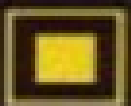


JAMES HADLEY

comé
noir



CHASE

MAKE THE CORPSE WALK



MAKE THE CORPSE WALK
JAMES HADLEY CHASE
1946

chapter one

On a pleasant summer evening, a few minutes after eleven o'clock, a black and chromium Rolls-Royce turned into Curzon Street from Clarges Street and slid to a standstill by the narrow passage that leads to Shepherd Market.

Two young women in fox furs, loitering in the shadows, regarded the Rolls-Royce with professional interest and also, perhaps, with a feeling of bitterness and envy at such a display of wealth.

Except for the two young women and the Rolls-Royce, Curzon Street was deserted—one of those freak lulls that sometimes occur in the streets of the West End of London for no apparent reason.

The young women watched the slim, uniformed chauffeur leave the car, open the rear door and speak with the passenger whom they were unable to see. Then the chauffeur stepped back and looked a little helplessly up and down the street.

The chauffeur noticed them talking together and approached them.

The tall woman said, "Hello. Did you want me?"

She was secretly surprised to see how young he was now that she could examine his white, immature face. In spite of this immaturity, there was something about his eyes and the rigid way he held himself that made her uneasy.

The chauffeur looked at her, recognized her for what she was" and made an imperceptible movement of disgust. "Do you know where the Gilded Lily Club is?" he asked after a moment's hesitation. His voice was soft and timbreless.

"Oh, God!" the woman exclaimed, angry in her disappointment. "Why don't

you ask a policeman instead of wasting my time? I thought you wanted me.”

“Ask me,” the blonde woman said, joining them. “I know.”

The chauffeur pulled at the cuff of his black gauntlet. He looked suspiciously from one to the other of the women.

“Well, where is it?” he said, impatiently.

The blonde woman smiled. Like her companion, now that she could see the chauffeur’s face, she felt an uneasy doubt about him. “It’s for members only,” she explained. “You’ll never get in. They’re ever so strict.”

“Never mind that,” the chauffeur returned, still jerking at the cuff of his gauntlet. “Just tell me where it is.”

The eyes of the blonde woman jeered at him. “You’ll never find it. Not if you look all night.” She glanced quickly at the tall woman and lowered her voice. “I’ll take you there if you make it worth my while.”

The blonde woman looked across at the Rolls-Royce. A little man in a long black coat, a black slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, his small hands encased in white buckskin gloves, had just got out of the car. Moonlight glittered on his highly polished shoes. He accepted the ebony, gold mounted walking stick the chauffeur banded to him, then he walked across the pavement. “So you know where this club is, my dear?” he said, pausing before the blonde woman.

She looked curiously at him. The broad brim of his hat hid the upper part of his face, but she could see his small mouth.

His lips were red and full and his chin pointed at her like an accusing finger.

She nodded. “I’ll take you there if you make it worth my while,” she said, then added, “You’re a foreigner, aren’t you?”

“What a clever little girl.” The full red lips smiled. “But you mustn’t waste

my time. Take me to the club and I'll give you a pound."

"Make it two, darling," she returned quickly. "I've had ever such a rotten night."

He pulled off his glove. A large diamond flashed in the moonlight from a ring that he wore on his finger. "Do you know Rollo?" he said, lowering his voice and peering up at her face.

She stiffened and looked suspicious. "Suppose I do?"

"I would like to know something about him." The hand and diamond disappeared inside his coat and came out again holding a thick roll of pound notes.

The blonde woman caught her breath. There must be over a hundred pounds in that roll, she decided.

"I would pay for information," the little man said, looking furtively over his shoulder as if he feared his chauffeur's disapproval. "That is if you know anything worthwhile."

She too looked up and down the street. People were appearing again. Not far off she caught the glint of the steel buttons of a policeman making his lonely patrol.

"You'd better come back to my flat," she said. "We can't talk here."

He shook his head. "We'll go for a little ride," he said and taking her arm he walked with her to the car.

The chauffeur opened the door and they got in.

The blonde woman gave an ecstatic sigh as she sank into the cushioned seat.

It was, she thought, like sitting on a cloud.

The little man, still holding the roll of notes in his left hand, reached with his

right hand for a gold cigarette case which was fitted into a small walnut cabinet by his side.

“Have a cigarette,” he said, looking at her out of the corners of his eyes. He gave her a light from a contraption that glowed red when he touched a switch on the cabinet. Then, as she drew in a lungful of smoke, he said to the chauffeur, “Drive round, but don’t go far.”

