sound. Nothing happened, and he paused by the door, his gun thrust forward, and peered into the dimly lit passage.

There was no sign of the fat man, and after listening for a moment or two without hearing anything Leon crossed the patch of light, quickened his stride and went on down the alley.

After he had walked fifty yards or so, he made out a faint light ahead of

him. He increased his speed and kept on until he reached the end of the alley. He paused again, keeping in the shadows, and peered out of the mouth of the alley into a dark and deserted side street. He stepped out of the alley and looked to the right and left. At the end of the street he could see the dirty street lights and the iron escapes and balconies of Eastern Street.

What was going to happen, he wondered, when he walked into Eastern Street with this girl slung over his shoulder? Suppose he ran into a cop? He glanced back down the alley, wondering if the man with the scar had come to the surface. There was no time to waste. Somehow he had to reach the waiting taxi and get the hell out of this district.

As he began to move forward, he felt the girl stir. She gave a little sigh and her legs moved in his grip. He kept on until he reached the corner of the road leading into Eastern Street. Then he swung her off his shoulder and propped her against the wall. Her knees buckled, and she would have slid to the ground if he hadn't held her up.

He shook her and slapped her face lightly.

'Come on,' he urged. 'Snap out of it! You're all right. Come on. Wake up!'

She opened her eyes and looked blankly at him, and then closed them again. He shook her once more.

'Come on! We're going for a walk. Wake up!'

'Don't want to go for a walk,' she mumbled. 'Wanna go to sleep.'

He relaxed his grip on her, and when she felt she was falling she made an effort to stay upright, clutching hold of him.

'What's happening? Where am I?'

'You're tight, baby, and far from home. Come on. I want to get you home. You don't want me to carry you, do you?'

He put his arm around her and started her moving. She staggered along at his side, leaning heavily against him.

Ahead of them, Leon saw the car the two men had come in. It stood some fifty yards or so from No. 23, and he hurriedly crossed the street away from it.

'I want to lie down,' the girl said suddenly. 'I can't go a step further.'

'Yes, you can. It's not far,' Leon said encouragingly. 'Come on. You're doing fine.'

Before he could stop her, she flopped down on the sidewalk.

‘I’m going to stay right here,’ she said sullenly.

A man stepped out of the shadows, making Leon start. He stared at the girl on the sidewalk, gave Leon a quick suspicious stare, but kept on up the street. Leon took off his hat and fanned himself with it. He was finding this situation a difficult and trying experience.

‘Up you get,’ he said, bending over the girl. ‘If you sit on that cold stone there’s no knowing the damage you’ll do to yourself.’

‘That’s not your business,’ the girl said coldly. ‘I’m going to stop right here.’

‘Come on, baby,’ Leon pleaded. ‘You look silly sitting there.’

‘Didn’t you hit me a while back?’ the girl asked, screwing up her eyes and staring at him.

‘Hit you? Never,’ Leon said. ‘Come on up. You want to get home, don’t you?’ He put his hands under her armpits and hauled her to her feet.

‘My home’s over there,’ she said, pointing to No. 23. ‘You’re taking me away from it.’

‘I’m going to buy you a drink,’ Leon said hurriedly. ‘Something long and cold with a kick in it that’ll make you steam at the ears. You’d like that, wouldn’t you?’

‘What kind of a drink’s that?’ she asked, showing interest.

‘They’ve bottled a kick of a mule,’ Leon said. ‘It’s not on the market yet. Come on. Let’s get going before the bar shuts.’

She went with him, leaning on his arm, and he hurried her down the street, looking over his shoulder every now and then, expecting to see either the man with the scar or the fat man coming after them. The girl suddenly tugged at his arm, slowing down.

‘What now?’ he said impatiently. ‘Can’t you keep walking for five minutes?’

‘I have an idea I don’t know who you are,’ she said, swaying against him. ‘Or do I?’

‘Sure, you know who I am,’ Leon said briskly. ‘I’m Ed. Remember me? I’m the guy who’s going to buy you a drink.’

‘Oh, yes.’ She nodded and smiled. ‘I remember now. Ed. When am I going to get that drink?’

‘As soon as we get to the bar,’ he said, taking her arm and hustling her along. ‘Step out, sweetheart. It won’t be long now.’

They reached the corner and Leon drew in a deep breath of relief when he saw the taxi waiting. The driver was walking up and down, munching on a sandwich, which he waved at Leon when he saw him.

‘I wasn’t going to wait much longer,’ he said. ‘I see you’ve found company.’

The girl stared at the driver.

‘Who’s this guy?’ she demanded, turning to Leon.

‘That’s Sam,’ Leon said. ‘You remember Sam. He’s the guy who’s going to take you to the drink I’m going to buy you.’

‘Oh. You didn’t mention Sam,’ the girl said, frowning. ‘Hi, Sam,’ she went on to the driver. ‘Where’s this drink Ed’s going to buy me?’

The driver scowled.

‘My name ain’t Sam,’ he said. ‘It’s George. Where do you get that Sam stuff from?’

‘Aw, forget it!’ Leon said impatiently. ‘Sam or George, what the hell does it matter? Come on, let’s all go for a ride.’ He pulled open the car door and took hold of the girl’s arm. ‘Hop in, sweetheart. Just a little ride around the corner.’

She pulled away from him and jumped back.

‘Oh, no! I’m not that dumb!’ she said. ‘I’m not going on any rides with you. What is this? A white slave snatch?’

‘I’m going to buy you a drink,’ Leon said, restraining his temper with a superhuman effort. ‘Come on, baby. Let’s all get in this hack and go find that drink.’

‘I’m going home,’ the girl said, and the finality in her voice made Leon’s heart sink.

‘Come on. You don’t want to go home yet. It’s too early,’ he said.

‘I’m going home,’ the girl repeated and thrust her hands into the pockets of her coat. As she did so the coat opened, and the driver got a good view of the black nylon pyjamas.

He caught his breath sharply.

‘Holy mackerel! I wouldn’t like my wife to wear an outfit like that!’ he said in a hushed voice.

‘Suppose you two go and jump in a lake,’ the girl said coldly, flapping her coat to. ‘I’m going home.’

She turned and staggered off the way she had come.

Leon jumped forward and grabbed her by her arm, pulling her back.

‘Hey, you can’t go off like that,’ he said. ‘We’re going to have a drink together.’

She tried to break his hold, but he held on.

‘It’s time I started to scream,’ she said, leaning against him. ‘I knew I should have done something all the time I’ve been with you. I should have started screaming minutes ago.’

‘What do you want to scream for?’ Leon asked, hurriedly releasing her. He took out his cigarette case, opened it and offered it. ‘Have a cigarette?’

‘They’re not doped, are they?’ she asked suspiciously.

‘Only the ones on this side. The others are Camels,’ Leon said gravely.

She took a Camel while the driver watched with bulging eyes.

‘Hey, mister,’ he said. ‘What’s going on around here?’

‘Keep out of this,’ Leon snarled. ‘You look after your cab.’ He put his arm round the girl’s shoulders and moved her toward the cab. ‘How about that drink, baby? The bar will shut if we don’t snap it up.’

She jerked away from him.

‘I’m not going. I’m going home.’

Regretfully Leon decided he would have to hit her again. Time was running out. Any moment the man with the scar might show up, and then the lid would blow off.

‘Don’t go yet,’ he said, closing his right fist. ‘Look at the moon up there. Doesn’t that make you want to stay out and have a good time?’

She looked up. The side of her jaw made a perfect target. His fist swung up, but before it could connect, his wrist was grabbed by the driver who shoved him back so violently he overbalanced and sat on the sidewalk.

‘What do you think you’re doing?’ the driver demanded fiercely. ‘I don’t stand for that stuff. What is all this, anyway?’

‘He hit me before,’ the girl said furiously and running over to Leon she kicked him. ‘That’ll teach you to strike a woman, you big gorilla.’

Leon grabbed her legs and brought her down on top of him. He twisted her arms behind her, picked her up and rushed her over to the cab.

The driver blocked the way, his eyes bolting out of his head.

‘Not in my cab!’ he said. ‘Let her go or I’ll make you!’

‘She’s crazy,’ Leon said, struggling to hold the girl. ‘I’ve got to take her home. Let me get her inside before she starts trouble.’

The girl threw back her head and let out a scream that set Leon's teeth on edge. He tried to cover her mouth with his hand, but the driver rushed up and hit him on the side of his head, sending him staggering.

The girl wriggled out of his grasp. He made a vain grab at her, got a grip on her coat, held her for a second, then she slipped out of the coat, leaving it in his hands. She began a staggering run down the street.

'What's going on here?' a voice demanded, and a red-faced cop materialized out of the shadows.

This guy's trying to kidnap this girl, the driver said, pointing to the girl, who had stopped running and had turned to look back. The street light fell directly on her, and the cop drew in a sharp breath.

'She can't show herself in the street like that,' he said angrily. 'It ain't decent.'

Leon threw down the coat in disgust.

'Two guys are gunning for that girl. I want to get her someplace safe,' he said to the cop. 'It's okay with me if you'll arrest her just so long as she doesn't go back to her apartment.'

The cop stared at him suspiciously.

'What two guys?' he demanded.

'He's lying, boss,' the driver said anxiously. 'He was going to hit her but I stopped him. He's got doped cigarettes, and he's trying to kidnap her.'

'Aw, shut up!' Leon said angrily. He turned to the cop. 'Let's you and me go and talk to the girl. Let's all go down to the station. We can sort it out there.'

'You stick right here,' the cop said to the driver. 'You come with me,' he went on to Leon, 'and no funny business or you'll need a new skull.'

The two of them started down the street. When the girl saw them coming, she turned and ran. She kept in the middle of the street, and she ran toward the car parked near the curb by the man with the scar. When she was within twenty yards of it, Leon saw the shadowy outline of a man move out of a nearby doorway.

'Look out!' he shouted to the cop. 'That guy over there!'

The cop slowed and came to a stop.

'What guy?'

Leon sprinted on, pulling the gun he had picked up from his hip pocket. The girl suddenly stopped running, turned and faced him as he came rushing

down the street. She was breathing heavily, her hands clasped over her breasts.

A spurt of yellow flame came from the doorway, then a crash of gunfire.

The girl screamed, and Leon yelled to her to drop flat. He fired into the doorway as the cop came pounding up, gun in hand. Another shot came from the doorway and Leon felt the slug fan air against his face. He swerved away out of the light of the street lamp. The cop dropped flat and fired into the doorway. His gun cracked three times.

From out of the shadows on the opposite side of the street to the doorway came gunfire. The dark night was lit by gun flashes.

The cop arched his back, flopped, levered himself off the ground, remained for a second or so on hands and knees, then his cap fell off as he flattened out, blood running down the side of his face. His fingers slackened on his gun. Leon scrambled behind a garbage can and fired twice into the shadows where the shots had come from. The fat man came out into the light, bent double, his hands pressing his belly. He walked two or three paces, then his knees folded and he spread out face down on the sidewalk.

Leon looked toward the girl.

She stood motionless in the middle of the road, her hands now over her mouth. She didn't seem to have been hit, and he yelled at her to get down.

He saw a movement in the doorway opposite him, caught a glint of steel as the man with the scar lifted his gun to fire at the girl. Leon fired a split second before the other got his gun up.

The man with the scar dropped the gun, ran out into the street, holding his right wrist. Leon fired at him again, but missed. The man with the scar ducked behind the parked car.

Cautiously Leon straightened.

The girl turned and began to run blindly down the street again.

Leon hesitated, undecided whether to go after the girl or tackle the man with the scar. He decided to go after the girl. She was running fast and had a hundred yards start. He increased his stride and pelted after her.

People were coming out of their houses now, standing cautiously at their front doors, peering into the street.

Two men ran out of a house and threw themselves on Leon, bringing him to the ground.

'Let me go!' he raved, hitting out. 'I've got to stop that girl!'

‘You’ll wait until the cops come,’ one of the men panted as he clung to Leon. The other, a small, determined man in shirtsleeves, struggled to hold on to Leon’s left arm. Leon flung him off and crashed his fist into the other man’s face, bowling him over.

He scrambled to his feet and went down the street like a bullet out of a gun, but he had lost sight of the girl now. The long, badly lit street was empty except for faces at the windows and people staring from the balconies.

The girl ran blindly until she reached an alley which she knew would bring her to the back of the entrance of No. 23. She spurted, crossing the street and entered the alley. She was gasping for breath as she ran. Her one idea was to get back to her apartment and lock herself in.

The alley was dark and narrow. It stretched out before her like a long, black tunnel. She ran for about twenty yards, then stopped abruptly, her nerve suddenly failing as she felt the darkness close in on her. She leaned against the wall, gasping for breath, too frightened to run back the way she had come. Too frightened even to scream. She imagined something moved near her, and she stared into the darkness, her heart hammering so violently she felt she was suffocating.

‘I’ve been waiting for you, May,’ a man’s voice said close to her, and she felt warm breath against her cheek, breath that had the sickly sweet smell of chewing gum. She felt her body freeze and her spirit seemed to start out of her body in a desperate, panic-stricken effort to run away. ‘I thought you would come this way,’ the voice went on. ‘So I waited.’ Out of the darkness a hand touched her arm and fingers closed around her wrist. ‘We didn’t want you to talk, May,’ the voice continued. ‘You know rather too much about me. I told Penn and Fats to shut your pretty mouth but they’ve made a mess of it. I always seem to have to do these jobs myself.’

A cold ball of fear began to uncoil inside her, rising in her throat in a wild, terrified scream. As she released the scream she felt an agonizing pain before her breasts. Her groping hands closed over his hand that held something that seemed to be growing out of her.

‘What have you done to me?’ she screamed, trying to tear his hand away. ‘What have you done?’

His hand went away, and her hands closed around the cold, ivory handle of a knife and she realized with sick terror that the blade was inside her. She leaned against the wall, sweat running down her face, her knees sagging,

feeling the pain as it moved inside her as if it were alive. She was too frightened to pull out the knife. She held on to the handle, crying weakly as she felt her life draining out of her.

III

Nick English was still pacing his study floor when Ed Leon came in. Leon wandered over to an armchair, sank into it and pushed his hat to the back of his head.

‘Jay-sus! What an evening I’ve had,’ he said. ‘If there’s a drink handy I could do with it.’

English crossed to the cellarette and made two large whiskies.

‘Where’s the girl?’ he asked as he brought the drinks to the desk.

‘I muffed it,’ Leon said, took the glass and drank half the whisky. ‘Right at this minute she’s in the morgue, poor kid.’ He put down his glass and grimaced.

‘You mean she’s dead?’

‘Yep. Someone stuck a knife in her guts,’ Leon returned, and went on to tell English the events of the evening.

English sat smoking, his eyes staring fixedly at the blotter on his desk, not missing a word.

‘Someone was waiting for her in the alley,’ Leon concluded. ‘I heard her scream, but by the time I got to her she was beyond help. Someone knifed her. He didn’t leave the knife, but he did leave something more important to us.’

He took from his pocket a scrap of paper and put it on the desk. It was the wrapping of a chewing gum package. English picked it up, his eyes meeting Leon’s.

‘Might not mean anything,’ he said quietly.

‘It’s my bet it does. She was lying on it. I think this guy in the brown suit gets hotter every time someone is knocked off.’

English put the scrap of paper carefully in his desk drawer.

‘What happened when you found her?’

‘The place was getting lousy with cops so I decided to duck out. The chances were I would be grabbed as the killer. I bolted down the alley, climbed a wall and picked up a cruising taxi. I got him to drop me off on Central Avenue, and I walked here.’

English nodded.

‘Think they picked up this man with the scar?’

‘Maybe. There’s a chance they did.’

‘And the fat man?’

‘I think he’s dead. I hit him in the belly and he didn’t seem to be enjoying the experience last time I saw him.’

‘Looks like a gang, doesn’t it?’

‘I guess so. Our chewing gum friend could be the boss.’

‘If it’s Sherman, he must be the boss,’ English said grimly. ‘That would make Roy the stooge. I didn’t think he had it in him to organize a racket like this.’

‘I don’t see what you can do to Sherman if he turns out to be the guy you want. Pull him into the limelight and Roy gets dragged in, too.’

English nodded.

‘That’s right.’ He sat brooding for a long minute, then he stood up. ‘Go home and get some sleep, Ed. This wants working out. I’ll have some ideas for you by tomorrow.’

‘Okay,’ Leon said, finished his whisky and stood up. ‘I didn’t get around to tracing those wires from the mike in my office. That’s something I’ll take care of tomorrow night.’

English walked with him to the front door.

‘I’ll talk to Morilli. This fat man you think you killed may have a record.’

‘Don’t stir up too much mud,’ Leon warned him. ‘Watch out Morilli doesn’t connect your enquiry with my description. That taxi driver had a good look at me.’

‘I’ll watch it,’ English said and opened the front door.

Leon stepped into the wide passage.

The elevator that was nearly opposite English’s door was coming up. It stopped, and a youngish man in a well-cut brown suit, a white silk handkerchief tucked up his sleeve and a brown slouch hat set squarely on his head got out. He gave Leon and English a quick, searching glance, then began to move along the passage to the other apartment that was at the end of the passage.

‘Mr. Sherman?’ English said quietly.

The man in the brown suit paused. He had the most extraordinary eyes Leon had ever seen; they were amber-coloured with huge pupils, and they were as expressionless as two yellow buttons.

‘Why, yes, I’m Sherman,’ he said. His voice was low-pitched and musical, and he smiled at English, showing small, very white, even teeth. ‘Did you want me? It’s Nick English, isn’t it?’

‘You run along, Ed,’ English said under his breath. ‘See you tomorrow.’ He went on to Sherman, ‘I did want a word with you. Perhaps you’d care to step in for a moment?’

‘I wonder if you would mind coming along to my apartment?’ Sherman said. ‘I’m expecting a telephone call and it’s important.’

‘Certainly,’ English returned and closed the front door, moving along the passage at Sherman’s side.

Leon stood watching them until they paused outside Sherman’s apartment, then he got into the elevator and thumbed the button to take him to the ground floor. He made an uneasy grimace as the elevator began to descend. Sherman unlocked his front door, reached forward and turned on the light, then stood aside.

‘Please go ahead, Mr. English.’

English walked into an ornate lobby that seemed full of flowers. He turned and watched Sherman close the door.

Sherman hung his hat on the rack, ran a small white hand over his flaxen hair and opened the door facing him. He reached in and pressed light buttons, and lights sprang up in the room.

He stood aside, motioning English to enter.

English walked into the room.

It took a lot to startle him, but this room brought him to an abrupt halt, and he stood staring around, his face clearly showing his astonishment. It was a big room. English was aware first of a feeling of space - a vast stretch of polished floor spread out before him. There was no carpet or rugs to break up that stretch of flooring. It seemed to go on and on until it finished up against long black velvet drapes that covered the windows.

A white corded settee and two white corded lounge chairs cringed in the empty space. In the alcove by the window stood a baby grand piano. There was a big fireplace where a log fire burned brightly, and on either side of it stood six-foot high black candles with small electric lamps imitating candle flames. Against one side of the room was a life-size replica of Michelangelo’s Pieta, his first masterpiece, which is now in St. Peter’s, Rome. The walls were covered with black velvet drapes, but English’s eyes

kept going to the Pieta, which stood out against the black background startlingly white in its simplicity and beauty.

There was a faint smell of incense in the room and the concealed lighting created an atmosphere that made English think of a crypt. He felt Sherman was watching him, and he quickly controlled his astonishment.

‘As a showman, Mr. English, you should appreciate this room,’ Sherman said, moving over to the fire. ‘At least, it is original, isn’t it? Of course not many people would care to live in it, but then I’m not like most people.’

‘I agree with you,’ English said dryly. ‘That’s a fine piece of sculpture.’

‘It is a good copy,’ Sherman returned, and took from his pocket a package of chewing gum. English saw the paper wrapper was identical with the piece he had in his desk drawer. ‘A young Italian student did it for me. He has caught Michelangelo’s mood remarkably well. It was Michelangelo’s greatest work. It was the only piece of sculpture he put his name to. If you look closely you will see his name written on the girdle that crosses the Virgin’s breast. Are you interested in art, Mr. English?’

‘I can appreciate art,’ English returned, waving his hand to the Pieta, ‘but I can’t say art really interests me. I haven’t had the opportunity to study the subject. But I mustn’t keep you. I wanted to ask you if you called on the news service agency at 1356 7th Street on the 17th of this month.’

Sherman slowly unpeeled the wrapping on the gum package, his expressionless eyes on English’s face.

‘I believe I did,’ he said. ‘I can’t be sure if I went there on the 17th, but it was some evening this week. It could be the 17th, come to think of it. How very odd you should ask.’

‘I have a reason for asking,’ English said. ‘You went there about ten fifteen?’

‘It is possible. It was something like that. I didn’t particularly notice.’

‘At about that time my brother committed suicide,’ English said, his eyes on Sherman’s face. ‘He shot himself.’

Sherman lifted his eyebrows.

‘How very unpleasant for you,’ he said, taking a piece of gum from the package and putting it into his mouth. ‘I’m sorry.’

‘Did you hear a shot when you were in the building?’

‘So it was a shot,’ Sherman said. ‘I did hear something and it crossed my mind it was a shot, but I finally decided it must have been a car backfiring.’

‘Where were you when you heard the shot?’

‘I was coming up in the elevator.’

‘Did you see anyone in the sixth-floor passage or coming out of my brother’s office?’

‘Had your brother an office on the sixth floor?’ Sherman asked. ‘There is a detective agency and the news service agency on that floor, if I remember rightly. Where would your brother’s office be?’

‘He owned the detective agency.’

Sherman’s jaw moved rhythmically.

‘Did he? That’s interesting. I had no idea your brother was a detective,’ he said, and his tone implied that he didn’t think anything of detectives.

‘Did you see anyone near my brother’s office?’ English repeated.

Sherman frowned.

‘Why, yes. Come to think of it, I did. I saw a girl up there. She was wearing a rather smart black and white outfit. I remember thinking for the type of girl she so obviously was, she had an unexpected flair for clothes.’

With an expressionless face, English asked, ‘And what type of girl was she Mr. Sherman?’

Sherman smiled.

‘Well, shall we say a little tarty? The type of girl who wouldn’t have too many ethics. One of my coarser friends would probably describe her as a surefire pushover.’

English’s eyes were cold and hard as he said, ‘And this girl was in the passage when you came up in the elevator?’

‘That’s right. She was walking away from the detective agency, making for the stairs.’

‘You saw no one else?’

‘No.’

‘How long would you say it was between the time you heard the shot and saw the girl?’

‘About five seconds.’

‘Well, thanks,’ English said, suddenly realizing where Sherman’s answers were leading to. ‘I guess I won’t keep you any longer. You’ve told me all I wanted to know.’

‘That’s fine,’ Sherman said. ‘I suppose your brother did commit suicide, Mr. English?’

‘That’s what I said,’ English returned curtly.

‘Yes, so you did. But detectives do appear to lead dangerous lives. That is if you are to believe the novels written about them. I wonder if your brother discovered something unpleasant about this girl and she shot him to silence him. It’s possible, isn’t it?’

English smiled bleakly.

‘My brother shot himself, Mr. Sherman.’

Sherman nodded.

‘Of course. I’m letting my imagination run away with me. But there have been cases where a man has been murdered and the crime has been written off as a suicide. But this seems unlikely in your brother’s case as you appear to be so certain he did shoot himself. If you weren’t so certain, Mr. English, I guess it would be my duty to tell the police about this girl I saw, or perhaps you don’t agree?’

‘There is no doubt whatsoever that my brother shot himself,’ English said quietly.

Sherman looked at him, his jaws moving as he chewed. He smiled pleasantly.

‘Well, you know best, Mr. English. I wonder what she was doing in your brother’s office. He must have shot himself while she was actually in the room.’

English’s mouth tightened.

‘Did she seem in any way distressed?’ he asked.

‘No, I wouldn’t say she looked distressed. She was in a hurry, as if she were running away. You are quite sure, Mr. English, that your brother wasn’t murdered?’

‘I’m quite sure.’

Again Sherman nodded.

‘Of course the girl could be easily traced,’ he went on absently. ‘I should imagine she worked in some nightclub. She looked like a nightclub singer.’ He ran his fingers through his flaxen hair, ruffling it so he suddenly appeared almost boyish as he smiled at English. ‘I’m an artist, Mr. English. You wouldn’t know that, of course, but I’m rather clever at creating a likeness. It would be a very easy task for me to provide the police with a picture this girl. Do you think I should do that?’

‘The police are satisfied that my brother shot himself,’ English said

quietly. 'I don't think you need bother to supply them with a picture.'

'Anything you say,' Sherman returned, shrugging. 'I have an overdeveloped sense of duty. It can be a nuisance at times.'

'That I can understand,' English said dryly and moved toward the door. 'Thank you for your help.'

'Only too glad,' Sherman said, remaining where he was before the fire. He continued to chew, his hands in his pockets, his face lit by a smile. 'As a matter of fact, I have been hoping to have the opportunity of talking to you. After all, you are quite a celebrity.'

'I suppose I am,' English said and reached for the door handle. 'Good night, Mr. Sherman.'

'I guess if the police knew about Miss Clair, it might be very awkward for her, and unpleasant for you,' Sherman said, raising his voice slightly. 'After all, she did have a very good reason for shooting your brother, didn't she?'

English turned slowly and looked at Sherman, who continued to smile. His yellow eyes reminded English of the parking lights of a car.

'Miss - who?' English asked, politely interested.

'Julie Clair, your mistress,' Sherman returned. 'Her motive and my evidence could put her in jail for quite a long time. She might even go to the chair, although if she flashed her legs at the jury she would probably avoid that. But she would get at least ten years. You wouldn't like that, would you, Mr. English?'

IV

There was a pause while the two men looked at each other, then English came back slowly to the centre of the room.

‘No,’ he said, speaking quietly. ‘I shouldn’t like that. Are you quite sure the girl you saw was Miss Clair?’

Sherman made a little gesture of impatience with his hand.

‘I know you are a very busy man,’ he said, ‘but you might feel inclined to discuss the situation now rather than later, but please yourself. I’m in no violent hurry.’

‘What is there to discuss?’ English asked.

‘Wouldn’t it save time if we stopped behaving like a couple of clubmen at a social gathering?’ Sherman said sharply. ‘I own a piece of information and I am prepared to sell it to you. That’s what there’s to discuss.’

‘I see,’ English said, raising his eyebrows. ‘This is a surprise. You have decided to drop the mask, have you? I was wondering if you would have the nerve to try to blackmail me.’

Sherman smiled.

‘To me, Mr. English, you are just a rich man. Your importance and fame leave me indifferent. You have the money and I have the information. I can either sell it to you or to Miss Clair. I would prefer to sell it to you as I would be able to ask a much higher price, but if you are not inclined to make a deal, then I must go to her.’

‘I was under the impression you already have dealings with her,’ English said mildly. ‘She has been paying you two hundred dollars a week, hasn’t she?’

Sherman’s eyes blinked, then he smiled.

‘I don’t usually betray a client’s confidence, but as she has obviously told you about it, then I see no harm in telling you we have a modest deal on together, but this new proposition would be a much larger deal, and it would be a cash payment, not a few hundred a week.’

‘I don’t think she could pay.’

‘Possibly not, then perhaps you would come to her assistance.’

English sat down, took out his cigarette case, selected a cigarette and lit it.

‘What do you want for your information?’ he asked as he flicked the match into the fire.

‘From you, I should think a fair price would be two hundred and fifty thousand in cash,’ Sherman said. ‘From her I don’t suppose I could expect more than fifty thousand. But if I sold to her I couldn’t guarantee that the press wouldn’t discover your brother was a professional blackmailer. For the larger sum I should be able to guarantee it.’

English crossed one leg over the other. He appeared quite at ease. His face expressionless, his eyes unworried.

‘How did Roy happen to get mixed up with you?’ he asked.

Sherman leaned his shoulders against the mantel while he studied English, a slightly puzzled expression in his eyes.

‘Need we go into that?’ he said. ‘We are discussing a deal, if I may bring your mind back to business.’

‘There’s plenty of time to talk about that,’ English returned airily. ‘How did Roy happen to get mixed up with you?’

Sherman hesitated then, shrugging his shoulders, he said, ‘Your brother was anxious to make some easy money. His agency was a convenient place for my clients to go to and settle their accounts with me without causing embarrassment to either side. I paid your brother well. He collected ten percent of the gross.’

‘I see,’ English said. ‘And he decided that ten percent wasn’t enough. He attempted to help himself. Probably he held some money due to you. He was planning to go away with his secretary, Mary Savitt, and no doubt he was anxious to lay his hands on a getaway stake. I assume you found out that he was cheating you, and you decided to teach him a lesson. On the night of the 17th, you went to his office, shot him through the head with his own gun, impressed his fingerprints on the gun butt and collected the card index containing the names of your customers before leaving. Am I right?’

Sherman continued to smile, but his eyes were now wary.

‘I believe something like that did happen,’ he said. ‘Naturally you wouldn’t expect me to swear to it before a jury, but between ourselves, since we are talking off the record, something very much like that did happen.’

English nodded and blew smoke toward the ceiling.

‘You then went to 45th East Place where Mary Savitt had an apartment. You strangled her and strung her up against the bathroom door. I assume you

silenced her because she knew what Roy had been doing and could have told the police that you had the motive for murdering him.'

'I must say, Mr. English, you appear to keep yourself very well informed,' Sherman said, an acid note creeping into his voice.

'During the late afternoon,' English went on, 'a man named Hennessey called at the Alert Agency to pay his dues. He met the present occupier, who persuaded him to talk. Somehow you managed to overhear the conversation, and you murdered Hennessey by running him down in your car. Before he died, Hennessey had mentioned a girl named May Mitchell, who was paying you blackmail. Less than an hour ago you met her in a quiet alley and knifed her.'

There was a long pause of silence while Sherman studied English. His smile was fixed now, and his eyes were uneasy.

'All this is very interesting, Mr. English,' he said at last, 'but suppose we get back to our business deal. Time is getting along. I have an appointment in half an hour.'

English smiled.

'You don't really imagine you can blackmail me, do you?' he asked.

'Yes, I see no reason why not,' Sherman returned, his voice hardening. 'It would be no hardship for you to find a quarter of a million. The advantages of paying are considerable. Up to now you have made a big impression on this city. You are anxious to have the hospital named after you. You have done the city a lot of good. It would be a pity to spoil your good name because you happen to have a brother who failed to live up to your own high standards. I think you would be extremely foolish not to make a deal with me.'

'But I don't have to make a deal with you,' English said mildly. 'It is you who have to try to make a deal with me.'

'What do you mean?' Sherman asked, frowning.

'I should have thought it was obvious. Within the past few days you have murdered four people. I hold your life in my hands.'

Sherman made an impatient gesture.

'Surely that is an exaggeration. There is a considerable difference between making a guess and proving it.'

'I don't need to prove it. You will have to prove you didn't kill these people.'

‘I’m afraid we’re wasting time,’ Sherman said sharply. ‘Are you going to buy my information or do I have to go to your mistress?’

English laughed.

‘I had the mistaken idea that when I found the man who murdered my brother I was going to take the law into my own hands. At the back of my mind I was prepared to shoot him. I knew my brother was a weak, gutless fool, but I felt I couldn’t let his murder go unrevenged. In my family we have a tradition. We bury our own dead. That is to say we prefer to deal with matters concerning the family in our own way, rather than call in outsiders. So I had made up my mind that I would find Roy’s murderer and deal with him myself.’ He leaned forward to flick ash into the fire. ‘Well, I have found him, but the circumstances have changed. I have also discovered my brother was not only a cheap cheat, but he was also a blackmailer, and to me, Mr. Sherman, a blackmailer is lower than any other form of life. A man who sets out to blackmail people who have no money, as Roy did, is beyond mercy. If you hadn’t killed him, then I should have. In fact, Mr. Sherman, I am moderately grateful to you for ridding me of Roy.’

Sherman’s face was now set, and his yellow eyes gleamed.

‘All this is very interesting, but it doesn’t answer my question. Are you paying me or do I have to go to your mistress?’

‘I’m certainly not paying you,’ English said, ‘and Miss Clair isn’t paying you, either.’

‘Then you give me no other alternative but to go elsewhere with my information,’ Sherman said.

‘Nor will you take your information elsewhere,’ English returned. ‘Up to now you have been blackmailing people who don’t know how to hit back. I do. You’re like a middleweight who has rashly taken on a heavyweight, and the heavyweight is bound to win.’

‘That remains to be seen,’ Sherman said.

‘That’s true, but you don’t seem to realize what you’ve taken on by trying to blackmail me,’ English said, stretching out his long legs. ‘I have a lot of money and a lot of influence. I have many useful friends. When dealing with a blackmailer I should not hesitate to throw aside all scruples. I have already told you I don’t regard a blackmailer as a human being. I would treat him as I would treat a rat that happens to find its way into my room. I would exterminate him without mercy and by any means, and that is what I am

prepared to do to you. I know you killed four people. At the moment I have no evidence against you that would stand up in court, but in two or three days I shall have the evidence. I have an exceedingly efficient organization. I have people who will trace some of your blackmail victims. Having found them I will guarantee them immunity plus a big financial reward if they will testify against you, and some of them will. I will then inform the police and I will let them know I would take it as a favour if they showed you no mercy. I am quite sure Lieutenant Morilli will personally take over the questioning, and he would beat you to a pulp if I offered to pay for the energy expended. It is very possible that you will break down and confess. If you happen to be tougher than you look, then the next move will be to manufacture the necessary evidence, and you will be surprised how easy it can be done. I admit it will cost money, but then I have money. It won't be difficult to find someone willing to perjure himself for an agreed sum who will identify you as the man who drove his car over Hennessey. Someone else will be only too willing to swear he saw you murder May Mitchell. Someone else will say he saw you leaving Mary Savitt's apartment the night she died. Tom Calhoun, the janitor, will identify you as the last person to see my brother alive. Having got my perjured evidence, I shall then talk to the judge who will try you. I know all the judges in the city, and they are all anxious to do me a favour. I will arrange to see the jury before they try you, and I will promise them a reward if they bring in a guilty verdict. Once you are arrested, Mr. Sherman, I guarantee you will be dead within a few months. Make no mistake about that.'

'You don't think you can scare me, do you?' Sherman said. 'I make a point always to call a bluff.'

'There comes a time when you can call a bluff once too often,' English returned. 'I admit if I handed you over to the police it wouldn't be possible to keep the shabby news that my brother is a blackmailer out of the papers. I admit I would cook my own goose in this city by having you arrested, but rather than submit to blackmail or let Miss Clair submit to blackmail, I shan't hesitate to go after you, and once I do go after you, no power on earth can save you from the electric chair.' He got up abruptly and began to pace up and down, his hands clasped behind his back, his face thoughtful. 'I can't allow you to remain in the city, nor can I allow you to continue to levy blackmail. I am going to make you a proposal. It doesn't suit me at the

moment to hand you over to the police. Instead, you are to leave town by the end of the week. You are not to return. You are to give up your blackmailing activities. If you don't leave, and if you attempt to levy blackmail in this town again, then I shall hand you over to the police. If you think I am bluffing, go ahead and stay in this apartment and see what happens to you. If it's the last thing I do I'll have you in the electric chair within six months. That is all I have to say to you. If this apartment isn't empty by Saturday night, you will be arrested on Sunday morning. I shall not warn you again. Get out of town by Saturday night or take the consequences. And if you think the police will believe that Miss Clair shot my brother, go to them and tell them. They won't react favourably. They know she is under my protection, and they won't be anxious to make difficulties for me.' He walked to the door, opened it and paused to say, 'As I don't expect to see you again, I won't say good night, I'll say goodbye.'

Sherman had gone pale, and his yellow eyes showed his suppressed fury.

'A war is never won until the last battle, Mr. English,' he said, his voice unsteadily.

English looked at him and made a grimace of disgust.

'This happens to be the last battle,' he said, opened the front door and walked slowly down the passage to his own apartment.

CHAPTER FIVE

I

Corrine English carried the coffeepot into the lounge and set it on the table. As she sat down, she yawned and ran her fingers through her blond hair. The time was twenty minutes past eleven in the morning, and the bright sunshine made her feel jaded. Never at her best in the mornings, Corrine only came alive after six o'clock when she had been fortified by the first cocktail of the day. She poured the coffee into a cup, and then, after only a momentary hesitation, she got up and went over to the cellarette for a bottle of brandy.

Since Roy's death she had been drinking heavily. The lonely house, her brooding thoughts about Roy and Mary Savitt, and her hatred of Nick English so preyed on her mind that she turned automatically to brandy to 'deadens her suffering' as she put it to herself. She began by drinking steadily in the evening, then she went to the bottle during the afternoon, and now she was beginning to take brandy in her morning coffee.

She brought the bottle to the table and poured a liberal shot into the coffee and sat down again. She found she couldn't face the toast she had made, and she pushed the plate aside with a grimace of disgust. She drank more brandy, then she carried the cup over to the electric fire and sat down on the settee.

She wore her rose-pink silk wrap over black lounging pyjamas, and as she settled herself among the cushions, she remembered she had been wearing this outfit when Nick English had broken the news to her of Roy's death.

Her eyes hardened as she thought of English. She hated him as she didn't think it possible to hate anyone. She blamed him for Roy's death. His threat to hand over Roy's letters to the press filled her with vindictive fury. To make matters worse she knew she was helpless to hurt him. She knew if she tried to pit herself against him it would be as futile as opposing a tank with an air pistol. She finished her coffee, got up and took a glass from the cellarette and half filled it with brandy.

'May as well get soused as sit here and think about that bastard,' she said

aloud. 'I've nothing to do until lunchtime, and when lunchtime comes, I shan't want any lunch. So what the hell?'

Since Roy's death, she had got into the habit of talking to herself. She would walk about the lonely house, talking and talking. Sometimes she talked to Roy just as if he were sitting in the lounge, listening. Sometimes she would talk to Sam or Helen Crail or one of her girlfriends, half imagining they were actually listening to her, and she kept up a monologue, occasionally asking questions and answering them herself, pretending it was Roy or Sam or Helen who was giving her the answer. She lit a cigarette, drained the glass and refilled it.

'We've got to do something, Roy, about that sonofabitch,' she said as she wandered back to the settee. 'He's not going to get away with it. All I want is a good idea. Give me a good idea, darling, and I'll carry it out. I promise I will. I'll do anything. I'll even shoot him if you say so.'

As she was about to sit down, the musical chimes at the front door sounded.

'Oh, damn!' she said crossly. 'That'll be Hetty.'

She went across the lounge into the lobby and opened the front door. A youngish man stood on the step. He raised his brown slouch hat, showing thick flaxen hair that looked like burnished silver in the sunlight. He smiled at Corrine, his jaws moving rhythmically as he chewed, his amber-coloured eyes sliding over her plump little figure like a caress.

'Mrs. English?'

Corrine's fingers went hastily to her hair. She knew she looked awful as she hadn't bothered to put on any makeup, and she knew the rose-pink wrap was grubby.

'Yes, but I - I don't receive callers at this hour. Who are you?'

'My name is Roger Sherman, Mrs. English. Forgive me for calling so early, but I was anxious to see you. I am an old friend of Roy's.'

'Oh!' Corrine stepped back. 'Perhaps you had better come in. The place is in a ghastly mess. My maid hasn't come yet. I was just having breakfast.'

Sherman stepped into the lobby and closed the door.

'Please don't be embarrassed,' he said, and gave her a charming smile. 'I should have called you on the telephone first. I do hope you will forgive me.'

Corrine was in a flutter. Roy had never mentioned Roger Sherman to her, but it was obvious this man was wealthy. She had caught a glimpse of a big

shiny Cadillac at the door, and his clothes and manner impressed her.

‘Please go into the lounge. I won’t be a moment,’ she said, and retreated hurriedly into her bedroom, shutting the door.

Sherman walked into the lounge and looked around with a slight wrinkling of his nose. He saw the bottle of brandy and the glass, and nodded to himself. He went over and stood before the electric fire, his hands in his pockets, his jaws moving slowly. He remained like that for over a quarter of an hour, his blank expression masking his impatience.

Corrine came in, still flustered. She had put on makeup, and had changed into a lilac-coloured wrap which she kept for the best occasions. If it hadn’t been for the shadowy puffiness under her eyes, and the fact that she was just a shade too plump, she would have looked extremely attractive.

‘I’m sorry to have kept you waiting,’ she said, closing the door. ‘But I had to make myself look a little presentable.’

‘Why, you look charming,’ Sherman said, smiling at her. ‘So you are Roy’s wife. He often talked about you, saying how pretty you are, and now I’ve seen you for myself I can endorse that.’

It seemed a long time to Corrine since anyone had paid her a compliment, and for a moment she forgot how Roy had betrayed her, and the memory of their past happiness brought sudden tears to her eyes.

‘Roy never mentioned you,’ she said, touching her eyes with her handkerchief. ‘You say you were a friend of his?’

‘We were very old friends. I was shocked to hear of his sad end. I would have come to see you sooner only I have been out of town. I can’t say how sorry I am.’

‘Please don’t talk about it,’ Corrine said and sat down. ‘I don’t think I’ll ever get over the disgrace.’

‘You mustn’t say things like that,’ Sherman said gently. ‘After all, it wasn’t Roy’s fault. I suppose you know his brother was at the bottom of the whole thing?’

Corrine stiffened.

‘He was? How do you know?’

Sherman’s eyes went to the bottle of brandy.

‘Would it be rude of me to ask if I might have a drink? I like a drink at this time in the morning, but perhaps you wouldn’t approve.’

‘Oh, yes,’ Corrine said. ‘Please help yourself. I don’t mind in the least.’

Sherman went over to the cellarette for a brandy glass. He poured brandy into it, then appeared to notice Corrine's empty glass for the first time. 'May I give you a drink, too, Mrs. English?'

Corrine hesitated. She didn't want this presentable young man to think she was in the habit of drinking brandy in the morning, but she wanted a drink badly. 'Well, perhaps a small one. I'm not feeling very bright this morning.'

'I'm sorry to hear that,' Sherman returned, poured brandy generously into her glass and gave it to her. 'I hope this won't be the last time we meet,' he went on and saluted her with his glass.

Corrine drank half the brandy while Sherman scarcely touched his.

'You were talking about Nick English,' Corrine said. 'How do you know he was at the bottom of Roy's death?'

'Roy told me,' Sherman said and sat down beside Corrine. His hand brushed against her silk-clad thigh. 'I beg your pardon. I seem to be clumsy this morning.'

'What did he tell you?' Corrine demanded, scarcely noticing he had touched her.

'He told me about the money,' Sherman said. 'You know about that, of course?'

'What money?'

'Why, the twenty thousand dollars Roy meant you to have,' Sherman returned, lifting his eyebrows. 'Surely your attorney has given it to you?'

Corrine's big blue eyes opened wide.

'Twenty thousand dollars?' she repeated. 'I don't know anything about it.'

'But surely you've been left something? Forgive me for appearing curious, but after all, I was Roy's best friend, and I feel I should see his wife has been properly provided for.'

'Oh, thank you,' Corrine said, nearly dissolving into tears. 'You don't know how lonely I've been. Of course Sam Crail has been kind, but he is very busy. After all, it's not as if he was a friend. He was only Roy's attorney.'

'He is Nick English's attorney, too,' Sherman said.

Corrine stiffened.

'He is? I didn't know that. But it doesn't matter, does it? He wouldn't tell that man anything, would he?'

'He is on English's payroll,' Sherman said. 'It's no secret. He does exactly

what English tells him.'

'Oh!' Corrine's face flushed. 'What am I going to do? I wouldn't have had him in the house if I had known.'

'May I ask what you have got to live on?' Sherman said, leaning forward and looking at her intently.

'Roy left an annuity. I'm to have two hundred dollars a week for life,' Corrine said.

'And nothing has been said about the twenty thousand?'

'No, this is the first time I have heard of it. What twenty thousand?'

'You know about Mary Savitt, I suppose?'

Corrine looked away.

'Yes, I know about her. How Roy could have done such a thing.'

'Some men get carried away by unscrupulous women,' Sherman said, shaking his head. 'And she was unscrupulous, Mrs. English. It wouldn't have lasted. He would have very soon realized his mistake.'

Corrine put her hand on his.

'Thank you for saying that. That's what I've been telling myself. Roy couldn't have gone off and left me. I know he would have come back.'

'He didn't forget you. He provided for you. He told me so. He brought off a deal which netted him twenty thousand. He intended to give you the money when he went away with Mary Savitt.'

'Roy made twenty thousand!' Corrine said, startled. 'Why, I can't believe it. Roy never made any money ever.'

'Strictly speaking it was rather sharp practice,' Sherman said. 'Apparently Nick English was handling the deal. Roy happened to call on the same client on another matter, and the client confused Roy with Nick. Roy didn't enlighten him and pulled off the deal. Nick English was so angry he called in the police. They were on their way when Roy got into a panic and shot himself.'

'Oh!' Corrine said, and leaned back, closing her eyes. 'You mean that man was going to have his own brother arrested?'

'I'm afraid so. Roy had put the money in a safe deposit and had given Sam Crail the key. Crail was to give you the money. As you haven't had it, it would seem pretty obvious that English had instructed Crail to hand the money to him.'

Corrine sat bolt upright, her eyes furious.

‘Do you mean he’s stolen the money from me?’

Sherman lifted his shoulders.

‘It looks like it, but neither you nor I has any proof the money even exists.’

Corrine took a long pull at her glass. The brandy she had already drunk before Sherman arrived was beginning to have an effect on her, and she felt a little dizzy and very reckless.

‘Well, he’s not going to get away with it. I’ll fix that louse!’ She jumped to her feet. ‘I’ll make him suffer for this!’

‘I can understand your feelings,’ Sherman said, watching narrowly, ‘but how do you propose to do it? He is an extremely powerful and influential individual.’

‘I’ll think of some way,’ Corrine said, and moving a little unsteadily across the room, she refilled her glass, slopping the brandy on the carpet as she did so.

‘Perhaps I could help you,’ Sherman said, getting to his feet.

She turned and leaned against the cellarette, staring at him.

‘Can you?’ she asked. ‘How?’

‘It wouldn’t be possible to get the money out of him, but if you want to make him suffer.’

‘That’s what I do want! Do you know how I can do it?’

‘Yes, but it’ll depend on you whether you succeed or not. You know Julie Clair?’

‘I don’t know her,’ Corrine said, ‘but I know of her. She’s his mistress, isn’t she?’

‘And English is crazy about her. I happen to know she is having an affair with his general manager, a fellow named Harry Vince.’

Corrine stood very still, looking at Sherman, her eyes gleaming.

‘Are you sure?’ she said. ‘Are you absolutely sure?’

‘Yes. She goes to Vince’s apartment whenever English has a business date. I’ve seen her go there.’

‘This is what I’ve been waiting for,’ Corrine said, and moved unsteadily back to the settee. ‘Oh! Now I’ll make him suffer. If only he could find them together! If only I could rub his nose in it!’

‘That could be arranged,’ Sherman said. ‘He happens to be dining tonight with Senator Beaumont at the Silver Tower. She’s bound to go to her lover. Why don’t you go along and tell him?’

‘Will you come with me?’ Corrine asked, her face lighting up with a cruel little smile.

Sherman shook his head.

‘That’s not possible. I have an engagement for tonight, but I will book a table for you. English will show up about eight-thirty. If you get there by nine, it will be time enough.’

‘I’ll be there,’ she said, clenching her fists. ‘I’ll make a scene he and his swank friends won’t forget in a hurry. To think he dared to threaten to send Roy’s letters to the press when his own mistress is carrying on with another man! This is what I’ve been praying for.’

Sherman smiled.

‘I thought you would make good use of the information.’

‘Why did you tell me? Have you something to settle with him as well?’

‘If I had,’ Sherman said smoothly, ‘I would do my own dirty work. I happen to be exceedingly angry about the way he has treated you. I felt I had to give you a weapon, and I’ve given it to you.’

Corrine smiled at him.

‘I’m grateful.’ She crossed her legs, letting the wrap fall away a little, showing her knees. ‘I can’t say how grateful I am.’

‘There’s just one thing I would ask you to do,’ Sherman said, his eyes straying to her knees. ‘When you have told him, will you telephone me?’

‘Why, of course.’

He took out a card and gave it to her.

‘You will find me at this number after nine o’clock. Will you telephone me immediately after you have spoken to him? I want to know what he does. It’s important. Can I rely on you?’

‘Of course,’ she repeated, taking the card. ‘I’ll call you just after nine. Thank you.’

He looked around for his hat, and suddenly she couldn’t bear the thought of him leaving. Not since she had first met Roy had a man had such a strong attraction to her. ‘Well, I’ll be running along,’ he went on. ‘May I come and see you again?’

‘Must you go?’ she said, patting her blond curls. ‘Won’t you have another drink?’

He shook his head.

‘No, thank you.’

‘Well, I wish you would come again. You can’t imagine how lonely I get. Roy and I were always around together when he wasn’t at work, and I miss him terribly.’

The amber-coloured eyes dwelt on her face speculatively.

‘We might take in a movie sometime,’ he said. ‘Would you like that?’

‘Oh, yes. I haven’t been to a movie for days. Before Roy died I used to go three or four times a week.’

‘Then I’ll fix it soon,’ Sherman returned and moved to the door.

Corrine followed him into the lobby.

He turned suddenly, looking at her.

‘I shouldn’t have thought an attractive girl like you would have been lonely.’

She was a little startled. There was a light in his eyes that made her uneasy.

‘I guess I relied on Roy’s company too much,’ she said. ‘You know how it is. I just don’t seem to have any friends now.’

‘You’re too pretty to be alone for long,’ Sherman said softly and moved closer to her. ‘Perhaps, after all, I needn’t go quite so soon.’

Corrine stepped back quickly. He frightened her now. The amber-coloured eyes were expressionless, but there was something horrible in their yellow vacancy.

‘There’s no need to - to worry about me,’ she said hurriedly. ‘I’m really quite all right.’

‘Are you?’ He reached out and put his hand on her arm. ‘But you re lonely, aren’t you?’

II

Lois Marshall was just finishing dictating a batch of cables to her stenographer when Ed Leon pushed open the office door and came in.

He lifted his hat.

‘Mr. English around?’

‘Yes, he's expecting you,’ Lois told him. ‘Would you sit down for a moment? Mr. Crail’s not here yet.’

Leon lowered his long frame into an easy chair and groped for a pack of Camels.

He watched Lois work for a few minutes, and then when the stenographer had gone, he said, ‘Aren’t you scared of getting an ulcer? The way you work is asking for ulcers.’

Lois laughed.

‘I haven’t got one yet,’ she laughed lightly. ‘Work agrees with me.’

‘Yeah, I’ve heard people talk like that before, and where do they wind up?’ Leon said gloomily. ‘I’m worked too hard myself. It’s a conspiracy to get me a wooden overcoat. Look at the time. Who but English would start working at nine-thirty in the morning?’

The door opened and Crail came in. His freshly shaven face was thoughtful as he nodded to Lois and waved a plump hand at Leon.

‘You look as if you’ve had a pretty good breakfast,’ Leon said enviously. ‘Or is that bulge under your vest just part of your scenery?’

Crail ran his hand over his paunch and smiled smugly.

‘It’s part of my good will,’ he returned. ‘If I had a frame like yours I’d go out of business. No one trusts a thin man these days.’ He looked over at Lois. ‘Mr. English ready for me?’