“This is marvellous,” the blonde woman said, as the car slid away from the kerb. “I’d give anything for a car like this.”

The little man grunted. “There are other things to talk about,” he said. “You know Rollo?”

She flicked the cigarette, spilling ash on the pile carpet covering the floor of the car. “He doesn’t like being talked about. I’ve got to be careful.”

“It’s all a question of money, isn’t it?” he returned. “Here, perhaps you will have more confidence if you have this.”

He gave her ten one pound notes.

She slid them quickly into her purse, but her eyes never left the roll that remained in his hand. “Yes, I know him,” she said.

“He owns the Gilded Lily Club?”

She nodded.

“What is the club?”

She hesitated. “Well, you know, it’s just a night club. People go there to dance.” She studied the glowing end of her cigarette while she wondered what else she could say without committing herself. “There’s a good band,” she went on.

“It’s ever so expensive. Members only.” You can’t get in without being a member.” She glanced at him and looked away. “I know because I’ve tried.

They don't even allow members to bring guests."

He sat huddled up by her side, motionless, his hands folded on the top of his stick. "Go on," he said when she fell silent.

"Well, what else can I tell you?" Her arm squeezed against the bag with an unconscious protective movement. "You can get a meal there. The sub's stiff. Rollo must make a lot of money out of it." Her voice trailed away as her imagination failed her.

"You've told me nothing I could not have found out by ringing the club," the little man said querulously. "I don't give away money as easily as that. There's more behind the club than what you've told me, What is it?"

"I don't know," she said uneasily. "Mind you, I've heard things, People talk, but I wouldn't like to get anyone into trouble."

"You mean Rollo's a receiver of stolen property and a trafficker in drugs, is that it?"

She sniffed. "Something like that."

The little man did not seem to hear her. He touched a switch at his elbow and spoke into a minute microphone.

"Return."

The Rolls-Royce slowed, stopped, reversed and manoeuvred its long length so that it faced the way it had come. Then in a few minutes it again stopped outside the narrow passage that leads to Shepherd Market.

"Take me to the club," the little man said, getting out of the car.

As the blonde woman passed the chauffeur who was holding open the door she felt him give her a searching glance. She felt too, as she walked into the shadows with the little man, that the chauffeur was staring after her; not knowing why, she shivered.

“Thanks, darling, you’ve been ever so generous. This way. Mind how you fall.”

The street lights threw dim shadows. There were a few dark figures standing in doorways. Most of them were women. The red glow of cigarettes indicated where other people, hidden in the darkness, were standing. A few men loitered in the street, hesitating—suspicious.

Together the blonde woman and the little man walked across the square and through another alley. It was so dark there that the little man paused.

A thread of light stabbed the darkness. He could see now. They were in a narrow passage that was abruptly terminated by a high brick wall. Halfway down the alley was a door set in the wall. In the light of the torch, the little man saw that the paint was peeling from the panels and the great iron knocker was rusty.

“That’s it,” the blonde woman said. “Don’t blame me if they don’t let you in.”

“Thank you,” the little man returned. “You can go now. Thank you very much.”

Rollo—no one had ever heard him called by any other name—was an immense man of fifty odd years. He was four inches over six feet, bulky fat with a great soft egg of a belly and pendant cones for arms and legs. His eyes made small by fat puffs around them were, by turns, bland, shrewd, vicious and lustful. As mall waxed moustache graced his upper lip and his immense fat hands, like bleached spiders, were never still.

No one really knew what Rollo did, apart from owning and directing the Gilded Lily Club. He was suspected of having his fingers in every dubious pie. Some said that he controlled the red light district of Shepherd Market. Some said that he dealt in stolen motor cars or that he was the biggest receiver of stolen property in the country. Others winked knowingly and hinted that his income came from a profitable traffic in drugs, while others whispered, “murder.” But no one really knew.

The Gilded Lily was the most exclusive night club in London. Its six hundred members had one thing in common—they all lived by their wits. Some of them were more dishonest than others, but none of them, even the richest and most influential of them, could ever have been called honest. They ranged from an armament king to a pimp, from a male impersonator to a high-class prostitute, if there is such a thing. Between these degrees of degradation, the club membership consisted of motor car thieves, confidence tricksters, share pushers, society women with kleptomania, blackmailers and drug traffickers and the like. Over them all, Rollo reigned supreme.

The Gilded Lily Club comprised one large ornate room with a surrounding balcony. Only a favoured few ever went up on the balcony. It was Rollo's favourite observation post. Most evenings, soon after midnight, he could be seen, standing with his white, hairy hands on the rail, looking down at the dancers and diners, his little eyes alight with speculation.

Rollo always looked imposing. On his egg-shaped head, which was as hairless and as smooth as a billiard ball, he wore a red Turkish fez. His gross body was dressed in a black cutaway coat, black waistcoat with white piping. A black satin Ascot tie hid his thick neck, striped grey worsted trousers covered his massive legs and patent leather shoes adorned his flat, splayed feet.

As you entered the large room you automatically looked up at the balcony to see if Rollo wished to speak to you. If that was his wish, he would make a sign with his fingers and then disappear into his office.

You would not go up immediately. There was no point in letting everyone know that Rollo wished to talk to you. It usually meant that something was on and that something was best kept a secret." You would go first to the long bar at the far end of the room, order a whisky and speak to the barman. While you drank the whisky you watched the Greek waiters as they served the expensive dinner. Then you would wander down the left-hand aisle between the tables and the miniature dance floor and pause for a moment to listen to the excellent four piece dance band and, perhaps, marvel at the astonishing technique of the negro drummer. Then with all the indifference in the world,

you would step behind a black velvet curtain that concealed the stairs leading to the balcony.

Butch would be there, guarding the staircase. He was a tall, thin creature with a deadpan face, dressed in black, a black slouch hat, black shirt and a white silk tie usually decorated with red and yellow horseshoes. Butch would be leaning against the wall, picking his teeth with a goose quill on the traditional lines of a movie gangster. You would nod to him but he would ignore you and you passed on, knowing that if Rollo did not wish to see you, Butch would be planted before you and in his soft American voice, threatening and cold; he would order you back into the restaurant.

Rollo's office was quite magnificent; oak-panelled, concealed lighting, heavy Persian rugs, a big glass-topped desk, elaborate ornaments, large green leather armchairs and a huge settee.

Rollo would be behind his desk, a big cigar between his large yellow teeth and a sleepy expression on his face. You never saw any papers on his desk. He would simply sit there, his hands folded on the green blotting-paper and stare at you as if he were surprised to see you.

Celie would be standing by the fireplace. She seldom spoke, but her great black eyes missed nothing nor did they leave your face while you were in the room.

Celie was a Creole. She looked like a pale bronze statue. She had big, sultry black eyes, a wide, short chin, cobra-like cheek bones, a mouth like a slashed red fruit. Her figure was outrageous.

She was tall and, as she faced you, she seemed incredibly narrow. In profile, her feminine lines might have been drawn by a lascivious cartoonist. She hid her crinkly black hair in a scarlet turban and no one had ever seen her without some kind of head covering; for Celie was ashamed of her West Indian blood. Her evening gowns were always vividly coloured, cut to emphasize every line of her figure and she disturbed all male visitors with her overpowering sensuality. She was Rollo's mistress.

In this room, with Rollo at his desk and Celie behind him, watching you, you would conduct your business, make plans, agree about money and then go away. You did not know that when you had gone, Rollo would glance over his shoulder and raise his eyebrows. Then Celie would say whether you were to be trusted or not. She had an uncanny gift of reading men's thoughts and many a time she had warned Rollo to take care. It was not easy to double-cross Rollo. In fact those few who had been foolish enough to try, had invariably come off second best. One or two of them had been fished out of the lower reaches of the Thames by the river police, while others, less dangerous, had been rushed to Charing Cross hospital with cracked skulls. It was considered extremely unhealthy to double-cross Rollo and once it became known, few, if any, tried it on.

A tap sounded on the door and Butch came in.

Rollo said, "What is it?"

"There's a guy asking for you," Butch said, his eyes straying for a moment to Celie and then back to Rollo. "I've never seen him before. He's not a member."

"What does he want?"

"He didn't say."

"I don't want to see him."

Butch nodded. "He guessed that." He took an envelope from his pocket. "He said he wanted you to have this."

Rollo's eyebrows went up. He took the envelope and glanced at Celie, then he opened the envelope and pulled out a treasury note.

There was a sudden silence in the room. The faint sound of the dance band drifted up from the restaurant.

Rollo unfolded the note and spread it out on the blotter.

“A hundred pounds.”

Butch and Celie leaned forward.

“A hundred pounds,” Rollo repeated and pushed back his chair. He picked up the envelope and glanced inside. “A nice visiting card.” He touched the treasury note with his fingertips. “Who is he?”