‘I think so,’ Lois said, picking up the telephone. ‘Mr. Crail and Mr. Leon are waiting, Mr. English,’ she said, then she nodded at the two men. ‘Will you go in, please?’

Leon levered himself out of his chair and followed Crail into English’s office.

English was sitting at his desk. Harry Vince was crossing the room to the door, a pile of papers in his hand. Harry nodded to Crail, looked sharply at

Leon and went out.

‘Who’s that guy?’ Leon asked, dropping into a chair.

‘Don’t you know Harry?’ English said. ‘He’s my general manager, and a damned fine one at that.’

‘What’s new, Nick?’ Crail asked, sitting down. ‘I can’t stay long. I’m in court at ten-thirty.’

English reached for a cigar, pushed the box toward Crail, raised his eyebrows at Leon who shook his head.

‘I’ve found the guy who murdered Roy,’ he said quietly.

‘You have?’ Crail sat up. ‘Well, for God’s sake! That’s fast work.’

English nodded over to Leon.

‘He may not look it, but he happens to be a fast worker. Sherman?’ Leon asked.

‘Yes.’

English went on to tell them of the conversation he had had with Sherman the previous night.

‘Four murders?’ Crail said, his eyes opening. ‘He admitted them?’

‘He didn’t deny them,’ English returned.

‘Well, I’ll be damned! I’d like to see the D.A.’s face when you tell him,’ Crail said, and rubbed his hands together. ‘He hasn’t even connected the four killings with the same killer.’

‘I’m not telling the D.A.,’ English said, paused to light his cigar, and as he waved out the match, he went on, ‘It’s up to him to find the killer. I’m not anxious to tell the world my brother was a blackmailer. If I talk to the D.A. the story will come out. I’ve given Sherman until Saturday to get out of town.’

Crail looked quickly at Leon, who stared back at him with an expression of complete indifference.

‘You can’t do it, Nick,’ Crail said sharply. ‘It’ll make you an accessory after the fact. Damn it! It would make me an accessory, too.’

‘That’s one of the drawbacks of working for me,’ English said and smiled. ‘You’re all right, Sam. No one but Ed and I know you know.’

‘Do you think Sherman will go?’ Leon broke in.

‘He’d be a fool if he didn’t. I hold all the cards. He didn’t strike me as a fool. But I want you to take care of him, Ed. Sit on his tail, don’t lose him for a second. Get someone to help you if necessary, but I want him under your

eye day and night until he leaves town on Saturday.'

Leon nodded.

'I'll take care of him.'

'You don't mean to tell me you're going to let him get away with four murders?' Crail said, horrified.

'He's already got away with them,' English returned, tapping ash into the ashtray. 'I haven't any evidence that'd stand up in court. If he double-crosses me, I'll manufacture some evidence, but not until.'

'What do you mean - manufacture evidence?' Crail asked, his eyebrows climbing.

'I'll explain that when and if I have to,' English said. 'If this fellow double-crosses me, he's going to the chair, and you and I are putting him in the chair.'

'That'll be something for you to dream about,' Leon said to Crail and grinned. 'What do you make of Sherman?' he went on to English.

'I'd say he was crazy,' English said soberly. 'I mean that. He's about as dangerous as a rattlesnake. There's a chance he'll try to pull a fast one. He might even arrange for me to be his fifth victim. I've put into writing the whole of our conversation, and I have it here.' He slid an envelope across the desk. 'I want you to take care of this, Sam. If anything should happen to me, give it to Morilli.'

Crail looked startled.

'You're not serious, are you?'

'Sherman's killed four people within a week. I've threatened to send him to the chair if he doesn't leave town by Saturday night. If he leaves town he gives up a lucrative blackmailing business. I can't imagine he'll give it up without a fight. I'm very serious, Sam. I've told Chuck to carry a gun, and not let me out of his sight for a moment.'

'Any news of the man with the scar?' Leon asked.

'No. I guess he got away. I've talked to Morilli. I told him May Mitchell once worked for me. That gave me the excuse to inquire about her murder. Your taxi driver didn't wait to be questioned. Morilli knows nothing about him. All he does know is the girl was knifed, a policeman was shot to death and a fat man was found dead in the street. He's trying to make something out of it, but he isn't getting very far. Two men have given him a bad description of you. They claim to have tried to hold you until the police

arrived, but you got away. Morilli thinks you're responsible for the three killings.'

Leon sighed.

'That's what comes of working for you, Nick,' he said gloomily. 'Well, I can take it so long as Morilli doesn't recognize me. If he does, you'll have to do some fast talking.'

'He won't recognize you,' English said with a sudden boyish smile. 'These two men said you were handsome. Morilli isn't a miracle worker.'

'Can I help it if my face frightens people?' Leon said grimacing. 'Come to think of it, it even frightens me.'

Crail gave an impatient grunt.

'I've got to get going,' Nick, he said, consulting his watch. 'Was there anything else you wanted to tell me?'

'What a glutton the man is!' Leon said. 'Aren't four murders enough for one morning?'

'There's nothing else,' English said. 'But be prepared to swing into action any moment, Sam. If Sherman tries anything funny, I mean to send him to the chair.'

Crail shook his head as he got to his feet.

'We'll cross that bridge when we come to it,' he said. 'By the way, how about the committee meeting?'

English smiled.

'I had it postponed.'

'You're playing this wrong, Nick,' Crail said seriously. 'It's dangerous to kick the committee around. Rees hates your guts, and don't forget, he's a particular pal of the D.A.'s and the police commissioner. You're frightening me to death,' English said with a contemptuous smile.

'So long, Sam.'

Crail shrugged, nodded to Leon and left the office.

'Who's Rees?' Leon asked casually, lighting another cigarette.

'He's the chairman of the City Planning Commission. He's also a judge.'

'Could he make things hot for you?'

'So long as I don't step out of turn, there's nothing he can do, and I'm taking damn good care I don't step out of turn.'

'You're already doing it,' Leon pointed out. 'You're covering up four murders. Couldn't Rees nail you for that?'

‘He could if he knew about them, but he doesn’t know about them.’ English stubbed out his cigar and glanced at his watch. ‘Well, I’ve got work to do, Ed. Will you get after Sherman? From now on until Saturday, I don’t want him out of your sight. It’s important. Don’t let him give you the slip.’

‘I’ll take care of him,’ Leon said. ‘I know what I meant to tell you. I tracked down those mike wires in Roy’s office. They lead into an office on the same floor, owned by a silhouette artist. A woman named Gloria Windsor.’

‘Think she’s one of the gang?’ English asked, not particularly interested.

‘Must be. It’s my guess she fingered Roy. She must have heard Roy and the Savitt girl planning to pull out. Those two must have made their plans in the office, not knowing the mike was in the chimney to pick up every word they said. You can bet that was how Sherman found out Roy was cheating on him.’

‘Well, it’s done now,’ English said, shrugging. ‘I’m content to get rid of Sherman. When he’s gone the rest of them will be like a body without a head.’

Leon got to his feet.

‘Let’s hope so. I’ll keep tabs on Sherman. If he looks like starting anything I’ll call you.’

‘Thanks, Ed. So long for now.’

After Leon had gone English immersed himself in the routine paperwork that came to his desk every day. He worked quickly and methodically, his mind concentrated on the work before him.

Lois found him hard at it a few minutes to lunchtime. She came in and put another pile of papers in his In-tray. He glanced up and smiled at her.

‘Did you remember to book a table at the Silver Tower for tonight?’ he asked, tossing his fountain pen on the blotter and leaning back.

‘Yes, for eight-thirty.’

‘Might have known you wouldn’t forget. I don’t believe you’ve ever forgotten anything to do with my business since we hooked up together. That’s quite a record.’

‘That’s what you pay me for,’ Lois said lightly.

‘I guess so,’ English said and frowned, ‘but I bet not many secretaries give the service you do. Let’s see, you’ve been with me for five years, haven’t you?’

Lois smiled.

‘Yes. It’ll be five years exactly on Saturday night.’

‘Is that right? Saturday night? How did you remember that?’

‘I have a good memory for dates. You’re lunching with Howe Bernstein at one, Mr. English.’

‘As if I’m likely to forget that one,’ English said and groaned. ‘Saturday, eh?’ he went on. ‘Well, damn it! We should celebrate. We’ve come pretty far in five years, haven’t we, Lois?’

She nodded.

‘When I think of that little office we started in,’ English went on, shaking his head, ‘and that typewriter! You pounding the keys all day and I pounding the sidewalks looking for dough. Thank the stars that’s over and done with. I bet you’re glad you have that office out there, and the electric typewriter, aren’t you?’

‘I guess so,’ Lois said.

He looked up quickly.

‘That doesn’t sound very enthusiastic. Tell you what, I’ll take you out to dinner on Saturday. We’ll celebrate the firm’s birthday! What do you say?’

A faint flush came to Lois’s face. She hesitated, then said quickly, ‘I don’t think I can manage Saturday night, Mr. English. I have a date.’

English studied her, noticing her flush deepen.

‘That’s too bad. All the same, we’re going to the Silver Tower and we’re going to eat the best dinner in town. That’s an order.’

‘It’s a date I can’t break,’ Lois said quietly. ‘Thank you all the same, Mr. English.’

English looked disconcerted, then he laughed, shrugging his shoulders.

‘Okay, Lois, if you can’t put your boyfriend off, you can’t. Well, maybe some other night. I’ll see what I can fix.’

‘It’s nothing to do with a boyfriend,’ Lois exclaimed with a vehemence that startled English. ‘I just happen to be busy that night,’ and she went out of the office, closing the door sharply behind her.

English frowned down at his blotter, puzzled.

‘Well, that takes care of that,’ he said to himself. ‘And Julie says the girl’s in love with me. Well, what do you know? Won’t even accept an invitation to dinner. Is that what Julie calls love?’

Some ten minutes later, he put down his pen and walked over to where his

hat and coat were hanging. He was struggling into his coat when a tap came on the door and Julie came in.

‘Why, hello, Julie,’ he said, straightening his coat. ‘What brings you here?’ Julie reached up and gave him a quick kiss.

‘I want some money,’ she said. ‘I’m lunching with Joyce Gibbons, and I’ve come out without my purse.’

‘I wish I could join you,’ English said regretfully, taking out his wallet. ‘Will fifty hold you?’

‘Ample, darling. We’re only going to eat a lettuce. Who are you lunching with?’

‘Bernstein,’ English said, grimacing. ‘He wants me to feature that punk singer of his at the Golden Apple. I’ll be damned if I will, but I want Tesca, and he’s got her under contract. She’s the most fantastic thing on two legs.’

‘If you’ve made up your mind to get her, you’ll get her,’ Julie said, putting the fifty-dollar bill into her handbag. ‘You can drive me downtown if you like.’

‘Where are you lunching?’ English asked, reaching for his hat.

‘The Waldorf.’

‘Right, it’s on my way. Come on then. Let’s get going.’

They walked into the outer office. Harry Vince came in at this moment. He gave Julie a quick, uneasy look, then stood aside.

‘Hello, Harry,’ Julie said gaily. ‘I know what I want you to do for me.’

‘Yes, Julie?’ Harry said stiffly.

His tone made Lois look up sharply. She was sitting at her desk by the window, unnoticed by either Julie or Harry.

‘I want two more tickets for the show. It’s for tonight,’ Julie said. ‘Can you get them for me?’

‘Why, yes,’ Harry said, changing colour.

‘Hey!’ English said with a grin. ‘Don’t ruin me, Julie. I can’t give too many tickets away.’

‘These are for Joyce. I did promise her.’

‘She’s rolling in money. Why the heck can’t she buy them?’

‘Now don’t be a tightwad,’ Julie said, linking her arm in his. ‘You know people expect me to give them tickets for all your shows.’

‘See what you can do for her, Harry,’ English said. ‘What she says goes, it seems.’

‘Yes, Mr. English,’ Harry said huskily.

‘Aren’t you dining with that dreary old senator tonight?’ Julie said as she led English across the office. ‘What time are you meeting him?’

‘Eight-thirty,’ English said. ‘I won’t be seeing you tonight, Julie. It’s bound to be a long session.’

He followed her into the passage.

Harry stood motionless, looking after them. There was an expression on his face that startled Lois. She watched him, and when he went abruptly out of the office, she felt a little chill of apprehension run through her.

III

Chuck Eagan swung the Cadillac to the curb and pulled up outside the ornate entrance to the Silver Tower.

English leaned forward.

‘Okay, Chuck, take the car away, and get some dinner. I’ll want you about half-past ten.’

‘Want me to come in, boss?’ Chuck asked, his beady eyes searching the sidewalk.

English shook his head.

‘No. There won’t be any trouble in there. It’s when we come out I want you to keep your eyes open.’

‘They’re always open,’ Chuck said aggressively. ‘Ten-thirty then?’

‘I’ll wait for you in the foyer.’

Chuck got out of the car, looked up and down the sidewalk, his hand inside his coat, then he opened the car door and watched English hurry across the sidewalk into the restaurant.

English handed his hat and coat to the check-girl, and was moving to the washroom when he saw Senator Beaumont come in.

‘Hello there, Senator,’ he said. ‘I haven’t kept you waiting this time.’

‘How are you, Nick?’ Beaumont asked, shaking hands.

‘I’m fine. I was just going to have a wash. Coming?’

‘May as well,’ Beaumont returned, and together they walked into the ornate washroom.

While English washed his hands, Beaumont lit a cigar and stood near him, scowling.

‘You shouldn’t have postponed that meeting, Nick,’ he jerked out. ‘Rees didn’t like it.’

‘I didn’t think he would,’ English returned indifferently and reached for a hand towel. ‘If I bothered my head about Rees’s likes and dislikes I’d have no time to make money.’

Beaumont shrugged.

‘I’m warning you. Rees isn’t going to stand for much more of this treatment. He told me so.’

English took the senator's arm and propelled him out of the washroom into the bar.

'Have a highball and relax,' he said genially. 'Rees will stand for everything I dish out and you know it.'

'He won't. He said it was time someone clamped down on you, and he's going to do it.'

English passed a highball to Beaumont and ordered a martini for himself.

'And how does he intend to clamp down on me?' he asked, smiling.

'He didn't say, but I've heard he's had a talk with the D.A. He's onto Roy.'

English's face tightened.

'What do you mean?'

Beaumont shifted uneasily in his chair.

'He's heard about the blackmail rumours. He's pressing the D.A. to investigate.'

English shrugged.

'There's nothing to investigate. Let him go ahead if he wants to, but if he starts anything he can't prove I'm going to sue the coat off his back!'

Beaumont nodded.

'I told him so,' he said, a satisfied expression coming into his eyes. 'He didn't like it. All the same, Nick, if there is any truth in it, you've got to be damned careful.'

'Don't talk crap!' English said roughly. 'There's nothing for me to do, nothing at all. He's got to prove Roy was a blackmailer, and he can't do it.'

'Well, I'm certainly glad to hear that,' Beaumont said, looking relieved. 'You wouldn't kid me, Nick?'

'Why should I? He can't prove it, nor can the D.A.'

'How about that girl? Roy's secretary?'

'She's been taken care of. The press didn't hook her to Roy, nor did the D.A. Morilli covered it up. He certainly earned that five grand. You've nothing to worry about, so relax, can't you?'

'It's all very well for you to talk,' Beaumont said crossly. 'But I've my position to think of.'

'So long as I'm here, you have nothing to worry about,' English said. 'So take it easy.'

'Talk of the devil,' Beaumont muttered. 'Here's Rees now.'

English glanced up.

Standing in the doorway was a squat, hard-faced man in his late sixties, talking to a vivacious looking girl who was wearing a silver-blue mutation mink in a cape stole over a black evening gown.

‘I wonder if he bought her that cape or if she hired it,’ English said out of the corner of his mouth. ‘That’s Lola Vegas. She used to dance at the Golden Apple before I threw her out. She went for anything in trousers - even the waiters.’

‘Keep your voice down, for God’s sake!’ Beaumont mumbled. ‘Rees is poison to you and me.’

‘Who are you kidding?’ English said and laughed.

Rees came up to the bar and sat away from English. He nodded stiffly to Beaumont and then to English.

English nodded back, waved a careless hand at Lola, who glared at him before turning her back.

‘When she tried to make the bellhop I thought it was time she went,’ English said. ‘As you can see, she still nurses a grudge.’

Beaumont hurriedly switched the conversation to the coming election, and for the next half-hour, English listened to Beaumont’s needs, which were substantial.

‘The last election didn’t cost anything like this,’ he broke in. ‘For Pete’s sake! Your costs are up twenty-five percent!’

‘That may be,’ Beaumont returned, ‘but I’ve got a lot more opposition. There are a lot more people to take care of, and the only language they understand is spelt out in hard cash.’

‘All the same that’s a lot of money,’ English returned. ‘Tell you what I’ll do. I’ll send Harry Vince down to your office tomorrow morning, and he can check on the whole position. He’s good at that kind of thing. I’ll accept his estimate, and you must, too.’

Beaumont scowled.

‘I know Vince. He’s all for economy, and this isn’t the time for economy, Nick.’

But English wasn’t listening. He had seen Corrine English, standing in the doorway. She was wearing a white evening dress that had seen better days. Her hair was untidy, and her face was flushed. Already people were staring at her.

‘Here’s Roy’s wife,’ English said. ‘This is the last time I come to this restaurant. Every crumb in town seems to be patronizing it.’

Beaumont looked across the room, his small, wiry frame stiffening.

‘Hell! She looks drunk,’ he said, clutching hold of the arms of his chair.

‘She is drunk,’ English returned, ‘and she’s coming this way.’

He pushed back his chair and stood up as Corrine made unsteady progress across the bar toward him. He went to meet her smiling.

‘Hello, Corrine,’ he said. ‘If you’re alone, perhaps you’ll join me.’

‘Hello, louse,’ she said shrilly. ‘I’d rather be in a snake pit than with you.’

The hum of conversation in the bar petered out, and all eyes turned to English in a silence that seemed to pile up around him like a snow drift. He continued to smile.

‘If that’s the way you feel, Corrine,’ he said quietly, ‘then I’m sorry I asked,’ and he turned back to his table.

‘Don’t run away,’ Corrine said shrilly. ‘I’ve got a lot to say to you,’ and she grabbed hold of his arm, pulling him around.

A hard-faced man in a tuxedo appeared suddenly behind the bar. He looked quickly at English, then said something to the barman.

English made no attempt to shake free from Corrine’s grip. He was as unruffled as a bishop at a tea party.

‘Take it easy, Corrine,’ he said genially. ‘Hadn’t you better go home?’

‘Your whore’s in bed with Harry Vince,’ Corrine said, raising her voice. ‘They’ve been lovers for months, you poor, stupid sucker! Every time you have a business date, she sneaks off to his apartment. She’s in bed with him right now!’

People were leaning forward, staring and not missing word. The hard-faced man came out from behind the bar and walked smoothly up to English.

‘Shall I get her out, Mr. English?’ he asked without moving his lips.

‘It’s all right,’ English said gently, his face expressionless. ‘I’ll do it. Come on, Corrine. I’ll see you home. You can tell me all about it as we go.’

Corrine stepped back, her face going white. She expected some reaction from English, but his unruffled aim and apparent indifference to what she had said cut the ground from under her feet.

‘Don’t you believe me?’ she screamed. ‘I tell you Julie Clair’s in bed with your manager!’

‘Well, why shouldn’t she be?’ English said, smiling. ‘What business is it of

yours or mine, Corrine?’

Rees half started out of his chair, thought better of it and sat down again.

Lola said in a clear hard voice, ‘My God! How absolutely disgusting!’

‘Come on, Corrine, let’s go home,’ English said, taking Corrine’s arm.

‘Don’t you mind?’ Corrine wailed, trying to pull away from a grip that looked gentle but that held her like a vise.

‘Why, no, I don’t think I do,’ English said soothingly as if talking to a child. ‘You know as well as I do, it’s all nonsense. Come along. People are staring at you, my dear.’

He drew her toward the door.

A man said, ‘Can’t the management keep these drunken tarts out of here, for God’s sake?’

Corrine began to cry. What had seemed such a spectacular opportunity for revenge was petering out like a damp firecracker. By his quiet, kindly behavior she could feel English had the crowd with him. They looked on her as some souse making a scene without knowing what she was saying.

She made one more desperate attempt to save the situation.

‘It’s true!’ she screamed, trying to break free. ‘And you killed your brother! You robbed me of twenty thousand dollars. Let go of me!’

A man laughed suddenly, and she knew with a sickening sense of frustration that she had muffed the whole plan.

English continued to walk with her from the bar into the empty lobby. She went with him, sagging a little at the knees.

‘You can tell me all about it when we get home,’ he said in a quiet, clear voice, ‘but you’d better have a bit of a sleep first.’

They were in the lobby now.

The hard-faced man who had followed them said, ‘Shall I call the cops, Mr. English?’

‘Why, no, Louis,’ English said, ‘but I’d be glad if you would see her home. Get a taxi, will you?’

‘Okay, Mr. English.’

Corrine leaned against English and continued to cry. He put his arm around her.

‘Take it easy,’ he said. ‘You get off home and have a sleep. I know how you’re feeling.’

‘You don’t,’ Corrine moaned. ‘I wanted to hurt you. I wanted to make you

suffer as you made me suffer.'

'How do you know you haven't?' English said, and tilted up her chin. 'Is it true?'

She couldn't meet his eyes.

She nodded.

'Well, that's all right. Then we're quits. I shouldn't have threatened to hand Roy's letters to the press. That was a bad move. I wouldn't have done it, of course, but I shouldn't have used such a threat against you.'

Louis came up.

'The taxi's here, Mr. English.'

'Will you see her home?' English said. 'Treat her well.'

'Sure, Mr. English.'

Louis took Corrine's arm.

'Come on, sister, let's get out of here.'

Corrine stared at English.

'You're not even mad at me,' she said, a catch in her voice. 'What are you - some kind of saint?'

'Nothing like that,' English returned. 'After all, Corrine, you are one of the family.'

He watched Louis lead her across the sidewalk to the airing taxi. His face was a little pale now, but still expressionless.

Beaumont joined him.

'My God, Nick! The press will get this. Why the hell didn't you stop her talking? Rees was drinking it in. He'll read it all over the town.'

English didn't say anything. He continued to stare out to the street.

'Nick!' Beaumont said, shaking English's arm. 'Why didn't you stop her talking?'

'Shut up!' English said harshly. 'I played it the right way. Do you think anyone will believe that drunken little sot?'

Beaumont hesitated.

'Is it true?'

English turned and looked at him. His tight blue eyes were like chips of ice.

'What the hell is it to do with you or anyone else if it is true or not?'

Beaumont recognized the danger signals.

'That's right. It's none of my business,' he said hurriedly. 'Well, maybe

we'd better go into dinner.'

'I'm not staying. I have something to do,' English said. 'I'll see you tomorrow, Senator. Excuse me now.'

He walked over to the cloakroom, got his hat and coat from the check-girl, and walked across the lobby to the revolving doors.

A man with a thin white scar that ran from his right ear to his mouth, who was standing in a phone booth near the exit, watched English wave to a taxi, then he picked up the receiver and began to dial.

IV

At ten minutes to eight o'clock, Roger Sherman turned out the lights in his bedroom and moved over to the double windows that overlooked the street. He was dressed to go out. His brown slouch hat was pulled down low over his face, and the collar of his fawn mackintosh was turned up. He lifted the shade a few inches away from the window and peered down into the street. Rain, beating against the glass, made it difficult to see clearly. From the sixth-floor window the street looked narrow and the parked cars like toys.

Sherman's eyes searched the opposite doorways. He spotted the figure of a man, standing in a porch out of the rain, the red tip of a cigarette pinpointing his face, half concealed under a pulled-down hat brim.

Sherman chewed thoughtfully as he watched the man, then he nodded to himself, lowered the shade and walked into the living room, clicking on all the lights as he entered. He crossed the room, opened the door that led into the kitchen and went to the window without turning on the light. Again he lifted the shade and looked down into the back street that ran the length of the rear of his apartment block.

He finally spotted another man standing under a tree, and again he nodded. It was now obvious to him that English was making certain he would be kept informed of his movements. Since noon Sherman had known he had been tailed, and tailed by experts. He had tried to shake them, but it would have been easier to have rid himself of a flypaper sticking to his hands. These two men knew their business, and they didn't seem to care if he was aware or not that they were tailing him. They were intent only on not letting him give them the slip. They were now waiting for him to make a move, guarding the only two exits of the block, and it was essential to his plan that he wasn't followed this evening.

He returned to the sitting room and turned on the radio. Then he took from his pocket a pair of thin silk gloves, so that when he put them on they seemed to form a second skin on his hands.

He went over to his desk, opened a top drawer and took out a .38 Colt automatic. He released the clip, checked the bullets, replaced the clip and jacked a bullet into the breech. He clicked down the safety-catch and slipped

the gun into his mackintosh pocket. Leaving the lights on in the sitting room, knowing the watcher below had a clear view of the lighted windows, Sherman walked softly to the front door, opened it a few inches and peered into the passage. Away to his right he could see English's front door, which was closed. Opposite was the gate to the elevator. The passage was empty. Only the loud sound of music coming from the radio filled the quiet of the passage.

Sherman stepped into the passage, closed the front door and walked swiftly and silently to the staircase. He went up, two steps at a time, until he reached the next landing. He paused for several seconds while he leaned over the banister rail, listening, but he heard nothing to excite his suspicions nor saw any movement.

He went along the passage to a window, pushed it open and looked out into the dark night. Below him was a sheer drop of a hundred feet or more. The window looked out onto the roofs of houses and business premises, dwarfed by the vast block in which he was. He glanced back down the passage, then put one foot up on the windowsill and, holding on to the window frame, he stood up, half in and half out of the window.

He reached up and his fingers closed around a narrow horizontal pipe that ran the length of the building. Holding on with one hand, he reached in and closed the window.

Rain beat down on him as he braced himself against the face of the building. His left hand went up and caught hold of the pipe.

The pipe was wet, and felt slippery; something he hadn't bargained for, and he cursed the rain. But this was the only way he could leave the block if he was to avoid the two men waiting for him below, and he didn't hesitate.

He shifted his hands until his body was at an almost forty-five degree sideways slant, his hands on the pipe, his feet on the windowsill. Then he swung his feet clear of the sill and hung in space by his hands. With the agility of a gymnast, he swung himself along the pipe, hand over hand, until he reached a stack pipe that went down to a foot-wide ledge about twenty feet below his feet.

He had one dangerous moment as he was changing his hold from the horizontal pipe to the vertical one. His right hand failed to get a grip and he swung outward, hanging on only by his left hand.

He looked down into the dark depths below, his jaws moving rhythmically

as he chewed, completely unafraid and unruffled. His right hand clawed out for the stack pipe, got a grip, and he pulled himself against the pipe, digging his knees into the sides of the pipe while he slowly released his grip of the horizontal pipe with his left hand.

He remained like that, clinging on with hands, knees and toes until he had properly adjusted his balance, then he began to let himself down inch by inch until he reached the ledge.

He stood against the face of the building while he recovered his breath. Thirty feet below him was a flat roof, an ugly projection that covered the kitchens of the restaurant of the apartment block.

He rested for a minute or so, then gripped the vertical pipe again and lowered himself to the flat roof. Bending low, to avoid being seen against the skyline, he walked silently to the edge of the roof to the fire escape ladder that would take him to the ground. He went down the ladder swiftly, and as easily as a man running downstairs.

He found himself in a dark alley, lined with garbage cans - the tradesmen's entrance to the apartment block. At the far end of the alley was the main street, and he walked quickly and silently toward it. When he reached the end of the alley, he stopped and peered cautiously into the street.

Some thirty yards to his right was the main entrance to the apartment block. He looked across the street. The watcher was still in the porch, sheltering from the rain, his eyes on the revolving doors opposite.

Sherman shifted the wad of gum from one side of his mouth to the other. He pulled his hat brim over his face, and moved out of the mouth of the alley, keeping in the shadows, his eyes fixed on the man in the porch.

He began to walk sideways away from the watcher, but the man in the porch didn't look his way, and, as Sherman turned the corner into a side street, he gave a little nod of satisfaction.

He was free now to go ahead with his plan unmolested and unwatched. He walked in the rain for some minutes until he was well clear of the apartment block, then he signalled to a passing taxi.

'Take me to 5th and 27th Street,' he said, got into the cab and slammed the door.

V

Julie lifted her head from the pillow and peered at the dial of the bedside clock. The hands showed three minutes after nine o'clock.

'It's not time yet surely?' Harry Vince said, pulling her close to him.

'No. Another half-hour. Dear Harry,' Julie sighed, her hand touching his bare chest. 'I wish I didn't have to leave you. Time goes so quickly.'

'English will be tied up for hours yet,' Harry said. 'Can't you give up the club tonight, Julie? Can't you give it up altogether?'

'I don't think Nick would like that,' Julie said, knowing that it would be she who wouldn't like it. 'If I gave it up he'd want me to be around with him more often, Harry.'

'I guess so,' Harry said, depressed. 'Oh, well, I guess I must be grateful for small mercies.'

'Are they so very small, darling?'

'You know what I mean. I want you all the time. I want you to be with me always.'

'So do I,' Julie said, a little untruthfully. She lifted her face so he could kiss her, and for some moments they gave themselves up to their love. Then Julie said suddenly, 'Better not, darling. No, really, Harry. I must be going in a few minutes.'

'Oh, Julie,' Harry said, breathing heavily. 'Let's forget the damned club for tonight. Stay here with me. Don't go.'

'I must go, Harry. They would wonder where I was. If they phoned Nick . . .'

'Oh, all right,' Harry said crossly. 'I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that.'

'Don't be angry, darling,' Julie said, and cautiously moved away from him, half sitting up. 'We must be sensible about this.'

'Yes, by all means let us be sensible,' Harry said bitterly.

She turned to smile at him.

'I love this room. I love the warm firelight, and I love you, darling.'

He shook off his rising depression.

'We're lucky, Julie, to have each other. You're so lovely. You're the most beautiful girl that's ever lived.'

She laughed, pleased.

‘You know that’s nonsense, but I’m glad you think that. Please go on thinking it.’

Harry reached out and pulled her to him.

‘I’m mad about you, Julie,’ he said. ‘Crazy about you.’

She slid her arms around his neck, pressing against him.

‘And I’m crazy about you, too, darling.’

‘You’re going to be late, Julie,’ he said. ‘I don’t care, and you’re not going to care.’

‘I mustn’t be,’ Julie said, her mind only half made up.

‘You’re going to be.’

‘Then quickly, darling,’ she said, and she kissed him so hard that he tasted salty blood as her mouth crushed against his. ‘Oh, darling,’ she said, and caught her breath. ‘Oh, darling, darling, darling!’

Time stood still for them. Only their quick breathing and her sharp little cry of pleasure disturbed the silence.

Then suddenly he felt her fingers stiffen into little hooks, digging into his shoulders, and her body arch like a bow that has been bent by its string.

‘What was that?’ she said sharply, her mouth against his ear. Her hands pushed him away, and she half sat up, staring into the fire lit darkness.

‘What’s the matter?’ he asked, lying back on the pillow and frowning at her.

‘I heard something,’ she said, and he saw how pale she had gone as the light from the fire lit up her tense face.

A cold chill snaked down his spine, and he sat up to listen.

‘There’s someone in the other room,’ Julie whispered.

‘Can’t be,’ he said, feeling suddenly sick. ‘The door’s locked. You’re imagining things.’

‘No. Someone’s there,’ Julie said, and her groping hand caught his. ‘I know there is.’

Harry tried to listen, but all he could hear was the steady hammering of his heart, and the sound of blood pounding through his arteries.

‘There can’t be anyone,’ he said hoarsely. ‘You’re scaring me out of my wits, Julie.’

‘Go and see,’ she said. ‘I’m sure I heard something.’

He hesitated, not believing her, but wondering if English could have got in.

Suppose he had? Suppose when he opened the bedroom door he found English out there?

‘Harry!’ Julie said sharply. ‘Go and see!’

He pushed back the sheet and swung his legs off the bed, his hand grabbing up his dressing gown.

‘You’re imagining it,’ he said. ‘No one can get in. There’s no possible way for anyone to get in.’

Then he stiffened into a rigid, horrified stillness, feeling the hair on the nape of his neck bristle.

Across the silence of the room came a faint scraping noise, then very slowly the bedroom door began to open.

Harry went cold. His paralyzed fingers remained in the silken folds of the dressing gown, and his breath whistled through his open mouth in a fear that left him helpless.

‘Oh, Harry!’ Julie breathed, her fingers digging into his arm.

Harry didn’t say anything. He couldn’t. He sat on the edge of the bed, his eyes staring as he watched the door push open.

Roger Sherman came in. He moved like a ghost. In his right hand he held the Colt automatic. Dark patches from the heavy rain stained his mackintosh. Water dripped from the brim of his hat. His smooth skin was shiny with damp. He stepped into the room, his jaws moving slowly as he chewed, his amber eyes reflecting the bright flames of the fire.

The automatic swung up and covered Harry.

‘Don’t move,’ Sherman said quietly, ‘either of you.’

He came farther into the room and shut the door.

The relief to Harry that it wasn’t English was overpowering.

‘Get out of here!’ he said, his voice still unsteady, his eyes on the gun.

Sherman moved over to an armchair by the fire and sat down. His deliberate, quiet movements horrified Julie.

‘Stay where you are,’ he said, crossing one leg over the other. The automatic pointed between Julie and Harry. ‘Don’t do anything stupid or I’ll have to kill you.’

‘Who - who are you?’ Harry said, suddenly realizing this man couldn’t be a burglar - he was too well dressed to be that.

‘My name is Roger Sherman,’ Sherman returned mildly. ‘Not that that will tell you anything.’ His amber eyes moved from Harry to Julie, who was

holding the sheet over her breasts, staring at him with wide, frightened eyes. 'Hello, Julie. You don't know me, but I know you. I've been watching you two for some time. It seems to me you are taking unnecessary risks coming here. After all, you were paying Roy English to keep his mouth shut, weren't you?'

'How do you know that?' Harry said, his face paling.

'My dear man, I'm the one who gave English the information. I was English's boss.'

'So it's blackmail. All right. How much?'

Sherman smiled.

'This time it is not money I want. I'm using you two to bait a trap.'

Harry felt Julie stiffen. He half turned, taking her hands.

'What do you mean?'

'Nick English is making a nuisance of himself,' Sherman said. 'I'm making arrangements to get him out of the way.'

'What's that to do with us?' Harry demanded, drawing his dressing gown toward him.

'Don't move!' Sherman snapped. 'Leave that alone!'

'Let us put something on,' Harry said, freezing into stillness as the gun covered him. 'Be reasonable.'

'My dear fool,' Sherman returned, 'I want English to find you exactly as you are.'

Harry half started up, but the threat of the gun made him sink back on the bed again.

'You're not bringing him here?'

'I'm waiting for him,' Sherman said and smiled. He looked at Julie. 'By now he should have heard what you two are up to. I imagine he'll come here as fast as a car can bring him.'

'Now look,' Harry said feverishly. 'I don't care what it costs; I'll pay to get out of this. How much?'

'It's not a matter of money.' Sherman began when the telephone bell interrupted him.

'Don't move. I'll take it,' he went on, got up and moved to the telephone that stood on the night table close to Julie.

She shrank away from him as he pointed the gun at her. He lifted the receiver.

‘Yes?’ He stood listening, his eyes on Harry, his jaws moving slowly. ‘Fine,’ he said. ‘I’ll take it from here.’ He hung up and moved back to his chair. ‘English is on his way now. He should be here in under ten minutes.’

‘But this won’t get English out of your way,’ Harry said desperately. ‘It’ll make him all the more determined to crack down on you. All right, I admit it, it’ll hit him hard, but you don’t know him as I do. He’ll hit back at you. It won’t get him out of the way.’

‘Oh, yes, it will,’ Sherman said. He lifted the Colt in his silk-clad hand. ‘This is his gun. I stole it from his apartment this afternoon. He’s going to be arrested for murder - two murders, in fact.’

Harry stiffened.

‘What do you mean?’

‘It’s obvious, isn’t it? When I hear his car arrive, I am going to shoot you both. Who’s going to prove he didn’t do it?’

Julie caught her breath sharply.

‘He’s bluffing, darling,’ Harry said. ‘He wouldn’t dare do it.’

She was looking at Sherman. The amber, expressionless eyes terrified her.

‘He’s going to do it,’ she said through dry lips.

‘Of course I am,’ Sherman said mildly. ‘You two have had your fun, and now you’re going to pay for it.’

‘You won’t be able to get away!’ Harry exclaimed. ‘You’ll be caught.’

Sherman laughed.

‘This window overlooks the river. I shall go that way. I am an exceptionally strong swimmer, and no one will notice me in a night as dark as this.’

‘You can’t do it!’ Harry said, suddenly realizing that Sherman wasn’t bluffing.

‘That you will see,’ Sherman said in a tone that made Harry’s blood run cold.

‘Let her go,’ he said huskily. ‘Don’t touch her. One murder’s enough.’

‘Sorry, I can’t oblige,’ Sherman returned. ‘You must see I can’t afford to let her live after I have shot you. She would give me away.’

‘She wouldn’t,’ Harry said. ‘She’d promise not to.’

‘Sorry,’ Sherman repeated. ‘Besides, a double killing is much more dramatic. English might get off if he just killed you, but the jury wouldn’t like him killing Julie.’ He moved back to the chair and sat down again. ‘You

haven't a great deal longer on this earth. Don't you want to say a prayer? Don't mind me. I won't listen.'

Harry decided he was dealing with a lunatic. He realized it was useless to continue to beg for their lives. Somehow he had to divert Sherman's attention, and then get close to him. If he could get the gun, there was a chance he might save both their lives.

He judged the distance between them. He was badly laced, as he was sitting on the side of the bed away from Sherman. Eight to nine feet separated them.

Julie said, 'I'll give you all the money I have if you'll stop this. I can raise twenty thousand. If you give me time I can get more.'

Sherman shook his head.

'Save your breath,' he said. 'I'm not interested in money.' He glanced at his strap watch, and Harry's hand reached behind him and gripped the pillow. Julie saw the move. She was breathing quickly, her face white and drawn. She sensed Harry was going to do something.

'I - I think I'm going to faint,' she gasped, closing her eyes, and she reached out as if to steady herself, and her hand pushed over the night table, which crashed to the floor.

Sherman's eyes went from Harry to the overturned table. Harry flung the pillow, threw himself off the bed as the pillow hit Sherman in the chest, smothering the gun. Harry, white-faced, his eyes staring, sprang forward, propelling his body across the nine-foot space toward Sherman.

Sherman half started up, throwing the pillow from him. Harry saw he couldn't reach Sherman before Sherman shot him, but he kept on, his mouth dry, his heart hammering, trying to close the space between himself and Sherman. There was a crash of gunfire that rattled the windows.

The bullet got Harry just below his knee, bringing him down. His hands caught Sherman's mackintosh belt, gripped, dragging Sherman forward. Sherman hit Harry a glancing blow with the gun barrel on his temple and kicked him away. He was completely unruffled, and his jaws moved rhythmically as he looked quickly at Julie who crouched petrified on the bed, the sheet fallen from her, her hands covering her breasts. She looked like a figure sculptured in marble.

Harry rolled away, blood running down his leg. He began to crawl toward Sherman, his lips drawn off his teeth in a snarl.

Sherman backed away, smiling.

‘You fool!’ he said softly. ‘You heroic fool!’

Harry kept on. The pain in his shattered knee filled him with a murderous rage. He wasn’t frightened anymore. All he wanted to do now was to get his hands on Sherman.

Sherman raised the Colt, and aimed carefully. Harry was only a few feet from him. He looked up at the little black sight of the gun pointing at him, and the cold amber eyes squinting along the barrel.

Julie screamed wildly.

‘Don’t ! No - don’t !’

The crash of gunfire rattled the windows. The bullet took Harry squarely between his eyes. The force of the blow threw him backward, and he rolled over on his side, his fingers opening and closing convulsively, his muscles twitching, blood smothering his face.

‘A little premature, I’m afraid,’ Sherman said, frowning. ‘Well, it can’t be helped.’

Julie knelt on the bed, staring at Harry’s body. Every now and then a shiver ran through her. Sherman watched the way her muscles fluttered under her skin. They reminded him of the surface of a river in a flurry of wind.

He heard a car door slam, and he smiled.

‘Here he is,’ he said, and moved quickly to the window. He pulled aside the curtains, opened the window and glanced out. Below ran the river, and away in the distance he could see the lights of a passing tug, and heard the moan of its siren.

‘Go to him, Julie,’ he said softly, pointing to the door. ‘Let him in.’

Julie didn’t move. Her eyes turned from Harry’s body to Sherman. She scarcely seemed to breathe.

‘Go to him, Julie,’ Sherman said again.

There came a heavy knock on the outer door.

‘He’s there now. Go to him. He may save you.’

Still she made no move, kneeling on the bed, as if carved out of stone, her eyes blank with terror.

‘Julie!’

English’s voice came through the outer door.

‘Are you there, Julie?’

She turned her head toward the sound. A flicker of life came into her eyes.

Sherman watched her, motionless, the Colt half raised, his fingers on the trigger.

‘Are you there, Julie?’

‘Yes,’ she cried suddenly. ‘Oh, Nick! Save me! Save me!’

She threw herself off the bed, ran blindly to the bedroom door and flung it open.

Sherman didn’t move. His teeth bit hard into the wad of gum he was chewing.

Julie stumbled into the dark sitting room, banged against a chair and fell full length.

‘What’s going on in there?’ English shouted and rattled the door handle.

‘Open up!’

Moving like a shadow, Sherman reached the bedroom door, and his fingers flicked down the light switch as Julie staggered to her feet. She continued across the room to the front door.

‘Nick!’ she screamed. ‘He’s going to shoot me. Save me, Nick!’

The front door creaked as English threw his weight against it.

Sherman raised the Colt as Julie’s hand closed over the key in the lock. The sight of the gun aimed at a point in the exact centre of her shoulders. Something seemed to warn her he was going to shoot, and she looked back over her shoulder.

Her terrified scream blended with the crash of gunfire. A small blue-black hole appeared between her shoulder blades. She was flung against the door and her knees sagged.

Sherman shot her again. The bullet got her above her right hip. Her body arched in agony, her hands clawed at the door, then her knees hinged and she fell face down, her arms and legs sprawling.

Unruffled, Sherman tossed the gun onto the floor near where she lay, turned and went swiftly back into the bedroom, across to the window.

He stepped up on the sill as he heard the front door crash open. Still unruffled, he paused long enough to draw the curtains, then he got out onto the sill, closed the window, straightened and dived without hesitation into the dark river flowing below him.

CHAPTER SIX

I

Lois Marshall leaned forward and impatiently snapped off the television. She had been trying to concentrate on T. S. Eliot's Cocktail Party, but her mind kept straying from the lighted screen until the words of the play had become a meaningless jumble.

She turned on the shaded lamp and bent to poke the fire. Rain continued to patter against the window panes. Restlessly, she glanced at the clock on the mantel. It was ten minutes after nine.

She was wearing a smart housecoat that set off her figure, and her long, slim feet were thrust into a pair of heelless slippers. Before sitting down to watch the play she had shampooed her hair, and it was now hanging about her shoulders, framing her face, and it glistened in the lamplight from the vigorous brushing she had given it.

She had been thinking regretfully of English's suggestion that they should have dinner together on Saturday night. It was the first time he had asked her to go out with him, and she had been badly caught off balance. Her immediate reaction was to have accepted, then she realized Julie would find out, and she would tell Harry Vince, who would tell someone else, until it was all around the office that poor Lois had at last been taken out by the boss.

She was sure most of the staff, including Harry, guessed she was in love with English. Blood rose to her face as she thought of the gossip that probably went on in the office about her. Well, she was in love with English. It was something she couldn't help, and come to that, wouldn't change if she could. Thinking about her relations with English, she decided he was about the only person who didn't realize she was in love with him, and for that she was grateful.

'Oh, snap out of it!' she said half aloud. 'What's the use? At least you work for him. At least you see him thirteen hours a day. What have you got to be bitter about?'

She got up and fetched her workbasket and settled down before the fire

again. She was essentially domesticated, and would have preferred to run a home than work in an office, and the small pile of mending she had saved for a rainy evening had a soothing effect on her.

She paused in her work to look around the sitting room, and it pleased her. It would have pleased her more if she didn't have to live in it alone. Again she headed herself off from brooding, and to divert her thoughts she leaned over to switch on the radio when the front doorbell rang.

She frowned, her eyes going to the clock. It was now twenty-five minutes to ten. She hesitated, wondering whether to go to the door or not.

The bell rang again! Two sharp, impatient rings.

She laid aside her mending and walked into the lobby. Quietly she slipped on the chain, then, keeping to one side, she opened the front door a few inches.

'Who is it?' she asked sharply.

'Can I come in, Lois?' English said.

She felt herself turn hot and then cold, and her heart missed a beat. Quickly she controlled herself and pushed off the chain. Then she opened the door. English stood just outside. His light-grey overcoat glistened with damp.

'I'm sorry to call so late, Lois,' he said quietly. 'Am I in the way?'

'Of course not. Come in,' she said, a cold feeling around her heart at the sight of his white, drawn face.

He entered the sitting room and stood looking around.

'What a nice room, Lois!' he said. 'I can see your hand in everything here.'

'I - I'm glad you like it,' she said, watching him. She had never felt so frightened before. She could tell by his expression something bad had happened, and she knew he would never have come to her apartment unless he had nowhere else to go. 'Can I take your coat, Mr. English?'

He smiled at her.

'Don't let's be formal tonight, Lois. Call me Nick, will you?'

He pulled off his coat.

'I'll take it into the bathroom,' she said. 'Go over to the fire, Nick.'

'That's better,' he said, and watched her carry his hat and coat into the bathroom.

When she returned he was sitting before the fire, his hands out toward the blaze, his brows drawn down in a heavy frown. She went over to the sideboard, mixed a stiff highball and brought it to him.

He took it and smiled up at her.

‘You always know the right thing to do, don’t you?’

She saw his eyes were frozen and hard.

‘What’s happened?’ she asked sharply, standing before him. ‘Please tell me. Don’t keep me waiting.’

He gave her a sharp look, then reached out and patted her hand. It felt cold under his touch.

‘Sorry, Lois, this is going to be a shock. Julie was murdered tonight. She and Harry. It all points to me.’

Lois sat down abruptly; her face went white.

‘Oh!’ she said, then she pulled herself together. ‘What happened, Nick?’

‘I was having a drink with Beaumont,’ English said, speaking rapidly. ‘Corrine came in. She was drunk. She made a scene. The bar was crowded - everyone, including Rees and Lola Vegas, heard what she said. She told me Julie and Harry were lovers - had been lovers for months - that Julie was with Harry in his apartment. I got rid of Corrine and took a taxi to Harry’s place. The door was locked. I knocked and called out. Julie answered. She sounded terrified. She said she was going to be shot. She screamed for me to save her. It took me some moments to get the door open. I heard a shot, then another. I smashed the lock. Julie was lying on the floor. She was dying.’ He paused and took a long drink, set down the glass and rubbed his eyes. ‘She died hard, Lois. She didn’t deserve a death like that. She said it was Sherman who shot her. That he had gone out through the bedroom window. I held her in my arms until she died.’ He groped in his pocket vaguely, frowned, and began to grope in another pocket.

Lois reached out, took a cigarette from a box, lit it and gave it to him.

‘Thanks,’ he said, not looking at her. ‘I hope I made things a bit easier for her,’ he went on, half to himself. ‘She was frightened I’d be angry with her. She didn’t seem to realize she was dying. She kept asking me to forgive her.’

Lois suppressed a shudder.

‘What happened then?’ she asked sharply.

He looked up and frowned.

‘I went into the bedroom. Harry was on the floor. He was dead, too. I pulled aside the curtain, but I couldn’t see anyone in the river. It was dark and raining hard. I went to the telephone to call the police, then I saw the gun on the floor. It looked familiar. I picked it up. That was stupid of me, but I was

startled and I wasn't thinking. It was my gun. It's been in my desk drawer for years. Sherman must have stolen it. Then I realized what a frame he had built for me. A dozen witnesses will testify that Corrine told me Julie and Harry were lovers. The taxi driver will testify he took me to Harry's apartment. The gun that killed them is my gun. They were shot a minute or so after I had arrived. The motive, the time, the weapon - what more can the D.A. want?'

'If Sherman killed them,' Lois said quietly, 'Leon will know about it. He was following Sherman, wasn't he?'

English stiffened, and then drove his right fist into the palm of his left hand.

'Why, damn it! I'd forgotten that. Of course, Ed wouldn't let him out of his sight. That's it! I believe we've got him, Lois! Try to get Ed. Call my apartment first. He may be waiting for me.'

As Lois began to dial the number, she said, 'You didn't call the police?'

'No. I walked out. I wanted to get my bearings.'

'You left the gun?'

'Yes.'

Leon's voice came over the line.

'Hello?'

'This is Lois Marshall,' Lois said. 'Did you keep contact with Sherman tonight?'

'He never left his apartment,' Leon returned. 'What's the idea? Why are you calling?'

'He says Sherman didn't leave his apartment,' Lois said, turning cold as she looked at English. 'Are you sure he didn't leave?' she went on to Leon.

'Of course I'm sure! Both exits are guarded. There's no other way out. Besides, I've been along to his apartment every half-hour. The radio's playing nonstop, and the lights are on.'

'He's certain Sherman didn't leave his apartment,' she said, turning to English.

'Tell him to come here at once!'

Lois turned back to the phone.

'Will you come to my apartment?' she said. 'It's 24 Front Street, top floor. It's urgent.'

'I'm waiting for English,' Leon said impatiently. 'What's the trouble?'

'I can't talk on the phone,' she returned. 'You must come at once.'

‘Well, all right,’ Leon growled and hung up.

‘Shall I get Mr. Crail?’ Lois asked, as she broke the connection.

English nodded.

‘Yes. Not that he can do anything.’

While she was dialling Crail’s home number, English began to pace slowly up and down.

‘Julie couldn’t have been mistaken,’ he said savagely. ‘She described Sherman. Damn Leon! He promised me he wouldn’t let him out of his sight.’

Lois spoke rapidly into the telephone mouthpiece, and then hung up.

‘He’s coming,’ she said, and went unsteadily to a chair and sat down. ‘You shouldn’t have left the gun, Nick.’

‘The gun doesn’t matter,’ English said, continuing to pace up and down. ‘It would ruin my case if I hid it. I’ve got to stick to the truth, Lois, if I’m to beat this rap. I’ve got to prove Sherman stole that gun.’

‘How did Corrine know about Julie?’ Lois asked.

English frowned.

‘I don’t know, unless . . .’ He stopped to think. ‘Yes! That’s it! Of course! Roy was blackmailing Julie. He must have found out what was going on between Julie and Harry. He must have told Corrine.’

‘Don’t you think it’s more likely that Sherman told Corrine?’ Lois said. ‘Don’t you think they’re working together?’

‘What makes you say that?’ English asked, staring at her.

‘How could Sherman know for certain that you would go to Harry’s apartment?’ Lois said. ‘How could he be sure you’d arrive when he was there unless the whole thing had been planned? Of course Corrine was in on this!’

‘I believe you’re right,’ English said. ‘If we could get her to talk . . .! I’ll tell Ed to pick her up as soon as he gets here. If we can make her talk we’re halfway to proving Sherman did it.’

‘I’ll get her,’ Lois said, jumping to her feet. ‘You have to talk to Leon. It’ll only waste time for him to go. I’ll be back by the time you have finished talking to him.’