Butch shrugged. “A little guy, well dressed, rich looking.”

Rollo picked up the treasury note, held it up to the light, grunted. “I’ll see him,” he said. “I might want to know something about him. If I ring twice, follow him. Find out who he is.”

Butch nodded and went away.

“A hundred pounds,” Celie said softly and moved to her position by the fireplace. “I wonder what he wants.”

Rollo lifted his great shoulders. “We shall see,” he said, and folding the treasury note, he slipped it into his waistcoat pocket.

They remained motionless, staring at the door.

Butch came in again. He stood on one side and the little man who had come in the Rolls-Royce took off his hat.

Rollo regarded him with carefully concealed interest.

The little man crossed the room. “My name,” he said, “is Dupont. I wanted to see you.”

Rollo rose to his feet. “You have an expensive way of introducing yourself,” he said. “Sit down, Mr. Dupont.”

Butch glanced at Rollo and then went out. The door closed silently.

The little man sat down. He looked at Celie and his deepset eyes glowed.

“Perhaps we might be alone,” he said to Rollo.

Rollo lowered his bulk into his chair again. “We are alone, Mr. Dupont,” he said.

There was a long pause. Celie remained like a pale bronze statue, her eyes on Mr. Dupont.

“You wanted to see me,” Rollo said at last. “Why?”

Mr. Dupont folded his hands on top of his stick. “I have heard about you,” he said, his eyes still on Celie. “You may be able to help me.”

“It is not my habit to help people,” Rollo said frankly. “I have many things which occupy me.”

“I should be prepared to buy your help.”

Rollo spread his hands. “That is different.”

Again there was a long pause, Mr. Dupont nibbled the top of his stick, reluctant to commit himself, uncertain of Celie, aware of her disturbing gaze.

“It would, I think, be better if we were alone.”

“You mustn’t mind Celie,” Rollo said. “She is important to me.” He smiled. “She knows no English.”

Mr. Dupont was not deceived by the lie, but he decided that he could not afford to be too particular.

“Very well,” he said, putting his stick on the floor beside him. “What I have to say is, of course, in confidence.”

“Of course.”

Mr. Dupont examined his fingernails for a moment. “I am interested in voodooism’ he said.

“You are interested in—what?” Rollo asked, leaning forward, his hands spread out on the green blotter.

Mr. Dupont did not meet his eyes. “Voodooism,” he repeated, his voice low and suppressed.

Rollo’s face took on a dusky, purple hue. His little eyes snapped angrily, but he was still cautious. His instinct told him that the hundred pound treasury note was one of many. If this odd little man wished to make a fool of him he could do so—at a price.

“I don’t understand,” he said, gently.

“I wish to be put in touch with someone who knows about voodooism,” Mr. Dupont said, fiddling with his gloves. “I thought perhaps you might know. I would pay for information.”

Rollo had only a vague idea what voodooism meant. He most certainly had no idea whether anyone in his unusual circle knew any more about it than he did, but since there was money to be made from this extraordinary request, he was not prepared to turn it away.

“There’s not much I don’t know,” he said, looking at Mr. Dupont with an encouraging smile. “But before I commit myself, perhaps you would care to give me more details?”

“I don’t think that is necessary,” Mr. Dupont said, a little curtly. “You either know or do not know anyone who understands the ritual ceremonies of voodooism. If you know, tell me who it is and I will pay you. If you do not know, then we are wasting time.”

“It is not a cult that is encouraged in this country,” Rollo said, feeling his way,” unsure of himself. “I should have to know why you wished such a thing.” He raised his shoulders apologetically. “One has to be careful.”

“Shall we say one thousand pounds and no questions?” Mr. Dupont asked, looking at Rollo fixedly.

Rollo had difficulty in controlling his surprise, but he succeeded. “That is a lot of money,” he said. “Yes, perhaps I can help you.”

“Very well, give me the name and address of this person and I will give you the money. Nothing could be more simple.”

Rollo mentally agreed that it was simple enough if he knew this person’s name and address. Unfortunately, he did not.

This situation would need a little generalship.

“There is a man,” he began, weighing his words carefully, “who understands voodooism. He has produced some extraordinary results.” He paused and touched his waxed moustache. “Some extraordinary results,” he repeated to give himself confidence. “I know him well. In fact, I was only talking to him yesterday. Wasn’t I, my dove?”

Celie said nothing.

“What results?” Mr. Dupont asked quickly. “You mean materialization?”