‘She may not come,’ English said uneasily.

‘Oh, yes, she will,’ Lois said, her face hardening. ‘I promise you that.’ She went quickly into her bedroom to change. She came out a few minutes later, struggling into a mackintosh. ‘Don’t move from here, Nick,’ she said. ‘I won’t be half an hour.’

‘I don’t like you going.’ English said. ‘It’s raining like hell.’

Lois tried to smile.

‘A little rain won’t hurt me. I won’t be long.’

He reached out and took her hand.

‘I’m damned if I know what I should do without you,’ he said.

She pulled her hand away and ran to the door, fighting back her tears.

‘I won’t be long,’ she repeated huskily, and went swiftly from the room.

II

Roger Sherman's fingers hooked over the rungs of the ladder. Slowly he hauled himself up, paused to look up and down the deserted waterfront, and then climbed onto the jetty.

Moving quickly and silently, he squelched to a dark hut that stood at the shore end of the jetty, pushed open the door and entered a room half-full of empty crates and barrels. He dipped into one of the crates and pulled out an expanding suitcase he had left there the previous evening.

He stripped off his wet clothes and rubbed himself down with a towel. Then he took from the case a complete change of clothing, dressed quickly and packed his wet clothes in the case.

He left the hut, looked to the right and left, then dropped the case into the river. It sank with scarcely a ripple. Again he looked right and left, and satisfied he had the waterfront to himself, he walked quickly off the jetty, up an alley until he reached 27th Street.

He headed for the subway, and paused at the head of the steps leading to the ticket office as he heard the wail of a police siren. He watched two prowling cars tear by, heading for 5th Street, and he gave a slight nod of satisfaction. He got an uptown train and got off at 110th Street. He walked the length of the street before hailing a taxi.

'Mason Street,' he said as he climbed in.

He sat in the corner of the taxi, chewing, his eyes thoughtful, every now and then glancing through the rear window to make sure no one was following him. He left the taxi at the corner of Mason Street and walked up Addison Street, turned left at Lawrence Boulevard, and, still keeping in the shadow, walked quickly toward Corrine English's bungalow.

He met no one. Rain beat down on him, soaking his mackintosh, and water dripped from his pulled-down hat brim and ran down his chin. He kept on, not appearing to notice the rain, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his jaws moving steadily as he chewed.

A light showed in the front room of Corrine's bungalow. He pushed open the gate, walked up the path and paused in the shelter of the porch. He leaned forward, his face near the bay window and listened.

He heard nothing, but he remained listening at the window for more than five minutes. Still he heard nothing. He reached forward and pressed the bell push, grimacing as he heard the chimes on the other side of the door. He waited several minutes, frowning, then he pressed the bell push again.

A light sprang up in the lobby and the front door opened. Corrine stood before him, holding on to the door. Her spirit-laden breath fanned his face.

‘Who is it?’ she said, peering at him as he stood in the darkness.

‘Have you forgotten me so soon, Corrine?’ he said softly.

He saw her stiffen, and her hand went to the door handle. He put his foot against the door to stop her slamming it in his face.

‘What do you want?’ she said sullenly.

His amber-coloured eyes searched her face.

‘I was expecting you to call me, but you didn’t. I think I’d better come in.’

‘I don’t want you to come in,’ she said, trying to close the door. ‘I don’t want to see you anymore.’

He moved forward, riding her back into the lobby.

‘I’m getting wet,’ he said with deceptive mildness. ‘Did you see English?’

She turned and went unsteadily into the sitting room. She lurched as she reached the fireplace. On the mantel was a bottle of brandy and a glass half-full of brandy.

He took off his wet coat and hat and dropped them on the floor of the lobby, then he turned and quietly pushed home the bolt on the front door. He walked into the sitting room, smiling.

‘You haven’t answered my question. Did you see English?’

‘I saw him,’ she said, and dropped onto the settee, holding the glass of brandy, slopping some of it as she sat down.

‘You don’t sound very happy,’ he said, ‘wasn’t our idea a success?’

‘It was your idea, not mine,’ Corrine said, ‘and it was a lousy idea. He didn’t give a damn.’

Sherman went over to the cellarette, selected a brandy glass and came over to the fire. He half-filled the glass, sniffed at it, and cocked his head on one side.

‘This isn’t at all bad. Did Roy buy it?’

She scowled up at him.

‘I didn’t tell you to help yourself,’ she said belligerently. ‘Who do you think you are - coming here, drinking my brandy?’

He laughed.

‘Don’t be ridiculous. We’re lovers, Corrine.’

Her face darkened.

‘We’re not! That’s not going to happen again. I don’t know what came over me. I don’t want you here - you and your lousy ideas!’

‘It was a very good idea,’ Sherman said. He drank some of the brandy and put down the glass. ‘Tell me what happened.’

‘I’m not going to. It was horrible!’ Corrine said, and began to cry. ‘I wish I hadn’t done it. They - they laughed at me.’

‘Who laughed at you?’ Sherman asked, his eyes intent.

‘I don’t know. They all laughed at me. They didn’t believe it. He was so damned smooth about it. They could see I was drunk.’

‘Who are - they?’

‘The people in the bar, of course.’ Corrine’s voice went shrill. ‘Who else do you think? One of them called me a drunken tart!’

‘You told English they were lovers then?’ Sherman asked, watching her.

‘Of course I did! That’s what you told me to do, and he didn’t give a damn. He said it wasn’t my business nor his,’ Corrine said, dabbing her eyes. He sent me home with some smooth punk from the club. That’s how your lousy idea worked out.’

Sherman nodded. He had learned what he wanted to know - that there had been witnesses to Corrine’s outburst. He finished his brandy, and touched his thin lips with his handkerchief.

‘You might be interested to know,’ he said, ‘that after you had left the club, English went to Vince’s apartment. He found Julie and Vince there in what is called a compromising situation. He shot Vince, and then Julie. The police are already on the scene, and I imagine English is under arrest by now for murder.’

Corrine stared at him, her plump, baby face seemed to shrink, and her big blue eyes looked enormous.

‘He shot them?’ she said huskily.

‘That’s what he did,’ Sherman said, taking out a package of chewing gum and stripping off the paper. ‘Do you think my idea is so lousy now?’

‘You mean - he killed them?’ Corrine’s voice went up a note.

‘Yes, he killed them.’

‘I don’t believe it!’

‘You will when you see tomorrow’s newspapers.’

‘How do you know? You talk as if you were there!’

‘I wasn’t far away,’ Sherman said, smiling. ‘I more or less saw what happened.’

‘I didn’t want them to be killed!’ Corrine said, starting to her feet. ‘I - I only wanted to hurt him!’

‘You have hurt him,’ Sherman said. ‘You’ve done more than that - you’ve ruined him. Possibly he’ll go to the chair.’

‘But I don’t want to ruin him!’ Corrine wailed. ‘He was kind to me. He – he said I was a member of the family.’

‘How touching!’ Sherman said with a little sneer. ‘In spite of the fact he calls you a member of the family, he didn’t hesitate to steal twenty thousand dollars from you.’

Corrine stared at him, her fists clenched.

‘I don’t believe Roy ever had all that money,’ she said. ‘I was a fool to have listened to you. You’re responsible for this. It was your idea. You wanted to get even with him, and you used me to do it!’

‘What a clever girl you’ve suddenly become,’ Sherman said, smiling. ‘Suppose that was so, what are you going to do about it?’

‘I’m going to the police!’ Corrine said. ‘It was a wicked thing to have done. If I tell them, they might let him off.’

‘I don’t think they will, and you’ll only look a bigger fool than you looked tonight,’ Sherman returned, his jaws moving as he chewed. ‘Don’t be stupid, Corrine. There’s nothing you can do now except keep your mouth shut.’

‘We’ll see about that!’ Corrine said angrily. ‘I’ll talk to Lieutenant Morilli. He’ll tell me what I should do.’

Sherman lifted his shoulders.

‘Well, I can’t stop you, of course, if that’s what you want to do,’ he said. ‘But I think you had better keep clear of it.’

‘I can’t keep clear of it!’ Corrine snapped. ‘They’ll call me as a witness. They’ll ask all kinds of questions, and don’t imagine you’re going to keep out of it. I’ll tell them it was your idea.’

Sherman nodded as if he expected her to say that. He began to wander around the room, his hands in his pockets, his jaws moving, his eyes expressionless.

‘Yes, I suppose you will,’ he said, pausing by the window. He reached out

and took hold of a red silk curtain cord, hanging by a hook. His fingers absently tested its strength. 'This is an extraordinary thing,' he said, 'I've been looking for a curtain cord like this for weeks. You wouldn't believe it, but I can't find this exact shade anywhere.' He took the cord off the hook and moved over to the lamp to examine it. 'Do you happen to remember where you bought it?'

'You're not going to put me off like that!' Corrine snapped. 'You're trying to change the subject. I'm going to telephone Lieutenant Morilli right now!'

'I'm not trying to change the subject,' Sherman said mildly. The cord hung like a red snake in his fingers. 'I do wish you could remember where you bought this.'

'I don't remember,' Corrine said and picked up the telephone book. 'Please leave it alone. I don't like my things being messed about.'

'Well, if you can't remember, you can't - a pity,' Sherman said, watching her, his eyes suddenly cold.

Corrine was bending over the telephone book she had placed on the table. Sherman moved so he was behind her. He arranged the cord into a loop. The sudden sound of chimes at the front door turned him into a motionless statue.

Corrine looked up, frowning. She saw Sherman's reflection in the mirror above the mantel. He was standing close beside her, his hands raised, the loop of the cord hovering above her head.

She knew at once what he was about to do, and she stumbled aside, keeping her back turned to him.

'I'll answer it,' she managed to get out, and before he could stop her, she ran unsteadily to the door, opened it and went into the lobby. She tried to open the front door, her knees buckling under her. Then she saw the bolt had been pushed home and she jerked it back.

A tall, dark girl in a rain-soaked mackintosh stood on the step.

'Mrs. English?'

Corrine nodded. Her breath whistled through her open mouth and she was trembling so violently she could scarcely stand.

'I'm Lois Marshall, Mr. English's secretary,' Lois said. 'May I come in?'

'Oh, yes,' Corrine gasped. 'Yes, come in.'

Lois looked at her sharply as she stepped into the lobby.

'Is anything the matter? You look frightened.'

'Frightened?' Corrine said huskily. 'I'm terrified. There's a man in there . .

.'

Sherman came to the sitting room door, a .38 Police Special in his hand. He pointed it at Lois, and smiled.

'Come in, Miss Marshall,' he said quietly. 'Unexpected, but nevertheless welcome.'

Corrine's hand fluttered to her face.

'I - I think he was going to strangle me,' she said, and slid to the floor in a faint.

III

English lifted his hands.

‘Well, there you are, that’s the setup. How do you like it?’

Crail took out his handkerchief and wiped his sweating face.

‘This is bad, Nick,’ he said in a hard, tight voice.

‘A master of the understatement,’ Leon said from his armchair. ‘The man says it’s bad. Brother, it’s a lot worse than bad. The lid’s blown right off.’

English said curtly, ‘You haven’t been much help, Ed. I told you to watch that devil. I warned you he’d start something.’

‘Take it easy,’ Leon said. ‘We were watching him. I hired two of Black’s men, and they’re good. We haven’t let him out of our sight since noon. There are only two exits to Crown Court, as you know. I had them both covered. I remained in your apartment, and every half-hour I went along to Sherman’s apartment and listened outside the door. He was in there, playing his radio.’

‘But he shot Julie and Harry!’

‘Sure she didn’t make a mistake?’

‘No. She described him. It was Sherman all right.’

‘He couldn’t have left the building.’

‘Is he there now?’ Crail put in.

‘He should be. When Miss Marshall called me I left Burt and Horwill watching the entrance and the rear exit. I guess he’s there or they’ll know about it.’

English went over to the telephone, dialled Sherman’s number and listened to the steady ringing. After a while he hung up.

‘He doesn’t answer.’

‘That doesn’t prove he isn’t there,’ Leon said.

‘There’s only one thing you can do,’ Crail said. ‘Come down with me to headquarters and let us give the commissioner the whole story.’

English smiled sarcastically.

‘How he’ll love it! How Rees will love it! How the mayor will love it! Do you think one of them will believe me? Not a chance in hell!’

‘He’s right,’ Leon said. ‘He can’t give himself up.’

‘But he’s got to give himself up!’ Crail said violently. He turned to

English. 'You can see that, can't you? It's your only hope of beating this rap.'
English shook his head.

'Once they get me in their clutches, Sam, the rap's unbeatable. There are too many of them against me.'

'Nonsense!' Crail exploded. 'If you run away, you're signing your death warrant! Let me fight for you, Nick. I give you my word I'll put up a fight that'll make legal history.'

'He won't be interested in legal nor any other history once he's in the chair,' Leon said. 'You keep out of this, Crail. All you lawyers think about is fighting in court. We're going to fight outside court, then if we don't pull it off, you can take over.'

'Yes,' English said. 'That's how it's going to be.'

'But don't you see,' Crail said, pounding the table with his fist, 'if you run now, you don't give me a weapon with which to fight.'

'Listen to that. Even in a situation like this,' Leon said sarcastically, 'the man refuses to end his sentence with a preposition.'

'Shut up!' Crail shouted, his fat face furious. 'I know what I'm talking about! Nick, you've got to listen to me. Come down with me to headquarters, and let me tell the story. It's your only way out.'

'It isn't,' English said. 'If I can get my hands on Sherman I'll damn well choke a confession out of him!'

'That's talking,' Leon said approvingly. 'I'll find him, you choke him.'

Crail nearly tore his hair.

'Don't listen to this crazy man, Nick! You must take my advice. Damn it! I'm the best lawyer in the country, and I'm telling you you must not run away! Do you imagine I'd tell you to give yourself up unless I was convinced there was no other out for you?'

English smiled.

'Take it easy, Sam. I know your advice is sound, but you're forgetting what I'm up against. I've got too many enemies. Rees is only waiting for a chance to fix me, and I've given it to him. With me in jail, the D.A. knows Beaumont will fold up. It can't be done. No matter how smart you are, you can't beat the combination. It's too strong. There's only one way of beating this rap. We've got to find Sherman, and we've got to crack him so he'll come clean. There is no other way.'

Crail started to say something, controlled himself and took a turn up and

down the room. His face was pale, and his eyes feverish.

‘I know what you’re up against all right,’ he said, ‘and I still say you must give yourself up. Leave the fighting to me. If you don’t, you’re a dead duck. All right, suppose you find Sherman, suppose you crack him, what good do you imagine that will do you? Once he’s in the box he’ll deny everything you’ve made him admit, and then where will you be? You’ve got to be the innocent man who has been framed. You’ve got to start that way, and an innocent man doesn’t run away. Leave it to me to make the jury believe you.’

‘It’s not good enough,’ English said. ‘Sorry, Sam, but I’m going to drop out of sight. Ed and I are going to find Sherman, and we’re going to fix him.’

Crail stood looking at English for a long moment, then he lifted his fat shoulders.

‘All right, but don’t forget I’ve warned you. I’ll do what I can when it comes to the trial, but you’re tying my hands.’

‘If you’ll lend me your hankie, I’ll cry,’ Leon said.

‘I’ve warned you,’ Crail went on, ignoring Leon. He picked up his hat and coat. ‘You know where to find me, Nick, when you want me. Good luck to you.’

English came over and shook hands.

‘Take it easy, Sam. I’ve handled my affairs all right up to now, and I think this is the way to play it.’

‘We’ll see. For one thing, where are you going to hide? This town’s like a hot stove already, and they’ll take it to pieces as soon as they know you’re ducked out of sight. It’s not as if you’ll go unrecognized. Nearly everyone in town knows what you look like.’

‘Don’t worry about that,’ English said quietly. ‘I’ll get along. See you in court, Sam.’

When Crail had gone, English poured a little whisky into a glass and drank it. His face was hard and pale.

‘He’s right, you know Ed,’ he said, beginning to pace up and down. ‘If we can’t find Sherman, I’m sunk.’

‘We’ll find him, and we’ll make him talk.’

English glanced at the clock on the mantel.

‘I wish Lois would hurry up,’ he said, sitting down. ‘She’s been gone three quarters of an hour.’

Leon stretched his long legs toward the fire.

‘Gone where?’

To get Corrine. I didn’t tell Sam because he would have started fussing about the legal end, but Corrine must have been working with Sherman. If I could talk to her, I might get her to admit it. She could be a big help in upsetting Sherman. Once we’ve got Sherman in the box, Corrine’s evidence might unseat him.’

‘Let’s hope Sherman hasn’t thought of that angle,’ Leon said lazily, reaching for a pack of cigarettes.

English stiffened and half sat up.

‘What did you say?’

Leon glanced up, surprised at the sharpness of English’s tone.

‘I said I hope Sherman doesn’t realize Corrine could be used as a witness against him. Might be bad for her if he did.’

English got to his feet. The look in his eyes brought Leon out of his chair.

‘What’s biting you?’ Leon demanded.

‘I must be out of my mind!’ English said. ‘I let that girl go.’

‘So what? What are you worrying about?’

‘Suppose Sherman’s there? Suppose she walks into him?’

‘Suppose he isn’t?’ Leon said. ‘Suppose she doesn’t walk into him? Don’t take your clothes off, Nick. The chances are . . .’

‘To hell with chances!’ English returned. ‘I shouldn’t have let her go. That fella is a homicidal maniac! I’m going to see what’s happened to her.’

‘Now wait a minute,’ Leon said, his voice sharpening. ‘You’re staying right here. Don’t you know the cops are looking for you? How far do you think you’ll get? I’ll go. The chances are she’ll be here by the time I get back.’

‘I’m going with you!’

‘Then if she came back with Corrine she’d find no one here. Use your head, Nick!’

English hesitated, then shrugged.

‘I guess that’s right. Well, get going, Ed! For Pete’s sake, get there fast’

‘Leave it to me,’ Leon said, snatching up his hat and coat and plunging out of the room. He ran down the stairs into the street, struggling into his mackintosh as he went. It was still raining hard, and he splashed through puddles to reach his car, parked some yards from Lois’ walk-up. He drove rapidly. He had to cross town to reach Lawrence Boulevard. On the way he

noticed an unusual number of prowler cars on the streets, and he guessed they were looking for English.

He rubbed his sweating face with the back of his hand, scowling. A fantastic situation, he thought. Nick English on the run! It was unbelievable. Nick English of all people, with his power, his money and his empire, to be hunted like an Eastside hoodlum!

He slightly increased his speed, but he was careful not to drive so fast that he would attract the attention of the prowler cars.

He reached Mason Street, turned into Addison Street, and slowed down as he looked for Lawrence Boulevard.

A prowler car coming in the opposite direction passed him. One of the cops was talking into the radio. Leon wondered uneasily if they had come from Corrine's bungalow.

He drove into Lawrence Boulevard, his eyes alert for any sign of trouble, but the long street was rain swept and deserted. He pulled up some yards from Corrine's bungalow, and got out of the car.

He stood for a moment in the driving rain to look up and down the street, then he walked toward the bungalow, noting there was a light on in the sitting room.

He went up the path and dug his thumb into the bell push. The chimes startled him, and he frowned, shaking his head. He waited several minutes, then rang again. No one answered the door, nor did he hear any sound of movement in the bungalow.

Cautiously he turned the door handle and pushed, but the door was locked. He rang again, then, after waiting a long minute, he stepped out of the shelter of the porch, onto the flowerbed to see if he could look into the lighted sitting room, but the curtains were too closely drawn, and he could see nothing.

He walked across the saturated lawn to the path leading to the back of the bungalow. Around the back he saw an overflowing garbage can and a big wooden box full of empty brandy bottles by the service entrance. When he turned the handle of the door he found the door unlocked.

He pushed it open and stepped into a small kitchen. His feet kicked against something that clanked noisily, and he cursed under his breath. He took from his pocket a small flashlight and turned it on.

The kitchen looked as if it hadn't been touched in days. A pile of dirty dishes stood on the table; flour, dust and bread crumbs littered the floor.

More brandy bottles occupied a distant corner, and there was a sour smell of curdled milk that made him wrinkle his nose. He opened the kitchen door, glanced into the dark lobby, listened, then moved forward, making no sound.

He reached the sitting room door, turned the handle and looked in. The room was empty. An overturned brandy bottle had emptied its contents on the rug before the dying fire. A broken glass lay in the hearth. He moved into the room, frowning, not liking the spilled brandy, feeling that here might be a hint of violence. He moved around the room, his eyes missing nothing, not knowing what he was looking for, but hoping to find something that would explain why the light was on and the room empty.

On the settee, pushed half out of sight, he saw something white, and he fished it out from under the cushion. It was a woman's handkerchief; embroidered in the corner were the initials L.M. He shook his head. Lois must have persuaded Corrine to leave with her, he thought, and they had forgotten to turn off the light.

He looked around for the telephone to call English, to ask him if Lois had returned, when his eyes encountered the overturned bottle again. He frowned. Had Corrine been tight? he wondered. Had Lois' ring startled her so she had upset the bottle? It seemed unlikely, and he went out into the lobby.

Facing him was a door, and he turned the handle and pushed it open. The room was in darkness, and he groped for the light switch and turned it on. The bedroom was as untidy as the kitchen. In the middle of the floor was a rose-colored silk wrap. Stockings, underclothes and a fur coat lay on the bed. The dressing table was a smother of face powder, and the mirror above it hadn't been dusted for days. A bottle of hand lotion had been knocked over, and its white, creamy contents had made a messy puddle on the floor.

Leon grimaced, shrugging, and as he was about to turn off the light, he paused, his eyes narrowing.

A door opposite him attracted his attention. It was open a few inches, and fastened to one of the dress hooks screwed to the door was a red silk cord that ran over the top of the door and disappeared down the other side.

The cord looked taut - too taut, as if it were supporting a heavy weight. Leon quickly crossed the room, pushed against the door, which opened sluggishly. Something heavy bumped against the other side as he pushed. He stepped into a blue and white bathroom, his heart skipping a beat. He was half-prepared for what he saw, but even at that his stomach gave a little heave

as he looked at Corrine English's dead face.

She hung grotesquely against the door, her knees drawn up in agony, her baby face puffed and swollen, her tongue pushing out between her small white teeth. The red silk cord had bitten deeply into her neck, and her hands were rigid claws as if she had been frantically trying to push someone away in the last moments of her life.

Leon touched one of her hands. It was still warm, and he stepped away, his face hard and white. For a long moment he stood thinking, his eyes averted from the hanging body, then he moved around the door into the bedroom, walked quickly into the lobby and into the sitting room.

He was thinking now of Lois. Had she come to the bungalow and found Corrine or had she arrived before Corrine had been murdered? Leon felt sweat beading his face. If he told English what had happened to Corrine, English would come out of cover. There'd be no controlling him, especially if he thought Lois was in Sherman's hands.

Uneasily, Leon wiped his face with his handkerchief. It did look as if Lois was in Sherman's hands. He stood, hesitating, trying to make up his mind what to do. He decided he had to find out if Lois had returned to her apartment. This might be a false alarm. She might be there, and safe.

He went over to the telephone, thumbed through the telephone directory until he found Lois' number and then dialled. He waited impatiently, listening to the burr-burr-burr on the line.

There was a sudden click and a man's voice said, 'Who is that?'

'Is this Westside 57794?' Leon asked cautiously.

'That's right. Who's calling?'

It wasn't English, Leon thought.

'I'd like to speak to Miss Marshall,' he said.

'She's not here,' the voice told him. 'Who's that speaking?'

'Come to that,' Leon said sharply, 'who are you, and what are you doing in Miss Marshall's apartment if she isn't there?'

'This is Lieutenant Morilli of the Homicide Bureau,' the voice snapped. 'Quit stalling! Who are you?'

Leon felt a chill run down his spine. Morilli! Had English got away?

He hurriedly dropped the receiver back onto its cradle.

IV

Nick English paced slowly up and down, his hands in his trousers pockets, his face set and anxious. He kept looking at the clock on the mantel. It was now a little more than an hour since Lois had left the apartment - a little less than a quarter of an hour since Leon had gone to look for her.

English calculated it would take Leon twenty minutes to get to Lawrence Boulevard. Even if he didn't find Lois there, it didn't necessarily mean she was in danger. She might have left the bungalow before Leon arrived.

What a thoughtless fool he had been to have let her go! he thought angrily. He should have realized that Corrine was dangerous to Sherman.

He paused to look around the room. It was just the kind of room he imagined Lois would have! well-furnished, comfortable, bright and homely. If anything happened to her!

He realized with a sense of shock that she meant something to him. Only now that Julie was dead he was able to judge Lois' worth. Julie had been a physical attraction - a doll to dress, to amuse and to sleep with - whereas Lois had worked by his side for five years, and he knew it had been largely due to her help and confidence in him that he had succeeded.

If anything happened to her!

Impatiently he went to the window, pulled aside the shade and looked down into the wet street below.

Rain made patterns on the window.

He stood watching the empty street for several minutes, hoping to catch a glimpse of Lois, but the street remained empty and forlorn. Then, as he was about to drop the shade, he saw the headlights of a fast-moving car coming down the street, and he stiffened to attention, wondering if it were Lois returning.

The car swung to the curb and pulled up outside the walk-up. English spotted the red flasher on the hood and recognized the black and white check pattern of the body. He quickly dropped the shade.

The police!

Did they know he was here or were they checking on the off-chance of finding him? He moved quickly across the room, snatched up his hat and

coat, and went into the lobby.

Then he stopped, frowning.

He had no idea if there was a rear exit to this building. Even if he found it, the chances were he'd walk into one of them. He hesitated for a moment, then tossed his hat and coat onto a chair and returned to the sitting room.

If he was cornered, then he was cornered. He'd be damned if he'd run like some frightened pickpocket. He stood before the fireplace, his hands behind his back, his face hard and set, and waited.

Minutes ticked by, and just when he was beginning to think it was a false alarm, the front doorbell rang sharply.

He stepped quickly to the telephone, took up the receiver and dialled Sam Crail's home number. His call was answered almost immediately by Crail himself.

'Sam? This is Nick,' English said, speaking quietly and rapidly. 'You win. They're ringing the bell now.'

'Say nothing,' Crail snapped. 'I'll be at headquarters before you get there. Leave it to me, Nick. Just say nothing. Where's Leon?'

'He's not here. Keep in touch with him, Sam. I've got to rely on you two.'

'You can rely on us,' Crail said. 'Just keep your mouth shut and leave everything to me.'

'Very comforting advice,' English said dryly. He heard the front doorbell ring again. 'They're getting impatient. See you at headquarters,' and he hung up.

He walked across the room, into the lobby and opened the front door. Morilli stood in the passage, one hand in his coat pocket. His lean, hatchet face looked pallid in the soft light, and his eyes were wary.

'Hello, Lieutenant,' English said calmly. 'This is unexpected. What do you want?'

'Can I come in, Mr. English?' Morilli said.

'You alone?'

'I have company, but he is downstairs.'

English nodded and stood aside.

'Come on in.'

Morilli walked into the lobby, shut the front door and waved English toward the sitting room. English went ahead, crossed over to the fireplace, and turned to face Morilli.

Morilli looked suspiciously around the sitting room as he came in.

‘There’s no one here but me,’ English said. ‘Miss Marshall is out.’

Morilli nodded, ran his thumbnail along his black moustache.

‘I don’t have to tell you why I’m here, Mr. English?’

English smiled.

‘I gave up making guesses years ago,’ he said. ‘Suppose you tell me.’

‘You’re to be charged with the murder of Julie Clair and Harold Vince,’ Morilli said and his small hard eyes shifted away from English.

‘I’m surprised you’ve taken the job on, Lieutenant,’ English said. ‘I had an idea you gave service.’

‘I’m still giving service,’ Morilli returned. ‘That’s why I’m here. I thought it would be safer for you if I made the arrest.’

English raised his eyebrows.

‘What does that mean?’

‘You wouldn’t be the first guy who’s been shot in the back while resisting arrest,’ Morilli said. ‘There are a lot of high-ups who would be happy to be rid of you, Mr. English.’

‘Including the commissioner?’

Morilli lifted his shoulders.

‘I don’t know, but I thought I’d be doing you a favour to handle this myself. This is a bad business, Mr. English. The D.A. reckons he has a watertight case.’

English didn’t say anything.

‘You went to Vince’s apartment, didn’t you?’ Morilli asked, his eyes probing.

‘Crail told me not to talk,’ English said lightly. ‘I’ve paid him a lot of money in the past so I’d better take his advice now, Lieutenant.’

‘I guess that’s right,’ Morilli said, and again stroked his moustache. ‘This rap will want a lot of beating.’

English said, ‘Well, I mustn’t keep you. Shall we go?’

As he moved toward the door, the telephone bell began to ring. He made a movement to answer it, but Morilli got there first.

English watched him, his eyes narrowed, his face set.

‘Who’s that?’ Morilli said sharply. He listened, then said, ‘That’s right. Who’s calling?’ He listened again, said, ‘She’s not here. Who’s that speaking?’

English felt a cold chill run down his spine. It must be Ed who was asking for Lois. That meant he hadn't found her at Corrine's place.

'This is Lieutenant Morilli of the Homicide Bureau,' Morilli snapped. 'Quit stalling! Who are you?'

He cursed softly as the connection was broken, then he rattled the telephone plunger.

'Operator! This is Lieutenant Morilli, police headquarters. Where was that call made from?' He waited, then said, 'Thanks. Put me through to headquarters, will you?' Again he waited, then said, 'Barker? Morilli. Get a car over to 25 Lawrence Boulevard as fast as you can. There may be trouble there. Call me back as soon as you've had a report. I'm at Westside 57794.'

English said, 'That's my sister-in-law's place. What makes you think she's in trouble?'

Morilli gave him a cold, searching stare.

'Why didn't she answer the phone?' he demanded. 'What was Leon doing there?'

'Leon?' English frowned. 'Was he there?'

'I recognized his voice. I'm not all that dumb. Your sister-in-law is an important witness against you. The commissioner wouldn't want anything to happen to her.'

'Why should anything happen to her? Do we go or do we wait?'

'We wait,' Morilli returned curtly, and began to move about the room, his eyes shifting to English continuously.

English sat down. His mouth was dry, and his heart beat unevenly. At least now he would know if there was something wrong at Corrine's place. He tipped a little whisky into the glass.

'Drink, Lieutenant?'

Morilli shook his head.

They waited while the hands of the clock crawled forward.

Then the telephone bell rang, and Morilli scooped up the receiver.

'Yeah, Morilli speaking,' he said. 'What's that? Well, for crying out loud! Did they pick up Leon? Then send a call out for him. He was there not more than ten minutes ago. I want that guy. Yeah, I'll get over as soon as I can. Let Jamieson handle it. Okay, be seeing you,' and he slammed down the receiver.

English braced himself. He could tell by Morilli's expression that something bad had happened.

‘Your sister-in-law was found hanged,’ Morilli said, his face white with fury. ‘How do you like that? You wouldn’t have sent Leon down to shut her mouth, would you?’

‘Dead?’ English said, getting to his feet.

‘Murdered! Hanged like Mary Savitt was hanged, only this time I’m not covering up for you,’ Morilli snarled.

Where was Lois? English thought, cold fear gripping at his heart. At all costs he must find her.

‘Would ten thousand buy me anything, Lieutenant?’ he said quietly, his eyes on Morilli’s face.

‘Quit kidding yourself,’ Morilli said viciously. ‘Your spending days are over. By tomorrow morning the banks won’t touch your checks. The commissioner didn’t forget money is your power. All that’s been taken care of. You’re washed up. Don’t try to wave your dough in my face. You haven’t any. Come on, let’s get out of here.’

‘I have money in the office,’ English said. ‘Don’t be a fool. No one knows I’m here. Give me an out and make yourself six thousand.’

Morilli showed his teeth in a grin.

‘There’s an officer sitting by your safe right at this moment. The commissioner has thought of all the angles. You haven’t any money. Come on!’

English lifted his shoulders. He was determined now he wasn’t going to be locked in a cell while Lois was in danger. Casually he moved toward Morilli, but something about his attitude warned Morilli, who jerked out his gun.

‘Take it easy,’ he said evenly. ‘Don’t pull a fast one, English, or you’ll get shot. Go ahead, and if you want a slug in the back, try to get away.’

English smiled.

‘Don’t be dramatic, Lieutenant. Even if I did get away, where would I go? I prefer to fight this in court.’

‘Get going and watch your step,’ Morilli said.

They went out of the apartment and down the four flights of stairs to the lobby. At the bottom of the stairs a thickset, red-faced detective leaned against the wall, chewing on a toothpick. He eyed English over, then glanced at Morilli.

‘Let’s get going,’ Morilli said impatiently. ‘We’ve got a murder on our hands after we’ve turned this guy in.’

‘For God’s sake!’ the red-faced detective exclaimed in disgust. ‘And I’ve got a ticket for the fights tonight!’

‘You’re unlucky,’ Morilli said. ‘Come on. Snap it up!’

The red-faced detective went down the steps to the waiting car and got in under the steering wheel.

English followed him, with Morilli at his heels. As English paused by the car and set himself, Morilli rammed his gun into his side.

‘Start something, and I’ll spread your guts on the sidewalk!’ he said viciously.

‘For a pensioner, you show very little respect for your benefactor,’ English said and smiled.

‘Get in!’ Morilli snapped. ‘And watch it!’

English climbed into the car, and Morilli followed him.

‘Okay, Nankin,’ Morilli said to the red-faced detective. ‘Let’s have some speed.’

The car shot away from the curb and headed downtown, keeping to the backstreets.

English sat motionless, feeling Morilli’s gun against his side, and inwardly seething. He realized his chances of escaping were slight, and his hopes would now have to rest on Ed.

As they swept over the Blackstone Bridge, English said sharply, ‘This isn’t the way to headquarters. What’s the idea?’

Morilli smiled.

‘I have a call to make first. Relax. You’re in no hurry to get anywhere.’

‘But he’ll get there just the same,’ Nankin said, and laughed.

English relaxed back into the corner of the seat. He should have guessed Morilli wouldn’t dare risk bringing him in alive. He knew too much for Morilli’s safety. There was the five thousand dollars he had given Morilli. Maybe there was no proof that Morilli had received the money, but an accusation like that would lead to an investigation, and Morilli’s bank manager might have a story to tell.

Besides, Morilli wouldn’t only be covering himself, he would also be doing a service to a number of high-ups by getting rid of English. It would be a nice tidy way of closing an embarrassing case.

English’s eyes went to Morilli’s gun. It was pointing at him, and Morilli’s finger was on the trigger. He decided it would be useless to start anything in

the car. He would have to make his break when they got out of the car.

They were driving along the river bank now. Rain drummed on the roof of the car, and the wipers laboured to keep the windshield clear. The waterfront was deserted. A good place in which to kill anyone, English thought. A shot, and then the river.

Morilli said sharply, 'Okay, Nankin.' His voice sounded tight and metallic.

Nankin slowed down, steered the car into the shadows of a warehouse and pulled up.

'Get out,' Morilli said to English.

English looked at him.

'What's this - an unofficial execution?'

Morilli rammed the gun into his side.

'Get out! I don't want you to bleed in this car.'

As English opened the off-side door, Nankin got out hurriedly and ran around the front of the car, pulling a gun as he did so. He covered English until Morilli got out.

'Unwise to have a witness, Lieutenant,' English said calmly. 'He'll blackmail you if you kill me.'

Nankin laughed.

'Me and the lieutenant work together pally,' he said. 'Don't bother your brains about us.'

Morilli swung up his gun and pointed it at English.

'This is yours, English,' he said. 'I'm not taking a chance on you talking. Back up against that wall.'

English braced himself. He was too far from the river to jump for it, too far from Morilli to close with him. He knew he was within a heartbeat of death. He was surprised that he felt no fear, only an angry frustration that he now wouldn't be able to even things up with Sherman.

He stepped back.

'Shed those rods!' a voice barked from behind the car. 'Quick or I'll blast both of you to blazes!'

Nankin hurriedly dropped his gun. Morilli half turned, his lips coming off his teeth in a furious snarl.

A gun crashed, and he staggered, dropping his automatic and gripping his wrist cursing.

Chuck Eagan came out from behind the car.

‘Thought I’d better come along for the ride,’ boss, he said cheerfully. ‘I never did trust this flatfoot.’

English stepped forward and picked up Morilli’s gun. He kicked Nankin’s gun across the waterfront into the river.

‘Phew! You timed it a little close, Chuck,’ he said with a wry smile.

‘Better late than never,’ Chuck returned, grinning. ‘What do we do with these lice?’

‘I want them out of the way for a few hours Chuck,’ English said. ‘What do you suggest?’

‘Easy,’ Chuck said and stepping up to Nankin he slammed him over the head with his gun butt.

Morilli backed away as Nankin fell face down.

English said, ‘Don’t move. I’m tempted to make a hole in your hide!’

Morilli snarled at him.

‘You’ll be sorry for this.’

Chuck hit him on the back of his skull, driving him to his knees. Then he hit him again, and Morilli spread out on the rain-soaked concrete.

‘Stick with them, Chuck. Put them somewhere out of the way. I want a couple of hours to myself.’

‘Don’t rush off alone,’ Chuck said uneasily.

‘Stick with them,’ English said curtly. ‘That’s an order.’

He walked over to the police car and slid under the wheel.

As he started the engine, he leaned out of the window.

‘Thanks, Chuck. I’ll remember you in my will.’

He reversed the car and sent it shooting along the waterfront, heading uptown.

V

Lois opened her eyes and blinked painfully up at an amber-coloured lamp that was screwed flush to the ceiling. The light sent sharp stabbing pains through her head and she shut her eyes, biting her lower lip to stop from crying out.

She lay still for several minutes, her mind slowly coming out of the fog of unconsciousness. Where was she? she wondered. She remembered seeing Corrine flop to the floor in a faint. She remembered bending over her, and then hearing the swish of a descending sap, and that was all she could remember. She opened her eyes again, not looking at the light, and after a moment or so, the hot pricking in her eyes went away.

She was in what must be a cabin of a ship. It was a luxury cabin, panelled in walnut and furnished expensively and with taste. She was lying on a bed, and she looked hastily to see if she was still dressed. Someone had taken off her mackintosh and hat and shoes, but otherwise she was still in the clothes in which she had left her apartment.

She slowly lifted her head, grimacing as a stab of pain drove into her temples.

‘So you’re all ready to join the party,’ a man’s voice said near her, making her start.

She looked quickly to her left.

A big man with a thin scar running from his right ear to his mouth and with a cast in his left eye sat in an armchair that was set against the cabin door. He nursed a heavily bandaged wrist.

‘That must have been quite a smack you walked into,’ he said, his eyes running over her. ‘You’ve been out for over an hour.’

Her hand went automatically to her skirt and pulled it down as far as it would go as she saw the expression in his eyes.

‘Don’t excite yourself,’ the man with the scar said, taking out a packet of cigarettes. ‘That’s not the first pair of gams I’ve seen, and they won’t be the last.’

He stuck a cigarette on his lower lip, flicked a match alight and set fire to the cigarette.

‘Where am I?’ Lois asked, her voice unsteady.

‘On Sherman’s yacht,’ the man with the scar told her. ‘He’ll be along in a little while. He wants to talk to you.’

‘Who are you?’ Lois asked, half sitting up.

‘My name’s Penn,’ he returned and grinned. ‘I take care of Sherman’s business. That’s why I’m taking care of you. Anything more you want to know?’

‘Why has he brought me here?’

‘He wants to talk to you. Between you and me and the bedpost, sister, I don’t think you’re going to live much longer,’ Penn said and winked. ‘He’s knocking them off so fast I’ve given up counting the bodies. He knocked off Corrine tonight. A waste of a pretty woman, but he’s like that. Did you know he stretched her neck?’

Lois’ heart skipped a beat and she felt suddenly sick.

‘Maybe if you’re nice to me,’ Penn went on, staring at her with his right eye. His left eye looked across the room, away from her, giving him a sly, furtive expression, ‘I might talk him out of it. Think you could be nice to me?’

‘If you come near me I’ll scream!’ Lois said fiercely.

Penn nodded and flicked ash on the floor.

‘When Sherman’s off the boat you can scream your lungs out,’ he said. ‘There’s no one within six miles of us except Sherman. Well, okay, if you want it the hard way, I don’t care. I like a little opposition.’

Lois didn’t say anything. She looked quickly around the cabin for a way of escape, but the only way out was through the door against which Penn had placed his chair.

Penn cocked his head on one side, then got to his feet.

‘He’s coming now,’ he said. ‘Watch your step, sister. He gets mean if he’s crossed.’

As he moved the chair from the door, the door opened and Sherman looked into the cabin. He stood in the doorway, his jaws moving, his amber-coloured eyes on Lois, his hands in his pockets.

‘Get out!’ he said to Penn.

The big man went past him without a word, and closed the door after him. Sherman pulled up the chair and sat down.

‘Sorry I had to hit you Miss Marshall,’ he said mildly. ‘But you came at an

inconvenient moment. Why did you come?’

‘Why have you brought me here?’ Lois demanded, swinging her legs off the bed and sitting up.

‘You will answer my questions,’ Sherman said, a sudden rasp in his voice. ‘If you’re going to be truculent I shall call Penn, and he’ll deal with you. Why did you come to Corrine English’s house?’

Lois hesitated. The cold, expressionless eyes scared her, but she had no intention of telling Sherman that she had hoped to persuade Corrine to give evidence against him.

‘I heard about the scene she made at the Silver Tower,’ she said quietly. ‘I wanted to find out if Mr. English had seen her home.’

Sherman studied her, not sure if she were lying or not.

‘You don’t know where English is?’

She shook her head.

‘Are you sure?’

Again she shook her head.

‘You know, of course, he killed Julie Clair and her lover tonight, and the police are hunting for him?’

‘I heard they had been murdered, but I’m sure Mr. English had nothing to do with it.

Sherman smiled.

‘Of course. You’re in love with him. I should have thought of that before.’

Lois didn’t say anything.

‘You are in love with him, aren’t you?’

‘Is it any of your business?’

‘It could be,’ Sherman said, staring at her thoughtfully. ‘The police haven’t picked him up yet, and when a man like English is running around footloose he’s dangerous. I want him picked up quickly or I’ll have to do something about him myself.’

‘You’d better let me go,’ Lois said firmly. ‘Kidnapping is a capital offence in this city.’

Sherman smiled.

‘So is murder. But I don’t intend to kill you just yet. I shall wait until tomorrow morning. Then if English hasn’t been arrested, I must find him myself and that’s where you come in. I don’t think it’ll be difficult if he gets to know I’m holding you. I have an idea he’ll come to terms. Then, of course,

he will commit suicide like his brother. They'll find him shot, with a gun in his hand. They'll find you some time later conveniently drowned, and they'll assume you died like Mary Savitt died - because you were unable to go on living without your lover. It is a convenient method, and I see no reason why I shouldn't repeat it.'

'I think you must be mad,' Lois said steadily. 'No one sane could talk as you do. No one sane could act as you do.'

Sherman shrugged.

'What if I am mad? What's wrong with being mad anyway? Why have people such a horror of being thought mad? I haven't. I'm perfectly satisfied the way my mind works. After all, madness is just a matter of viewpoint. You say you're sane. Well, look at you. I'm not in your position. A man in what they call his right mind would shrink from murder, and as it happens murder is my only way out. I don't shrink from it. Therefore I must be mad according to you. It's entirely immaterial to me if I am mad or not. As it happens my mother was supposed to be mad, but she was quite the most brilliant woman I have ever known. They put her in an asylum and she died there. If she had murdered my father as I advised her to, she wouldn't have gone to the asylum. She shrank from murder. It's a lesson I didn't ignore. He crossed one leg over the other.

Murder is an odd thing. It is like a snowball rolling down a hill. One murder leads to another. I wouldn't be in this jam if that cheap little chiseller hadn't tried to gyp me. I was a fool to have picked on him to work for me. Before he came I had a good business. Now, if I'm not very careful, the bottom could drop out of it. It's worth a quarter of a million a year to me, and I'm not giving that up without a fight. I killed Roy English in a moment of anger. It would have been simpler to have kicked him out and got someone else to do the work, but I was angry when I found out he was cheating me, and I shot him. Then the snowball started running downhill. Mary Savitt had to go. She knew as much about me as English did, and when she heard he was dead, she would talk. So she had to go. Then the old fool Hennessey got garrulous and he had to go. May Mitchell had to go, too, but by that time your clever Mr. English was onto me. He was unwise to threaten me. At first I thought I would kill him, but it seemed simpler and more amusing to let him ruin himself in his own way. I arranged he should hear about his mistress and Harry Vince. I couldn't be sure he would kill them, so I did it for him. Then

you had to come along and I realized Corrine English could be dangerous, so she had to go. You see, I'm being frank with you. Murder is an interesting subject - it grows and grows. Soon I shall kill you, then English. It might stop there, but there's Leon to think about. He knows too much. I shall probably have to silence him. Then someone else will have to be silenced. One murder starts a chain of others. Interesting, isn't it?'

Lois didn't say anything. She stared at Sherman, horror in her eyes.

'English worries me,' Sherman went on, half to himself. 'He's dangerous. He's like a bull - he'll charge against any odds, and he might make things difficult for me unless he's arrested very soon.'

'He will make things difficult for you,' Lois said. 'But don't think he'll care what happens to me - he won't. He's ruthless like that. I mean nothing to him, so don't imagine you can use me to trap him, because it won't work. He'll come after you in his own way and in his own time, you can be sure of that.'

Sherman laughed.

'You don't believe that,' he said and got to his feet. 'Whatever else he is, English is the chivalrous type. You and he have worked together for some time. Even if you don't mean anything to him, he'll come charging along like a mad bull when he hears you are in danger. That type always does. The movies thrive on them. But it may not be necessary. I'll wait until tomorrow morning, then if the police haven't picked him up, I'll set my trap. He'll walk into it. In the meantime you're going to stay here. You can't get away. We're six miles from the shore. I'll come and talk to you again tomorrow morning.'

He opened the door and motioned Penn back into the room.

'Watch her,' he said curtly. 'I'll come on board again by ten o'clock tomorrow.'

Penn smiled.

'She'll be right here when you get back,' he said.

'She'd better be,' Sherman returned and went away along the narrow corridor to the companion hatch.

Penn lolled against the doorway, his face smirking. He stood there for several minutes, not moving, his head cocked on one side. Then they both heard the roar of a motorboat engine as it started up. Still Penn remained leaning against the doorway. Lois watched him, her heart beating violently, her cold hands clenched in her lap.

They remained staring at each other until the sound of the motor engine died away, then Penn came into the cabin and closed the door. He turned the key, took it from the lock and put it in his pocket.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

Ed Leon drove slowly past Lois's walk-up, his eyes alert for the first sign of trouble, but there was no police car outside the building nor did a light show in Lois' windows. He pulled up at the corner of the street, got out of the car and walked back to look up at the windows.

Had English been arrested? he wondered, or had he given Morilli the slip? Sam Crail should know, he decided, and he returned to the car.

If English had been arrested, then it was up to him to find Lois, Leon told himself as he slid under the steering wheel. But where to look for her? Sherman wouldn't take her to his apartment. He probably had some other place where he could duck out of sight - but where?

In the next street, Leon spotted an all-night drug store. He swung the car to the curb and went in, crossing to a pay booth. He shut himself in and dialed Crail's number.

As he waited for the connection he glanced at his strap watch. It was twenty minutes to ten. With an impatient grimace he dropped the receiver back onto the cradle when he heard the busy signal, and fumbled for a cigarette. He waited, his cigarette burning fast, his mind searching for an inspiration.

Then he remembered Gloria Windsor. Maybe she knew if Sherman had a hideout. He decided it might pay dividends to call on her. He dialled Crail's number again.

Helen Crail answered.

'This is Ed Leon,' Leon said. 'Sam around?'

'He's just gone out,' Helen told him. 'If it's important I can catch him. He's getting the car out of the garage. He's going down to headquarters. You've heard Nick's been arrested?'

'Yeah. Get him, will you, Mrs. Crail? It is important.'

'Hold on.'

Leon leaned against the wall of the booth, frowning. It looked as if he was

going to have a busy night, he thought. He knew English would want him to find Lois first, then he had to get after Sherman. He pushed his hat to the back of his head and wiped the sweat beads from his forehead. If he didn't play his cards right, Nick could be a dead duck, he thought gloomily.

'Hello?' Crail's voice snapped in his ear. 'That you, Leon?'

'Yeah - so they got Nick?'

'He phoned a couple of minutes ago. The police were at the door while he was speaking to me. I'm on my way to headquarters now. Damn it! He should have given himself up like I said. I'm going to have a hell of a fight on my hands to pull him out of this?'

'Don't take your clothes off,' Leon said shortly. 'Lois is missing. Looks like Sherman's got her. Corrine English has been murdered.'

'What are you talking about?' Crail demanded, his voice shooting up.

'Lois went over to Corrine's place. Nick reckoned Corrine and Sherman were working together. Lois was going to bring her back so Nick could talk to her. I found Corrine strangled, and Lois missing. She had been there. I found her handkerchief. I've got to find her, Crail. Tell Nick I'm going to put pressure on this Windsor girl. She may know something. She's our only chance. Tell him not to worry. I'll find Lois if it kills me.'

'Who's the Windsor girl?' Crail asked blankly.

'Never mind. Tell him. He knows who she is. I've got to get moving.'

'Keep in touch with me,' Crail said urgently.

'Sure. I'll call you back after I've talked to this girl. How long will you be before you get back?'

'I don't know. An hour maybe. Call me in an hour.'

'I'll do that,' Leon said, and hung up.

He left the pay booth and went back to his car. Ten minutes' fast driving brought him to 7th Street, and he pulled up outside the building that housed the Alert Agency.

He walked into the lobby and down the stairs to Tom Calhoun's quarters. He found Calhoun watching a fight on the television. Calhoun got reluctantly to his feet. The two fighters were belting each other all over the ring, and he didn't want to miss the knock-out.

'I'm busy,' he said, scowling. 'What do you want at this hour?'

'I want to talk to Miss Windsor. Is she upstairs still or has she gone home?' Leon had to raise his voice to get above the uproar that was coming from the

television set. 'For the love of Mike, do you have to blast that thing like that?'

Calhoun lowered the sound. His eyes kept flickering to the lighted screen. 'She's up there. She lives up there.'

'Thanks,' Leon said. 'Sorry to have disturbed you.'

Calhoun's curiosity got the better of his interest in the fight.

'What do you want to talk to her about?' he asked.

'I want to find out if she's as lonely as I am.'

Leon backed out of the room and crossed over to the elevator. Calhoun followed him.

'You can find your way up, can't you?' he said, unlocking the elevator grill. 'Maybe she won't want to see you.'

Leon got into the elevator and slammed the grill.

'Like to bet on it?' he said, and dug his thumb into the top button. The elevator creaked upward. It finally came to rest on the top floor, and Leon stepped out into the passage. The clatter of the teleprinters from the news agency covered the sound of the grill opening. There was a light showing through the transom above Gloria Windsor's door. He walked along the passage, lifted the brass knocker and rapped twice. He leaned against the doorpost, his foot ready to wedge back the door if necessary, his hands thrust into his mackintosh pockets.

After a delay a bolt shot back. The door opened.

A tall, redheaded girl in a green high neck sweater and a pair of fawn-coloured slacks looked at him enquiringly. She was around twenty-eight or nine. Her face had an alert beauty, marred by a hard mouth and an overaggressive chin. Leon thought she had the most provocative shape he had ever seen on a woman, and he had difficulty in dragging his eyes from her figure that was accentuated rather than concealed by the skintight sweater she wore.