This was beyond Rollo’s knowledge or imagination. He waved his hands airily. “I don’t think he would like me to give away confidences,” he said, “but if I could interest him in helping you, then I am positive he would be the right choice.”

“His name?” Mr. Dupont was sitting forward. His gloves slipped off his small bony knees on to the floor. He did not notice them.

“I must speak to him first,” Rollo said. “He may not care for me to reveal his identity. You understand?”

Mr. Dupont sat back. His small, elfish face revealed his disappointment.

“Yes,” he said, after a moment’s thought. “That is reasonable.” He stood up. “You will consult him and I will come again.”

Rollo looked up searchingly. “But you haven’t told me what you want him to

do?”

“Tell him that I am interested in seeing the ceremonial ritual performed. It will be carried out in the strictest privacy but it must include zombiism. Tell him that. He will understand. The fee will be a large one.”

Rollo searched in his waistcoat pocket and found a pencil. He wrote zombiism on his blotter. That was a word he had never heard of, nor could he guess its meaning.

“What would the fee be?” he asked. “Forgive my curiosity, but a large fee to some might be a small fee to others.”

Again Mr. Dupont ducked his head in agreement, “Ten thousand pounds,” he said, his full red lips twitching. “But it would have to be successful for that amount of money.”

Rollo’s eyes showed respect. Obviously this little man was going to be worth cultivating.

“Thursday this time?” he said, standing up. “I will have the man here—if he agrees.”

Mr. Dupont nodded. “It is understood?” he asked. “A thousand pounds for you for the introduction. Ten thousand pounds for him for the work?”

Rollo kept his fat face expressionless. “It is understood.”

Mr. Dupont held out his hand. “May I have my visiting card back?” he said softly. “I merely used it to gain an entrance.”

Not for one second did Rollo hesitate. He took the folded note from his pocket and handed it to the little man. It was like drawing one of his great yellow teeth, but Rollo knew instinctively that it was worth the gamble. If the little man did not trust him then he would never see him again, and Rollo was most anxious to see him again.

Mr. Dupont went to the door, opened it and went out. They heard him walk down the corridor that led to the restaurant.

“He is mad,” Celie said. “Did you see his eyes? He is quite insane.”

Rollo lifted his shoulders. “I thought so too,” he said, “but he is rich,” and he put his great thumb on the bell push on his desk and rang twice.

* * *

Susan Hedder walked down Shaftesbury Avenue and paused at the corner of Denman Street as a taxi cautiously edged into the stream of traffic flowing towards Leicester Square.

A man said out of the darkness, “Hello, girlie, going my way?”

Susan ignored him and as the traffic lights turned from green to red, she crossed the street and walked on towards Piccadilly. Eight men had said precisely the same thing to her during the past hour. It was her own fault. She must stop this aimless walking. She must go home. Home? She thought of the small bed-sitting-room on the top floor of an old-fashioned house in Fulham Road. You couldn’t really call that home. Until tonight, she had regarded it only as a place where she kept her things and where she slept, but now it was all she had got. The home she had planned and which seemed, a few hours ago, so certain had vanished with the coming of the letter. But she wasn’t going to think about the letter. There would be plenty of time to think about that later on. So far as she could see, she could read the letter and think about it every night for the rest of her life. Tonight, she wasn’t going to think about it.

But she couldn’t go on walking the streets. It was getting late. Besides she had been walking now for two hours and her legs were aching. She felt if she went back to her room, away from the glittering Sights, the noise of the

traffic and the bustling surge of people she would start thinking. Tonight she just could not bear to be alone and that was what it meant if she went back to her room. She knew eventually that she would have to go back, but she wanted to postpone that moment for as long as she could.

She was tired. The man who had spoken to her was walking a few paces behind her. He had a dragging step as if one of his legs was shorter than the other. She knew without looking round that he was following her. She wasn't alarmed because there were so many people about, but all the same it was a nuisance to hear this persistent shuffling behind her and to know that he thought she was a likely "pick-up."

She followed the gradual curve past the Monico into Glasshouse Street.

That, of course, was a mistake because

Glasshouse Street was dark and a haunt for "pickups." The man kept close behind her and she quickened her step, annoyed that she should have so deliberately left the safety of Piccadilly. A snack bar a few yards up the street offered the solution. Without pausing, she walked straight in and shut the door in the man's face. She did not look back, but she could feel his frustrated gaze boring into the back of her head.