'Miss Windsor?' he asked, tipping his hat.

Grey eyes looked into his. Scarlet lips twisted into half a smile.

'Sure. What do you want?'

'I'm Ed Leon,' Leon told her. 'I'm a detective. I want to talk to you.'

She continued to smile, but her eyes grew suddenly wary.

'Don't kid me,' she said scornfully. 'If you're a flatfoot, then I'm Sophie Tucker.'

Leon took out his wallet and showed her his buzzer and licence.

‘Does that convince you?’

‘Oh, a shamus,’ she said with a withering contempt. ‘Run along, boy scout, I can’t be bothered with amateurs.’

She began to close the door, but Leon’s foot was in the way. He moved forward, riding her back.

‘I said I wanted to talk to you,’ he told her. ‘Let’s park our fannies, and take our hair out of curlers.’

She gave ground, her grey eyes angry.

‘You’re going to walk into a load of grief, shamus,’ she said, ‘if you try to make a move on me.’

‘It’s a risk I’ll gladly run,’ Leon said, inside the lobby by now. He closed the door and leaned against it. ‘It’s not often I have the opportunity of making a move on a redhead as well stacked as you. Tell me, just to satisfy my curiosity, were you put together by an architect or did you grow that way naturally?’

A hint of a smile came into the grey eyes.

‘A smooth guy!’ she said in mock despair. ‘I meet them twenty-four hours a day, ten a dime. Well, now you’re in, say your piece and dust. I want to watch the fights on the television.’

‘We’re not in yet,’ Leon said, and stepped past her. He pushed open a door and walked into a large airy sitting room. ‘Well, you know how to make yourself comfortable,’ he went on, looking round the room. ‘My, my! You must be doing pretty well with your silhouette.’

‘Put that in the plural or I’ll take a poke at your left eye,’ she said languidly and walked over to a deep armchair and sank into it.

‘Or maybe it’s the blackmail racket that’s paying off,’ Leon went on, watching her.

She looked at him out of the corners of her eyes, and her mouth tightened.

‘What are you talking about?’ she demanded frostily.

‘You’re in trouble, baby,’ Leon said, moving over to the fireplace and standing before the bright fire. ‘This is the end of the road for you. How do you like the idea of spending the next ten years in a nice, cozy jail?’

She looked up at him, her eyes jeering.

‘What makes you think I’m going to jail, shamus?’

‘Facts and figures - not your figure, mathematical ones,’ Leon said, taking

out a packet of cigarettes. 'Smoke?'

She shook her head.

'What facts and figures?'

Leon lit up and flicked the match into the fire.

'Sherman's racket has blown up in his face. You and he have been working together. We've got all we want on him, and we're waiting to pick him up. While we're waiting for him to show, we're picking up the small fry, like you.'

She raised her eyebrows.

'Who's Sherman? What are you talking about?'

Leon smiled.

'Don't give me that stuff. You know what I'm talking about. You fingered Roy English. You're Sherman's sounding board. Everything that went on in English's office was heard by you and passed on to Sherman. That makes you Sherman's stooge.'

'Aw, you're crazy!' she exclaimed angrily. 'Get out of here before I call the cops.'

'Go ahead and call them. It'll save me the trouble of dragging you down to headquarters.'

She got out of the chair and walked over to the telephone.

'The cops in this city know how to deal with a louse like you,' she said. 'Take my tip and dust while the dusting's good.'

'Go ahead and call them,' he said, leaning his shoulders against the mantel. 'I've got enough on you to put you away for ten years. Blackmail rates high these days.'

'You can't prove a thing,' she said, her hand on the telephone.

'I can tie you in with Sherman. Within the last few days he's knocked off five people - Roy English, Mary Savitt, Joe Hennessey, May Mitchell, and an hour ago, Corrine English,' Leon said, watching her. 'You're tied in to Roy's killing. I can prove that. If you're not careful, they'll put that nice outline of yours in the chair.'

She half turned as she lifted the receiver, then she slammed it down, jerked open a drawer and whipped out a .25 automatic. She spun around and pointed the gun at Leon.

'Don't move, shamus,' she said, her face hard and her eyes glittering. 'I'm tempted to put a slug in you, and tell the cops you broke in here.'

‘What - with that toy? It wouldn’t even make me bleed,’ Leon said, not feeling as confident as he sounded.

‘You make a move out of turn, and we’ll see if it’ll make you bleed!’

‘Where’s this going to get you?’ he asked. ‘Why don’t you use your head and do the sensible thing?’

‘And what’s that?’ she demanded, resting her hips against the table, the gun centred on his chest.

‘I want Sherman,’ Leon said. ‘I could afford to let you go. He’s ducked out of sight. Where would he go?’

She studied him.

‘Suppose I know, and suppose I tell you - what then, shamus?’

‘I’d give you twelve hours to pull out of town. After twelve hours I’d have to tell the cops you were working with Sherman, but a girl with transport can get a long way in twelve hours.’

‘I don’t know anything about Sherman,’ she said and laughed. ‘Why, you’re crazy! I’ve never heard of the guy until you walked in here. Now get out!’

Leon studied her.

‘If I walk out of here, the cops will walk in. They’ll persuade you to talk, make no mistake about that!’

‘Get out!’

Leon shrugged.

‘Okay, if that’s the way you want to play it, don’t blame me if you land up in the chair.’

‘Get out!’

‘A one-track mind,’ Leon remarked, and moved over to the door. ‘I forgot to mention there’d be a getaway stake thrown in with my offer of a twelve-hour start. I wouldn’t expect a girl like you to take a powder without a little folding money to keep her warm.’

He saw her stiffen to attention, and knew he had struck the right note.

‘Keep going,’ she said, but she didn’t sound quite so convincing this time.

As he reached the door, she said, ‘How much?’

‘A couple of grand. That’s not a bad proposition, sister - two grand and twelve hours’ start.’

‘Not interested,’ she said curtly. ‘That’s chicken feed. Get out of here!’

‘Suppose you make a suggestion?’

She hesitated.

‘Ten.’

Leon laughed.

‘That’s funny. Ten grand for something the cops could beat out of you. But I’ll go to five because redheads soothe my ulcer.’

‘Seven,’ she said promptly.

Leon realized he was wasting time.

‘Do you know where he is?’ he asked.

She nodded.

‘Well, okay, what have I got to lose? It isn’t my dough. I’ll close at seven. Where is he?’

‘Do I look all that damp behind the ears?’ she said scornfully. ‘I want the dough first.’

‘Where is he?’ Leon barked, suddenly losing his nonchalant air. ‘You’ll get the money, but you’ll talk first!’

‘I want the money first,’ she returned obstinately.

He grabbed her by her arm.

‘Listen. Sherman has kidnapped English’s secretary! He’s taken her somewhere. If I don’t find her fast, he’ll knock her off, and if he does, I’ll damn well see you’re tied in with him. Where is he?’

She hesitated.

‘How do I know you’re not lying?’ she said. ‘Who is English’s secretary?’

‘Her name’s Lois Marshall,’ Leon said impatiently. ‘She went to Corrine English’s place and vanished. I went there to see what had happened to her and found Corrine strangled. Sherman’s got her, and every minute I spend talking to you puts her in a worse spot. Do you want to be made an accessory to murder?’

‘You’ll give me the money and twelve hours start if I tell you?’

‘Yes! Where is he?’

‘Where’s the money coming from?’

‘Sam Crail the attorney, will give it to you.’

She hesitated, then said, ‘He’s got a yacht anchored off Bay Creek. That’s where he spends his weekends. If he’s anywhere, that’s where he’ll be. You can’t miss it, it’s the only yacht anchored there.’

‘Is this on the level?’ Leon demanded.

‘Of course it is! Now how do I collect the dough?’

Leon went over to the desk by the window, pulled a sheet of notepaper from a pigeonhole and scribbled a note. He handed it to her.

‘Give that to Crail. Tell him what you’ve told me, and he’ll pay you.’

‘If he doesn’t . . .’

‘He’ll do it. Maybe not tonight, but first thing in the morning. You’ll still have twelve hours’ start. I promise you that.’

‘Do I go there now?’

‘Better wait until the morning. He can’t lay his hands on seven grand tonight.’

‘If I’m going, I’m going now. Maybe he can give me something, and send on the rest.’

‘Please yourself,’ Leon said, making for the door. I’ve got things to do.’

When he had gone, she stood, thinking, her eyes worried, then she went swiftly into the bedroom, pulled out two suitcases from under her bed and began to pack hurriedly. She packed only essential things, and threw them anyhow into the cases.

For the past days she had read in the newspaper of the succession of mysterious deaths, and she guessed Sherman had been responsible for them. She had decided before Leon’s visit to leave town. Now, she was in a panic to get away before the police tied her in with Sherman. She didn’t altogether trust Leon. If Crail gave her a thousand, she would be content with that so long as she could leave town that night. Her one thought now was to get away before trouble overtook her.

Without bothering to change out of her sweater and slacks, she pulled on a fur coat, picked up her two suitcases and went swiftly to the front door. She jerked it open, and then came to an abrupt stop, her heart skipping a beat.

Sherman was standing in the passage, his hands in his mackintosh pockets, water dripping from his hat brim, his jaws moving slowly, his eyes expressionless.

‘Hello, Gloria,’ he said quietly.

She didn’t say anything.

‘Running away?’ he went on, his eyes going to the two cases.

‘What do you mean?’ she managed to get out, ‘I’m only going away for the weekend.’

‘But not coming back?’ he said. ‘Got cold feet, Gloria?’

‘Why should I have cold feet?’ she said, struggling to keep her voice

steady. 'What's the matter with you? Can't I go away for a weekend without you imagining things?'

He shrugged.

'I don't care where you go, Gloria, but you are running away, aren't you?'

'Of course I'm not!' she said with unnecessary vehemence. 'What's the matter with you? It's you who have got cold feet.'

Sherman smiled.

'Can I come in a moment? I want to talk to you.'

'I - I don't want to miss my train.'

He moved toward her, and she gave ground. He entered the sitting room. Slowly, as if hypnotized, she put the two suitcases on the floor and leaned against the wall, watching him.

'You don't have to run away Gloria,' he said, moving about the room. 'I've got English where I want him. He can't cause trouble now. The police are looking for him. He shot his mistress.'

She didn't say anything. Her eyes followed him as he moved over to the window.

'It looked at first as if he could stop me,' Sherman went on, 'but it's all right now. How are you off for money, Gloria? I think I owe you something, don't I?'

'I'm all right,' she said huskily. 'I - I don't need anything at the moment.'

He smiled at her.

'First time I've ever known you to say that. Perhaps you're scared of taking my money now, Gloria? You don't have to be.'

'If you've got it, I'll have it,' she said, 'but I'm not hard up.'

'No, I don't suppose you are.' He had stopped by the window and was examining the curtain cord. 'Now this is an odd coincidence. I've been looking for a cord like this for weeks. You may not believe it, but I can't find this exact shade anywhere.' He took the cord off the hook and appeared to examine it closely. 'Do you remember where you got it?'

'From Sackville's,' Gloria said, watching him uneasily.

'Are you sure?' he asked, moving casually toward her. 'I think I tried there.'

She looked at the cord, seeing it now hanging in a loop between his fingers and she tried to screw herself into the wall, her eyes opening wide with terror.

'Keep away from me!' she said in a tight, strangled voice.

‘What’s the matter?’ Sherman asked, smiling at her. ‘What’s frightening you? Don’t tell me, Gloria, you of all people, are suffering from a guilty conscience?’

He was within a few feet of her now. She suddenly threw herself blindly across the room to the door. He went after her with quick silent steps, and as she reached the door, he dropped the loop over her head.

Her frantic scream of terror was throttled back into her throat as he crossed his hands and tightened the cord.

II

As Sam Crail got out of his car, the shadowy figure of a man came out of the darkness.

‘Sam?’

‘Why, Nick!’ Crail looked uneasily to the right and left, scared anyone might be watching. ‘What the hell are you doing here? What happened?’

‘Let’s get inside,’ English said, his voice tense.

Crail snapped off the car’s headlight, and then led the way up the dark path to his house. He opened the door, and English followed him into the lobby. Helen Crail came out of the lounge. She was a tall, willowy girl with light brown hair and shrewd, friendly eyes. English had often wondered why she had married Crail. He thought she was too good-looking to have hooked up with a fat, middle-aged attorney like Sam. But in spite of the disparity of age and looks, they seemed to get on well together.

‘Come in by the fire Nick,’ she said, smiling at him. ‘I’ll get you a drink.’

‘No, please don’t Helen,’ English said. ‘I’m all right. Mind if I talk business to Sam, but don’t go away.’

Helen looked swiftly at Crail, who shook his head.

‘Heard from Ed yet?’ English asked.

‘I’ve heard from him,’ Crail returned, following English into the big, brightly lit lounge. He took off his coat and dropped it in a chair. ‘Take your coat off. You re sopping wet.’ As English took off his coat, Crail went on, ‘What happened to you? I went down to headquarters and waited. Captain Swinney hadn’t any information. He said there was a call out for you, but he had no report on you. I didn’t tell him you’d been found. Did you give them the slip?’

English smiled grimly.

‘Eventually. Morilli staged a private arrest for his own benefit. What’s happened to Lois?’

‘I don’t know. Ed’s looking for her. He said he was calling me back in an hour. He should come through at any minute now.’

Helen took English’s coat and hung it in the lobby.

‘Did he say what he found when he arrived at Corrine’s place?’ English

asked.

Crail nodded.

‘Yes. Sherman had been there. He strangled Corrine. Lois had been there, too. Ed found her handkerchief, but we don’t know if Sherman has her or not.’

English clenched his fists, his pale face hardening.

‘He’s got to be stopped, Sam! This can’t go on. I’ve got to find him.’

‘Now look, you’re in a bad spot yourself,’ Crail said anxiously. ‘You should have given yourself up when Morilli came for you. Running away from him . . .’

‘I didn’t run away from him. I let him arrest me,’ English said as Helen came back into the lounge. He took me for a one-way ride. If Chuck hadn’t spotted us leaving and got himself a ride on the rear bumper I’d be in the morgue by now.’

Crail stared at him.

‘You aren’t serious?’

‘You bet I’m serious. Morilli made no bones about it. He was scared I’d talk. He was about to shoot me when Chuck appeared like a hero in a second feature movie. And that’s the kind of treatment I’d get if I gave myself up. I told you how it would be. They’ll frame me into the chair if I give them half a chance.’

Crail wiped his face with his handkerchief.

‘I’ll go to the commissioner right now and tell him,’ he said. ‘He’ll have to listen to me. Where did you say you’ve left Morilli?’

‘Hampton Wharf,’ English told him. ‘Chuck is with him. Take a newspaperman with you, Sam. It’s a good idea. Maybe Morilli will give himself away.’

‘Leave it to me,’ Crail said, putting on his coat again. ‘In the meantime, you stay here, Nick, and keep out of sight. I’ll fix that rat Morilli!’

‘You’re harbouring a criminal,’ English pointed out. ‘Maybe I’d better move on, Sam.’

‘You stay here! See that he does, Helen,’ Crail said. ‘They won’t think to look here for you. I’ll be back as soon as I can.’

When he had gone out to the garage, Helen said, ‘You’re worrying about Lois, aren’t you, Nick?’

He nodded.

‘If that devil’s killed her . . .’

‘You mustn’t think like that,’ she said soothingly. ‘Sit down and rest. Ed will find her. He’s a good man, Nick.’

‘But the police are looking for him now and he doesn’t know it. Morilli put out a call for him. He might walk into trouble, and then what’ll happen to Lois?’

‘Trust him to keep out of trouble,’ she returned. ‘If anyone can find her, he will.’

English flopped down in an armchair.

‘If only I knew where Sherman was,’ he said angrily. ‘I can’t go looking all over the town. I’d be picked up within minutes.’

‘Ed said he was going to talk to some girl - Windsor I think he said her name was. He thought she might know where Sherman was.’

English’s face brightened.

‘I’d forgotten her. Ed thinks she’s working with Sherman. I wonder if he got anywhere with her.’

‘He’ll call in a little while,’ Helen said.

‘He may be with her now,’ English said, jumping to his feet. ‘I might get him on the phone.’

He went over to the telephone and ruffled through the pages of the directory until he found Gloria Windsor’s number. He dialled and waited, listening with growing impatience to the ringing tone. He waited for a minute or so, then replaced the receiver.

‘No answer. Maybe she’s out and he hasn’t talked to her yet.’ He looked at his watch. ‘When I think of Lois . . .’ He drove his fist into his palm. ‘Damn it! I must do something! I can’t just sit and wait!’

‘Take it easy Nick,’ Helen said. ‘You’ve got to rely on Ed. He’ll find her.’

‘It’s all very well.’ He broke off and smiled crookedly at her. ‘You know I’ve been a mug about Lois, Helen. I didn’t realize what she means to me until I’d lost her.’

‘Aren’t we all mugs sometimes?’ she returned gently. ‘I’m glad Nick. She’s been good to you.’

‘I know. Well, if she’s alive, I’ll make up for it.’

‘Listen!’ Helen said sharply, holding up her hand.

They heard the sound of a fast moving car, coming down the street. A moment later it pulled up outside the house with a squeal of tortured tires.

As English moved to the window, Helen pushed him aside.

‘You must keep out of sight, Nick. It may be the police,’ she said sharply. ‘Let me see.’

She lifted the shade, then turned swiftly, her face alight with excitement.

‘It’s Ed!’ she exclaimed, and ran across the room to the front door.

Leon was about to ring the bell when Helen opened the door. He was soaked with rain, and there was an anxious, harassed look in his eyes.

‘Sam in?’ he asked.

‘Come in,’ Helen said. ‘Nick’s here.’

‘Nick! Well, I’ll be damned. I thought he was in jail.’

He stepped into the lobby as English came out of the sitting room.

‘What a break!’ Leon said. ‘I’d given you up as lost.’

‘Where’s Lois?’ English demanded.

‘I’m not sure yet. I came here for some money. I’ve got to hire a boat. Sherman has a yacht six miles off Bay Creek. It’s my bet Lois is on board. They want a hundred bucks for a motorboat to take me out there. Have you got a hundred bucks?’

‘Of course I have,’ English said. ‘I’m coming with you.’

‘Better not. The cops are still looking for you.’

‘They’re looking for you, too,’ English said. ‘Morilli’s put a call out for you. He’s trying to pin Corrine’s murder on you. Come on, let’s get going!’

He struggled into his overcoat.

‘How far is Bay Creek?’ he asked.

‘About three miles from here,’ Leon said, opening the front door.

‘Tell Sam where I’ve gone,’ English said to Helen. ‘And thanks for putting up with me.’

‘Good luck Nick,’ Helen said, her eyes anxious. ‘And be careful.’

English went down the path after Leon and got into the waiting car.

Leon sent the car shooting down the deserted street.

‘I got the Windsor girl to talk,’ he told English, but it’s going to cost you seven grand, and it may come to nothing. All the same I imagine Sherman will take Lois to the yacht if he takes her anywhere. What happened to you?’

‘Morilli took me for a ride. If Chuck hadn’t turned up I shouldn’t be here now,’ English said.

Leon glanced swiftly at him.

‘You mean he was going to knock you off?’

‘That was the idea. He was scared I’d talk. Besides, getting rid of me would have earned him a promotion. Where’s this Bay Creek, Ed?’

‘You know the golf club? A mile farther on is Bay Creek. There’s a boathouse there. I’ve seen the yacht. It’s anchored about six miles out in the estuary. Someone’s on board. Lights are showing, but the guy who owns the motorboat wouldn’t play unless I paid him the hundred. I nearly went crazy trying to persuade him, but the louse wouldn’t budge. So I had to come back to

Sam for the dough.’

English glanced over his shoulder.

‘There’s a car after us, Ed!’ he said, his voice sharpening.

Leon promptly shoved his foot hard down on the gas pedal.

‘Cops?’

‘Could be. Maybe they spotted your number. I told you they were on the lookout for you.’

‘I can’t hope to shake a prowler car in this old heap,’ Leon said uneasily. ‘What are we going to do?’

‘Can we lose them?’

‘Not in this district.’ He looked in the driving mirror. ‘Hell! They’re coming up fast!’

‘You stall them, Ed. I’m going after Lois. Get around the next corner, slow down and let me drop off. I’ll take my chance of giving them the slip.’

‘They’re right behind us,’ Leon said, and shoved the gas pedal to the boards. The car surged forward at over sixty miles an hour, and the car behind fell back a little. ‘Hang on tight. I’m going to take the next corner.’

Twenty yards from the corner, Leon slammed on his brakes. The back of the car swung around in a violent skid. He heard the screaming of tires as the other car braked frantically. Beams from the other car’s headlamps lit up Leon’s car as he wrestled with the wheel, steering into the skid. He released the brake and trod on the gas pedal. The car shot into the side street. The pursuing car went on, braking violently as Leon slowed down.

‘Good luck!’ he exclaimed as English opened the door.

English jumped out, took two staggering steps forward before falling heavily. He rolled over, staggered to his feet, and ran blindly for an alley facing him.

The police car had reversed and was swinging into the street as he reached

the mouth of the alley. A voice yelled at him, but he didn't look around. He kept on, his long legs flying over the ground.

There was a flash and a crash of gunfire. Something zipped perilously close to his head; then he dashed into the darkness of the alley.

For some seconds he ran blindly. The alley led to the river, and he came out on the waterfront. He heard the sound of pounding feet coming after him, and he looked to the right and left for cover. A few yards from him was a vast pile of empty wooden crates. He darted over to them and dodged behind them. A moment later a cop came out of the alley, gun in hand. He looked up and down the deserted waterfront, then stood listening for a moment.

English watched him, his mouth in a tight, hard smile. Nick English hiding from a cop! If it wasn't for Lois, it would be funny, he thought.

He waited, sure the cop would come to investigate the pile of crates. He crouched in the shadows, holding his breath as the cop began a slow, cautious walk toward him.

'Okay, I can see you!' the cop barked suddenly, and pushed forward his gun. 'Come on out or I'll blast you!'

Sure the cop couldn't see him, English remained where he was.

The cop came on and began to circle the pile of crates. Moving without a sound, English followed him, keeping just out of sight, until the two of them had made a complete circle of the crates.

With a grunt of disgust the cop went off along the waterfront, flashing a powerful flashlight, his gun thrust forward.

English didn't move until the cop was out of sight, then he went off in the opposite direction, walking fast, his head bent against the driving rain. He was about a mile from the golf club, and time was running out. He decided to risk a taxi. He couldn't waste time walking to the club.

He turned off the waterfront and made his way back to the town. As he walked along in the pelting rain, he wondered what had happened to Leon, and he wished he had a gun.

After walking for some minutes he saw a taxi coming toward him, and he waved.

The taxi pulled up.

'Know the golf club?' he asked, keeping his head bent so the driver couldn't see his face clearly.

'Sure,' the driver returned. 'You're not thinking of having a game at this

hour, are you, mister?’

‘A mile farther on there’s a boathouse. That’s where I want to go.’

‘I know it. Tom Kerr’s place.’

English got into the cab.

‘Twenty bucks if you get me there in ten minutes.’

‘Can’t be done, but I’ll get you there in fifteen.’

‘Get going!’

English sat back and fumbled for a cigarette. He suddenly felt deflated and tired. So much time had been wasted, he thought. It was now three hours since Lois had walked out of her apartment. The chances were she was dead, strangled by that maniac. Well, if she was, he would avenge her, he thought grimly. Sherman wasn’t going to get away with it this time.

Once clear of the town, the taxi raced along the broad road through the sand dunes that led to the club. They flashed past the clubhouse after eight minutes’ reckless driving. There was a dance on, and English could hear the music and see the couples as they moved around the big ballroom.

Four minutes later, the driver said, That’s Kerr’s joint right ahead. English leaned forward to peer through the rain-soaked windshield. He could see a big wooden shed by the river bank. Lights came through the windows.

He fumbled in his wallet and took out a twenty-dollar bill.

‘Want to wait?’ he said. ‘I’ll be coming back, but I may be some time. It rates another twenty.’

‘I’ll wait all night for that kind of dough,’ the driver said eagerly.

He swung down a steep slope that led directly to the shed and pulled up.

‘You’ll find Kerr in that cabin down by the jetty,’ he told English as he took the twenty-dollar bill.

English walked quickly down the path to the cabin at the shore end of the jetty and rapped on the door.

The door opened and a fat man in a turtleneck sweater and thick rubber boots looked at him enquiringly.

‘You Tom Kerr?’ English asked.

‘That’s right, mister. Come in.’

English stepped into a warm, pleasant room. A girl sat before a bright fire nursing a baby. She looked at English and he saw her give a little start of recognition.

‘I want a motorboat in a hurry,’ he said to Kerr. ‘How soon can you get

one ready?’

Kerr looked sharply at him.

‘What’s the trouble, Mr. English?’ he asked.

English smiled crookedly.

‘I wish my face wasn’t so familiar,’ he said. ‘I want to get to a yacht moored in Bay Creek.’

‘Take him there Tom,’ the girl said sharply, ‘and don’t ask questions. Can’t you see Mr. English is in a hurry?’

‘I’ll take you there,’ Kerr said. ‘Give me five minutes. You wait here. I’ll get the boat now.’

He grabbed up his oilskins and went out of the hut.

English wiped the rain off his face.

‘Do you two know the police are looking for me?’ he said. ‘I don’t want to get you into trouble.’

The girl smiled.

‘We mind our own business. Besides, Tom and I have had a lot of pleasure from your shows, Mr. English. And we watched the big fight on the television. We’re glad to do something for you.’

English nodded.

‘I’ve more friends than I thought,’ he said, and came over to look at the baby. ‘Your first?’

‘Yes, but there’ll be more.’

‘When he’s old enough, send him to me, and I’ll give him a job,’ English said.

The girl giggled.

‘It isn’t a boy, it’s a girl.’

‘Send her to me just the same. I’ll fix her with something. Fine kid.’

‘If you want any help, Mr. English, you can rely on Tom,’ the girl said.

English smiled.

‘That’s fine. I may need him.’

The door opened and Kerr looked in.

‘All ready Mr. English. Want to borrow an oilskin?’

English shook his head.

‘Thanks, no. I can’t be wetter than I am now.’ He looked over at Mrs. Kerr. ‘My thanks to you. Don’t forget, when she gets older I’ll do something for her.’

He went out into the rain to a powerful speedboat that bobbed up and down on the heavy swell. Kerr helped him into the boat, cast off, pushed forward the throttle and sent the boat shooting toward the mouth of the estuary.

‘We didn’t talk terms,’ English said, standing close to Kerr. ‘Would a hundred settle it?’

Kerr nodded.

‘Anything you say, Mr. English.’

‘There may be some trouble on the yacht,’ English went on. ‘A girl I know has been kidnapped, and I think she’s on board. I’ll tackle it. You stay with the boat. I’ll want you to take us back if she’s there.’

‘If there’s going to be any rough stuff, count me in,’ Kerr said, his face lighting up. ‘I used to be the MidWest heavyweight champion before I married, and I haven’t had any action in years.’

‘You have your wife and kid to think of,’ English returned. ‘These thugs don’t fight with their fists.’

Kerr reached for a belaying pin and flourished it.

‘Nor do I when I’ve got one of these. Count me in, Mr. English.’

‘I guess I can use you if there are more than one of them.’

They reached the mouth of the estuary, and in the distance they could see the lights of the yacht.

‘Push her along,’ English said impatiently.

Kerr advanced the throttle. The speedboat raced over the heavy swell, throwing a foaming wash behind as it cleaved through the water. English peered through the blinding spray, his eyes on the yacht. If Lois wasn’t on board! he thought. If this was a wild goose chase!

Out of the shelter of the bay the wind whistled and the sea thundered.

English thought it was unlikely anyone on board would hear the approaching speedboat.

‘Cut down speed,’ he said to Kerr, ‘and drift up to her. I don’t want them to know we’re coming.’

‘Sure,’ Kerr said, and throttled back.

The boat, moving on its own impetus, ran on toward the yacht and, in a few minutes, Kerr brought it alongside.

English caught hold of the glittering brass rail and steadied the boat while Kerr made it fast.

Then they swung aboard.

Above deck the yacht was deserted, but a light showed through two of the cabin portholes.

‘I’ll go first,’ English said under his breath. ‘You keep out of sight. If there’s trouble, take them in the rear.’

He moved softly to the companion hatch and paused to listen at the head of the companion stairway. Hearing nothing, he cautiously began to descend, and as he reached the bottom step, a cabin door toward the end of the passage abruptly opened.

He crouched down, waiting, knowing he couldn’t get along the passage before he was seen, nor had he time to get up the stairway and out of sight. If whoever it was coming out of the cabin had a gun, he would be shot down before he could make a move.

Then he saw Lois.

She came out of the cabin, her face white, her eyes scared. Her white nylon blouse was ripped off her shoulder, and one stocking was down to her ankle.

‘Lois!’ English said softly.

‘Oh, Nick!’ she said, and ran toward him.

III

Halfway down the staircase, Kerr stopped and gaped. He was expecting to run into a rough house, and the sight of English holding a girl in his arms stopped him short, as if he had run into a brick wall.

But English was oblivious to Kerr's astonishment. He held Lois close to him, thankful to find her alive.

'Are you all right?' he asked anxiously. 'You're not hurt?'

'I'm all right. I - I thought it was Sherman coming back. Oh, I'm so glad to see you,' Lois said, pushing away from him, embarrassed. 'I'm sorry to have run into your arms like that, only I was scared.'

'My dear girl,' English began, then realized this was no time for idle talk. 'Is there anyone else on board?'

Lois shivered.

'There's Penn. He's in there. She pointed to another cabin. I've been scared to go in there again. I hit him.'

'You hit him?' English said blankly. 'What happened?'

'He attacked me. I got away from him, and hit him over the head with a bottle. I - I think I may have killed him.'

He could see she was struggling not to cry, and he put his arm around her.

'It's all right,' he said. 'I'm going to get you out of here.' He looked over his shoulder at Kerr. 'Take a look in there and see what's happened.'

Kerr pushed past them, opened the cabin door and went in. He came out after a minute or so, grinning.

'Well, you certainly did hit him, miss,' he said admiringly, 'but he's all right. He'll probably have a cracked skull, but he's not going to croak.'

Lois leaned against English.

'I was so frightened he would die,' she said, 'but he was such a brute.'

'Come on,' English said. 'You're going home.'

'No, wait,' she said, catching hold of his arm. 'This is important, Nick. There's something in the next cabin we must take with us.'

'All right. Just a moment.' English turned to Kerr. 'Think you can get that thug into the boat? I want him.'

'Sure,' Kerr said. 'Leave him to me.'

English followed Lois into the cabin next to the one in which she had been kept prisoner.

‘I found this, Nick,’ she said, pointing to a square leather suitcase. ‘It’s a tape recorder. The tape contains all kinds of conversations between Sherman and Penn, and something that clears you. Sherman talked to me. Penn must have set the machine going. Listen to this.’

She opened the case and flicked down the switch. The two reels containing the metal tape began to revolve.

‘Murder is an odd thing,’ Sherman’s voice said clearly out of the machine. ‘It’s like a snowball rolling down a hill. One murder leads to another. I wouldn’t be in this jam if that cheap little chiseller hadn’t tried to gyp me. I was a fool to have picked him to work for me. Before he came I had a good business. Now, if I’m not very careful, the bottom could drop out of it. It’s worth a quarter of a million a year to me, and I’m not giving that up without a fight. I killed Roy English in a moment of anger. It would have been simpler to have kicked him out.’

They stood side by side, listening to the flat, metallic voice, and when it said, ‘I arranged that he should hear about his mistress and Harry Vince. I couldn’t be sure he would kill them, so I did it for him.’

English put his arm round Lois and hugged her.

‘That’s it! That lets me out!’ he said. ‘Now we’ve got him where we want him!’

‘Let’s go now, Nick,’ Lois said, switching off the machine. ‘I can’t wait until we’ve given this to the police.’

English was looking past her, a sudden puzzled expression in his eyes.

‘I don’t remember shutting the door, do you, Lois?’ he said, and walked over to the door and turned the handle. He pulled, shook the door, and then stepped back. ‘That’s odd. It’s locked.’

‘Oh, Nick!’ Lois said, her eyes frightened. ‘You don’t think he’s here?’

‘Of course not,’ English said, and rattled the door handle. ‘Hey Kerr! Open the door. We’re locked in!’

‘Nick! Put your hand on the wall. It feels as if the engines have started up.’

English put his hand on the wall. He could feel a faint vibration, and he nodded.

‘You’re right. Maybe Kerr’s decided to take the yacht in.’

‘It isn’t Kerr - it’s Sherman,’ Lois said. ‘I know it is.’

English went swiftly to the porthole and looked out. He was in time to see the speedboat drifting away into the darkness. Even as he caught a glimpse of it, it vanished from sight, wallowing in the heavy swell.

‘He’s cut the boat adrift,’ he said, turning to face her. ‘I think you’re right. Sherman is on board.’

He went over to the door and rattled the handle again.

The vibration was stronger now as if the engines were mounting to full speed, and when Lois looked through the porthole she could see the water foaming against the yacht’s side as it forged ahead.

‘He’s heading out to sea. What are we going to do, Nick?’

English was examining the door.

‘The damn thing opens inward. There’s not much hope of smashing the lock, but we’ve got to get out of here, Lois.’

‘This table – couldn’t we use it as a battering ram?’

‘That’s an idea. Let’s try. You take that side, and I’ll take this.’

Together they wrenched the table from its fastenings and carried it over to the door.

‘Now, together.’

They slammed the table against the door, drew back and slammed it again against the door. One of the door panels split.

‘Once again,’ English said. ‘I think it’s going to work.’

They drew back and then ran at the door. The corner of the table smashed through the panel, making a gaping hole.

‘Fine,’ English said. ‘I think I can tackle it now.’

He kicked out the rest of the panel, leaned through the opening and found the key in the lock. He turned it and pushed open the door.

‘Now look, Lois, you stay here,’ he said, ‘or better still go into the next cabin and lock yourself in. Take the recorder with you. Whatever happens we’re not going to lose that. I’m going to see what’s happening.’

‘No, don’t Nick. Don’t leave me. If anything happened to you . . .’

‘I’ll be careful. Now get into the other cabin and wait for me.’ He picked up the recorder and pushed her into the passage. ‘I’ll be all right.’

Before she could argue further, he handed her the recorder, and then went along the passage to the companion stairway.

Lois stood in the doorway of the cabin and watched him, her face white and her eyes scared.

He went up the stairway slowly, his ears cocked for the slightest sound, but all he could hear was the noise of the engines and the heavy thud of the sea against the yacht as she drove through the water.

When he was almost at the top of the stairway, he stopped, not sure if he had heard something. He listened, then went on, and very cautiously looked along the dark deck. He saw nothing to alarm him. The deck was deserted, and he looked toward the bridge, but that, too, was deserted, and his mouth set in a hard line.

He guessed Sherman must have lashed the wheel, and was hiding somewhere, waiting for him to show himself.

Then he saw a movement in the shadows ahead of him, and he quickly ducked down so he was no longer outlined against the white hatchway.

‘Hello English,’ Sherman said from out of the shadows. ‘I can see you and I’m covering you with a gun.’

English looked in the direction of the voice. He decided Sherman was too far away for a quick rush. He moved down a step so Sherman couldn’t pick him off and waited.

‘I thought you would walk into my trap sooner or later,’ Sherman went on. ‘She wouldn’t believe you’d come after her. I told her you would. I said you had the mentality of a cheap movie hero.’

‘Where do you imagine you’re going?’ English asked. ‘Every coast guard boat on the coast is on the lookout for you.’

‘That, of course, is a stupid lie,’ Sherman returned. ‘In a few hours when Kerr recovers from the blow on the head I gave him, they might look for us, but by that time, it will be too late.’

‘Don’t be too sure,’ English said. ‘You don’t imagine you can get away in this yacht, do you?’

Sherman laughed.

‘No, but it’ll be at the bottom of the sea by the time they come after us,’ he said and came out of the shadows. He held an automatic in his hand, and it covered the companion hatch. ‘That’s where we’re going, English. You and the girl and I - to the bottom of the sea.’

‘Is that necessary?’ English asked. ‘Surely you don’t want to join us.’

‘I’m going to end it,’ Sherman said. ‘I’m sick of killing people. I shouldn’t have killed Gloria. The janitor saw me leave. Of course I could have killed him, but I can’t go on and on killing people. I’m sick of it! There seems no

end to it. Well, I'm going to end it, and end you, too.'

'And how do you propose to end it?' English asked, seeking information. He knew it was hopeless to attempt to close with Sherman. The distance between them was too great. He would be shot down long before he could reach him.

'I've set fire to the yacht,' Sherman said. 'There should be a pretty good blaze before long. You'll have the opportunity of either burning or drowning. We're about twelve miles off shore now, and we're still going. Personally, I prefer to drown.'

English had heard all he wanted to know now. He slid down the stairs and landed heavily in the passage.

Lois had come along the passage, and had heard what had been said. She looked at English, her face pale, but her eyes unafraid.

'He's cracked,' English said. 'He says he's set fire to the yacht. Maybe he's lying, but if he isn't, we may have to swim for it. Can you swim, Lois?'

She smiled.

'Yes. You don't have to worry about me.'

'But I do worry about you.' He put his hand on her arm and looked down at her. 'This is the wrong time and place, my dear, but I'd better tell you now. I'm in love with you. I guess I've been in love with you for years. It was only when I thought I was going to lose you, I realized it. Sorry, Lois, but there it is. Better late than never, I suppose. Having got that off my chest, let's get busy. There must be some lifebelts somewhere down here. Let's find them.'

She gave him a quick, searching look before going into the cabin. A few minutes' search brought to light three lifebelts and a couple of oilskins.

'We'll wrap the recorder in the oilskins, and then put a lifebelt around it,' English said. 'I'm not losing it unless I have to.'

'There is a fire, Nick,' Lois said suddenly as she spread the oilskin out on the floor. I can smell smoke.

English stepped into the passage. Smoke was drifting up through the floorboards, and when he touched the floor it felt hot. He returned to the cabin to help Lois tie the lifebelt around the recorder.

'We can't get off the boat without going up on deck,' he said, helping her on with a lifebelt, 'and he's guarding the head of the stairs. You wait here. I'll see what he's doing.'

'Be careful, Nick.'

He put his fingers under her chin and kissed her.

‘You bet, but we’ve got to get out of here.’

A sudden gust of smoke whirled into the cabin, making them cough, and when he went into the narrow passage, he found it full of smoke and the heat intense.

‘Come on, Lois, we can’t stay here.’

She joined him, and they ran along the passage to the stairway.

English hadn’t yet put on his lifebelt. He didn’t want Sherman to know they had lifebelts, and he put his belt on the stairs before he looked along the deck. A red glow came from the bridge, and the heat was now so violent English had to shield his face as he peered through the smoke. He couldn’t see anything, but he could hear the roar of the flames as they burned furiously, eating into the deck and slowly demolishing the bridge house. Cautiously he went up the stairs and onto the deck. Still he could see no sign of Sherman.

‘Lois!’ he called softly.

She joined him and he motioned her to keep down.

‘I can’t see him. Let’s get out of here. Give me the recorder.’

‘Your lifebelt,’ she said, thrusting the belt into his hands.

As he made to take it, he saw Sherman coming through the smoke. He dropped the belt, grabbed Lois by the arm and rushed her across the deck.

‘In you go,’ he said, and lifting her, dropped her into the sea.

He ran back for the recorder and as he snatched it up, Sherman saw him.

‘Don’t move!’ he shouted.

English dodged to the right, reached the rail and tossed the recorder into the sea. As he put his hand on the rail to vault over, Sherman shot him.

English felt something hit him viciously in his side, sending a scorching pain through his body. He fell face down on the hot deck. The deck was so hot, his soaking clothes sizzled, and as he tried to push himself to his feet, his hands began to blister. He rolled over, frantically trying to get under the rail and into the sea. Sherman ran over to him, caught hold of one of his ankles and dragged him back.

‘You’re not going to get away!’ he cried wildly. ‘You’ll roast here with me. How do you like it, English? How do you like your first taste of hell?’

English kicked out. The heel of his shoe crashed against Sherman’s knee cap, bringing him down. Sherman’s gun went off, and a slug ploughed a

furrow in the deck near English's head.

English rolled on Sherman, pinning him flat on the deck. Snarling with pain and fury, Sherman tried to get his gun hand up, but English caught his wrist in both hands and pressed Sherman's hand down on the metal guard that ran the length of the yacht.

Sherman screamed as the almost red-hot metal burned into his flesh. Exerting all his great strength, English kept Sherman's hand down against the metal.

Sherman slammed his free fist into English's face, but English held on until Sherman's fingers opened in agony and the gun dropped into the sea. He let go of Sherman's wrist, tried to get to his feet, but the pain in his side was now so intense he blacked out for a moment. He came out of the faint, the hot deck scorching his back. Sherman was kneeling on him, his fingers digging into his throat. English caught hold of Sherman's thumbs and wrenched them back, breaking Sherman's hold. As Sherman groped for his throat again, English smashed his fist into Sherman's face, sending him sprawling on his back.

English grabbed hold of the rail and dragged himself to his feet. Before Sherman could reach him, English overbalanced and fell head first into the sea. The shock of the cold water revived him, and when he broke surface, he shook the water out of his eyes and turned on his back.

The yacht was blazing now like a torch, lighting up the sea. English kicked out to send himself away from the yacht and the intense heat.

'Nick!'

A hand closed over his shoulder. He turned his head. Lois was beside him, her other hand holding on to the recorder.

'Oh, darling, are you hurt?'

'It's all right,' English gasped. 'It's nothing much. What happened to him?'

'I think he's still on the yacht.'

English reached out and put his arm over the recorder. With its help he kept his head above water. His legs hung like leaden weights, and if it hadn't been for the buoyancy of the recorder he would have sunk.

'Keep near me, Lois,' he said. 'I'm bleeding a little, and I don't feel too good.'

'Get on your back,' she urged. 'I can hold you. Keep a grip on that case.'

As he turned on his back he saw Sherman, swimming strongly toward them. Sherman's eyes were gleaming, and his teeth showed in a vicious snarl.

'Look out!' English panted and pushed Lois away from him.

Sherman's hand caught hold of English's shoulder.

'We'll go down together!' he cried shrilly. 'This is the end for you, English!'

English struck out at him, but his strength was failing. He couldn't hold Sherman off, and he felt Sherman's fingers shift from his shoulder to his throat. They went down together, Sherman locking his legs round English's body, his fingers digging into English's throat.

Lois saw them go down, and she dived after them, but the buoyancy of her lifebelt immediately returned her to the surface.

Frantically she wrestled with the strings to get it off, but the knots had hardened in the water and she couldn't loosen them.

'Nick!' she screamed, and again tried to go down, but again the buoyancy of the belt brought her to the surface.

Then suddenly there was a commotion under the water. She caught a glimpse of the two men, still locked together, as they came to the surface. She saw English's hand grope for Sherman's face, and his thumbs sink into Sherman's eyes as they went down again, the water closing over them.

She waited, her heart pounding, sick with fear for English, watching the bubbles of air as the two men fought under the water. They broke surface a second time. Sherman seemed no longer to be struggling. His arms and legs were locked round English's body while English was fighting desperately to throw him off.

She swam toward them, trying to reach them before they sank again, but she was too late. They went down again as English was within a few inches of her questing hand. Then after a long pause a body came to the surface, rolled over and floated half submerged near her. She reached it, turned it and saw with a sob of relief English's white unconscious face.

She held him up, pushing him toward the floating recorder and propping him over it. She was still holding him above the water when Kerr found them, fifteen minutes later, when he brought the speedboat toward the flaming wreck.

IV

Sam Crail hurried up the imposing steps that led to the main entrance of the new city hospital and entered the lobby where Dr. Ingolls, the resident surgeon, was waiting to meet him.

Ingolls, a tall, spare man in his late forties, was still in a slight flutter of excitement to have Nick English as a patient in his hospital.

The continual telephone calls, the invasion of the newspaper men and the constant stream of visitors, including stage and screen stars, show girls and stage technicians, enquiring after English, had temporarily disorganized the reception desk, and Ingolls was enjoying the experience of being on the fringe of English's limelight.

As Crail shook hands with Ingolls, Crail said, 'How's the patient? Can I see him?'

'Yes,' Ingolls returned, smiling. 'He's coming along well. His tremendous constitution is doing more for him now than I can. In fact, we're already having trouble keeping him in bed.'

'And the wound?'

'It's healing satisfactorily. In another two weeks he should be fit enough to go home.'

'That's good news. Well, I'll go up. You've done a good job, doctor.'

Ingolls beamed.

'We do our best,' he said airily. 'Of course, half the battle's having a good constitution, and that's something Mr. English certainly has.'

Crail nodded, and went off down the long white-tiled corridor to the elevator that took him to the first floor.

He found English lying in bed before an open window. On a side table was a mass of letters, cablegrams and books.

Chuck Eagan sat on an upright chair in a corner, his jaw aggressive and his eyes watchful. No one in the hospital had succeeded in shifting him. He had been in the room now for the past three days, ever since English had arrived, and even English couldn't get rid of him.

'Well, Nick,' Crail said, coming over to the bed. 'How do you feel?'

'Hello Sam,' English returned. 'Get yourself a chair. I'm fine. Why

everyone's making so much damned fuss beats me. I keep telling that quack I want to go home.'

Crail frowned.

'Considering you've been unconscious for the past two days, I think that's unnecessarily unreasonable,' he said, pulling up a chair. He glanced over at Chuck. 'You can take some fresh air, Eagan. He'll be all right with me.'

Chuck snorted.

'Yeah? Look what happened the moment I took my eyes off him,' he said bitterly. 'I'm sticking. No one else is going to throw lead into him again if I can help it.'

'Let him alone,' English said, grinning. 'I've done my best to get rid of him, but I've given up. What's the news?'

'You're in the clear,' Crail said. 'That tape recorder clinched it. You have nothing to worry about. It wouldn't surprise me if the commissioner doesn't call and apologize.'

English grimaced.

'I don't want him here. What about Sherman?'

'They picked up his body. You broke his neck Nick.'

'He would have finished me if I hadn't pulled a judo trick on him,' English said. 'It was a close call, Sam - too damn close. Is Lois all right?'

Crail nodded.

'Nothing the matter with her,' he said. 'I spoke to her on the phone this morning. She sounds fine.'

'Didn't she say she was coming to see me?' English asked a little anxiously. 'I was expecting her.'

Crail shrugged.

'She didn't say, but she'll be along.'

English started to say something, then changed his mind. Instead, he asked, 'What happened to that fella, Penn?'

'We've got him. Kerr was loading him into the boat when Sherman sneaked up behind him and cracked him over the skull. Kerr fell into the boat, and it drifted away, otherwise Sherman would probably have finished him. When Kerr came to, he saw the fire and came over to investigate. He fished you out just in time.'

'He's a good man,' English said. 'Do something for him, Sam. He's got a cute baby daughter. Have a talk with him. He might like me to take over her

education.'

'Sure,' Crail said. 'I'll talk to him.'

'According to Chuck, Morilli gave himself away,' English said. 'What's happening to him?'

'He's facing an attempted murder rap. You'll have to charge him, Nick. Luckily I took a couple of newspaper men along with me. The commissioner can't cover up for him. He won't give you any trouble for some time.'

'It all seems to be working out all right. I bet there're a lot of disappointed people in the city right now. Rees must be shedding a few tears.'

'He is,' Crail said quietly. 'He certainly thought he had got you where he wanted you. But the whole story's got to come out. We can't cover Roy up any longer.'

English shrugged, then winced.

'Damn! I mustn't do that. I'm still a little sore,' he said, settling himself into a more comfortable position. 'Well, it can't be helped. I guess that lets me out, Sam.'

'For a little while,' Crail said, 'but when the scandal's blown over, you'll be all right.'

English shook his head.

'No, it won't be the same. It's a funny thing but I don't give a damn now. I've been doing a lot of thinking while I've been lying here. I've decided to break new ground. I'm getting out of this city, Sam. I have other ideas now.'

Crail looked alarmed.

'But you can't do that! You can't walk out of a setup as big as yours when so many people depend on you for work!'

'Oh, I'll put someone in charge!' English said. 'How would you like the job Sam?'

'You're not serious?' Crail said, stiffening with surprise.

'I certainly am. But don't rush into it. Think about it. It'll mean giving up your law work, but it's a big job, Sam, and I know you could make a success of it. I'll be happy to take twenty-five percent of the net profit and leave the rest to you if you'll take the whole business off my hands.'

'But what are you going to do?' Crail asked blankly. 'This is your life, Nick. You can't just throw it up.'

'Twenty-five percent will give me all the money I want,' English said. 'It's time I looked at the world. I want to travel. Then when I'm tired of travelling,

I'll start all over again. You know, Sam, the best days of my life were when I was trying to become a success. Now, I'm going to try to recapture some of the fun I had in those days. Anyway, never mind about me. Think about my offer. If you don't want it, I'll have to find someone else. I'm quitting. I've made up my mind.'

Crail got to his feet.

'All right, I'll think about it. I think I'm sold. Think of the attorney fees I'll save!'

English laughed.

'Save - nothing. If you do the legal work, you pay yourself the appropriate fees. You can make a lot of money out of this setup, Sam.'

'Yeah,' Crail said, mentally calculating. 'I guess I could. Give me until tomorrow Nick. I'll have an answer by then. I'd like to talk to Helen first.'

'Sure, there's no hurry,' English returned. 'I have a lot to do before I can quit.'

Later in the afternoon, Ed Leon looked in.

'Thought I'd drop in and see how you were making out,' he said, shaking hands. 'I have to get back to Chicago, and I'm on my way now. There's nothing more I can do for you, is there?'

English shook his head.

'No, I guess not. Thanks for all you've done, Ed. You'll get a check as soon as I get back to my desk. We cleared that mess up pretty well, didn't we?'

'Yeah. I wish you could have seen those coppers' faces when Lois walked in with the tape recorder. She did a nice job of work, didn't she?'

'She certainly did. I can't understand why she hasn't come to see me. Everybody in town's looked in but her. What the hell is she up to, Ed?'

Leon grinned.

'For crying out loud! Who do you imagine is running your business while you're lolling about in bed? Don't you remember your new show's opening tonight? She's been working twenty-four hours a day to make it a success. The poor girl hasn't had time even to powder her nose.'

'To hell with the new show,' English said irritably. 'Who cares about it anyway? I want to see her!'

'She'll be along. She said something about looking in before she goes to the theatre tonight. You should be grateful. The girl's making your fortune.'

‘Well, okay,’ English said, frowning. ‘But it’s time she quit working like a slave.’

‘I’ve been telling her that ever since I first met her, but she won’t listen,’ Leon said. ‘Well, I’ve got to get moving. See you soon, pal, and take it easy. You’ve had enough excitement to last you a lifetime.’

When he had gone, Chuck said cautiously, ‘Is that right, you’re quitting, boss?’

English looked at him and grinned.

‘Sure. I have a bigger job to attend to now. A job that’s going to take up a lot of my time. Something I should have tackled years ago.’

Chuck’s eyes opened.

‘Anything in it for me, boss?’

English shook his head.

‘I guess not,’ he said cheerfully. ‘This is something personal. I’m going to get married, and I’m going to raise a family.’

Chuck’s expression of horror struck English as funny, and he burst out laughing.