It was hot and a little steamy in the cafe. The place was fairly full and every table was occupied. She looked round uncomfortably aware that most of the people looked at her either curiously or with vague interest. She hastily sat down at a table whose occupant paid her no attention. This man was reading the Evening News and he held it open so that she could not see him. All she could see was the paper and the two black gauntleted hands that held it open.

A waitress said coldly, "We're closing."

Susan looked at her, feeling suddenly exhausted. The bright light and the steamy heat of the place seemed to absorb all her remaining energy. The back of her legs ached and her body felt as if it were dissolving into a pool of lassitude.

“Oh, I thought—I just wanted a cup of coffee,” she said, thinking that the waitress’s face looked like a suet pudding.

“We’re closing,” the waitress repeated inexorably.

Susan thought, I must rest. I just can’t go out into that street again, anyway not for a moment. He’ll be out there, waiting to follow me. But she saw people were watching her, and she was frightened of the waitress, who looked tired and ill—tempered. I know she’ll make a scene if I don’t go, she thought dismally. So she picked up her bag which she had placed on the marble topped table and pushed back her chair.

“There’s still twenty minutes before you shut,” a soft, timbreless voice said. “Give her a coffee.”

Both Susan and the waitress glanced at the man who was sitting at the table.

He had lowered the newspaper and was staring at the waitress with bleak, grey eyes.

The waitress opened her mouth to repeat that the cafe was closing, but she changed her mind. There was something about the man’s thin, white face that made her uneasy. She couldn’t say what it was, except, perhaps, that his will was stronger than hers. Somehow she felt that if she did not serve the coffee he would go on and on at her until she did so, even if he stayed there all night.

She went to the counter, drew coffee from the urn and came back. She slapped the cup and saucer down in front of Susan and stood over her while she scrawled a bill. Then she went away.

While she did these things, the man watched her, his newspaper still open, but lowered. When she had gone away, he compressed his lips, grunted and hid himself behind the newspaper again.

Susan sat looking at the thin, steaming coffee, feeling that everyone was staring at her and not sure whether she ought to thank the man for coming to

her assistance. Obviously he had no interest in her because not once had he looked at her.

While he was watching the waitress, Susan had examined him. He was in chauffeur's uniform, well fitting, expensive, smart.

The peaked cap was pulled down over his eyes, but she could see his face well enough. He was young—she guessed he was her age— twenty-one. His features were small and regular. His skin was very fair. His black eyebrows looked out of place against the fairness of his skin.

His grey eyes under somewhat long curling lashes held her attention. They were hard, experienced eyes. They frightened her.

She stirred the coffee, wishing in a way that he would lower the newspaper.

It would be so much easier just to thank him and then dismiss him. Somehow this newspaper barrier made things not only difficult but, oddly enough, rather mysterious.

She decided that she wouldn't say anything.

She opened her bag and took out the letter. She looked at the crabbed, immature writing and she thought of all the other letters she had received. It had brought her no joy. She thought dully that it was a pity it had to be the last letter she was to have from him as all the other letters had been so loving.

He had tried to be kind and let her down lightly, but he had only succeeded in being stilted and insincere. Of course, she knew he was fond of his mother, but why hadn't he thought of that before?

"I've decided it wouldn't be fair to mother," he had written. "It's a question of waiting until I earn more and it may be a long time. I don't think I ought to ask you to wait all that time.. .She couldn't read any more just then, the writing suddenly became blurred, and she folded the letter carefully and put it in her bag. She was aware of a tear that rolled down her cheek and splashed into her coffee.

She became aware of the chauffeur again. He was watching her. He sat with his back to the wall, holding the newspaper so that only she could see him.

“It won’t get you anywhere,” he said, his lips scarcely moving. “It never does.”

She felt blood rush to her face and for one horrible moment she thought she was going to burst into uncontrolled tears.

“You’re soft,” the chauffeur went on, his bleak, grey eyes never leaving her face. “I suppose you’re howling over some man. Well, don’t. It doesn’t get you anywhere.”

“Please mind your own business,” she said, suddenly angry and she turned her head so that she need not look at him.

“That’s better,” he said. “That shows you’ve got spirit. Only don’t tell me what’s wrong. I don’t want to hear.”

“Please don’t speak to me,” she said, her tears and self-pity forgotten.

“I want you to help me,” he said. “It’s important.” She turned back so that she could look at him. “I don’t know who you think you’re talking to . . .” she began, her eyes flashing.

He made an impatient movement with his head.

“Let me do the talking,” he said. “You’re all right. I know girls. You’re the right sort of girl. You’ve had a knock, but that doesn’t matter. You’ll get over it.”

She picked up her bag. “I’m going,” she said. “I don’t let strange men talk to me.”

“I got you that coffee, didn’t I?” he returned, staring at her. “Can’t you do something for me in return?”

She felt his eyes boring into her and through his eyes she felt the strength of

his will. It made her feel weak “I don’t know what you mean.”

“Well, shut up talking and give me a chance. There’s a man sitting at the left-hand table at the far end of the room. He’s wearing a black shirt and a white tie. Is he still there?”

She glanced over her shoulder.

A man was sitting at the left-hand table at the far end of the room. He did wear a black shirt and a white tie. His black slouch hat was pushed to the back of his head. In a vague way, he reminded her of Humphrey Bogart.” He was looking in her direction in a disinterested detached way.

“Yes,” she said, wondering what all this meant.

The chauffeur compressed his lips. “He’s following me,” he confided after a moment’s hesitation. “If ever you follow anyone don’t wear clothes that shriek. I noticed that tie half an hour ago, It’s been following me ever since.”

“It’s nothing to do with me,” Susan said, a little bewildered. She drank her coffee and opened her bag.

“It could be,” the chauffeur said. “You’ve had a knock. This is the way to forget it. I want to know who that man is. Will you follow him for me?”

She was so surprised she could only stare at him. “Give you some excitement,” the chauffeur went on. “He wouldn’t expect you. I’d make it worth your while.” He took out a thin packet of pound notes and pushed them across the table.

“Ten pounds,” he went on. “It’s easy money.”

She drew back. “I think you must be mad,” she said, feeling a sudden excitement. “I wouldn’t dream of doing such a thing.”

“Yes, you would,” he returned, looking at the newspaper with a frown on his thin, white face. “I don’t make mistakes. A moment ago you were thinking

you'd make a hole in the river." Now, you've almost forgotten what you were howling about. This will round off the night."

She said reluctantly, "But I've never followed anyone before."

"It's easy," he said, still seemingly absorbed in his newspaper. "He's got a car. It's a big green Packard. XLA3578. He's left it at the top of the street. All you have to do is to get in the back and put the rug over you. There's a rug in the back—I've seen it. He'll follow my car and then go back to Shepherd Market. At least I think that's where he'll go, but I want to be sure. It'll be a night out for you."

"I'm not going to do it," Susan said. "He might find me. Then what would happen? Besides, I don't like the look of him."

"Nor do I," the chauffeur said, "but he won't find you. He'd never think of looking. Can't you see that? You better make up your mind. We can't stay here all night."

"No," she said. "It's too ridiculous."

He looked at her. "It's exciting," he said simply. "You don't look as if you've ever had any real excitement. You're the sort of girl who needs it."

I don't know about that, Susan thought, her heart beating rapidly, but tonight I do need something. It would be better than going back to my room.

"Who is he?" she said. "Who are you? Why is he following you?"

The chauffeur rattled the paper impatiently. "Never mind all that," he said. "When you have followed him, we'll meet and talk about it. There's no time to waste now."

"But I 'm not going to follow him," Susan said weakly.

"Ten pounds," the chauffeur urged. "I 'll engage you for the work. Imagine you're a detective."

She giggled. This was really too absurd.

“Do you think I look like a detective?”

“That’s why you’re going to be good,” he said. “No one would suspect you.”

He pushed the notes further across the table, screening the move from everyone by the newspaper. “Don’t be a fool. You can use the money. Look upon it as a job.”

She could use the money all right, she told herself. Jobs didn’t hang on trees. Yes, ten pounds would be useful.

She glanced across at the man in the black shirt. He was lighting a cigarette, not looking in their direction. He looked ruthless and unpleasantly like an American gangster. She shivered, suddenly tense with excitement. She wondered what George would have said if he knew what she was going to do. Poor George who hated her to walk down Fulham Road in the dark. She wished George and his mother were in the cafe. The thought of their shocked horror finally decided her.

“All right,” she said, “I’ll do it,” and immediately regretted saying so.

The chauffeur looked at her. “You could say that, take the money and go home, couldn’t you?”

She faced him. “Yes, I could.”

He eyed her for a moment of time. “But you wouldn’t. Some girls would, but you wouldn’t. I know girls. You’re the right sort.”

Somehow she was flattered, although she knew she ought to have been angry.

“All right,” he said. “Meet me somewhere tomorrow. Outside the Green Man on Putney Hill. Ten o’clock. All right?”

She began to say that she had to look for a job tomorrow but stopped herself in time. She would look for a job in the afternoon, she decided. “All right.”

“A green Packard. XLA3578. At the top of the street. I’ll give you three minutes start and then I’ll come on. He’ll follow me.”

She picked up the notes and put them into her bag. I can’t believe this is going to happen, she thought. I do hope I’m not being stupid. I do hope it will work out all right. She got to her feet and went over to the counter. The waitress took her three-pence and threw the three coppers into the till. She slammed the till drawer as if to say “and good riddance.”

Susan looked back over her shoulder. The chauffeur still hid behind the Evening News. The man in the black shirt was yawning and looking irritably up at the ceiling. There was nothing to show that anything extraordinary was about to happen.

She opened the door and stepped into the street.

I think you had better go home, she said to herself. You don’t know who these men are. You’ll probably be sorry in a little while that you had anything to do with them. There’s still time to give him back his money. There’s still time to catch a 14 bus outside Simpson’s.

But she only hesitated a moment, then aware of a wildly beating heart, she walked up the street in search of the green Packard.

* * *

Butch—his proper name was Mike Egan—drove along the darkened Thames Embankment, his big muscular hands resting on the steering wheel; a cigarette hung limply from his thin lips.

He decided that it had been a pretty good evening. A glance at the dashboard clock showed that it was a few minutes after twelve thirty. Still time to take

care of his private affairs, he told himself. He had managed to give Celie the high sign. She knew what that meant. She'd find a way to ditch the old buzzard and be over at her Mews apartment by the time he got there.

Butch pushed his hat to the back of his head and grunted. Celie was all right.

She'd got a head on her. She was a looker too. Odd that he never considered her as "coloured." Very odd considering how he hated niggers. Take that dinge Gilroy, the drummer at the Gilded Lily. Butch's mouth tightened. Back in the States he would have taken him for a one-way ride. Here, it didn't pay to take guys for a ride. These coppers in their funny helmets were dynamite, so he had heard. Anyway, Rollo thought so and Rollo wasn't the kind who scared easily. Shoot a guy in this country and they hanged you. He shook his head. Some country!

So long as he stayed in this country he would have to be content with Celie when he wanted sensation. He got two separate and distinct bangs out of his association with her. One was Celie herself. An affair with her was like an affair with a tigress. She was likely to sink her nails into your neck if she was in that kind of a mood. Then there was Rollo.

Rollo kidded himself that Celie regarded him as a god; that her whole world revolved around him and that there never could be any other man in her life. That was a laugh. Butch didn't kid himself that he was the only other man in Celie's life. He was too smart for that. He knew the way things were; although she never talked and he didn't ask questions.

There were nights when he gave her the high sign and she just looked blankly through him, her dark eyes expressionless as wet stones. Some other guy, he would think, and grin. She was certainly stacking the deck against Rollo.

Yes, he got a bang out of cheating Rollo. The guy was dangerous. Butch admired him because he wasn't like Legs Diamond or Al Capone or Bugs Moran.

He slowed down as he came to Victoria station and then opened up again once he was clear of the omnibuses that were pulling out of the station yard

on their last journey for the night. He kept on up Grosvenor Place, past Constitution Hill and into Piccadilly.

He nodded to himself. Just about right, he thought as he turned into Berkeley Street. He touched the accelerator pedal and the big Packard swept up the street with a rush. Then he braked and edged cautiously into Bruton Place, drove a few yards down the dark mews and stopped.

He leaned out of the car window and glanced up at the garage apartment. A light came through a chink in the curtain and he grunted with approval. She was there.

Even then, he did not immediately get out. There were certain moves in the game that had to be observed. Moves that excited and amused him.

He touched the horn button lightly, paused and then touched it again. The deep note of the horn made only a choked, faint splutter, but it was enough. Celie had learned to listen for this sound.

He leaned out of the car window again and waited. The curtains opened and then closed. That was the signal which told him she was alone.

He grinned, opened the car door and slid out. While he was opening the double garage doors, he remembered the time when the curtains had not moved. It had only happened once, but it showed how careful they had to be. Rollo had insisted on returning with Celie that night and if they had not arranged the curtain signal weeks before, Butch would have walked in on them. It would have been a sweet situation to try to explain away.

He went back to the Packard, drove into the big garage, snapped off the headlights and turned off the ignition. Then he got out of the car, shut the garage doors from the inside and turned on the electric light by the door that led to the apartment.

Whistling softly he climbed the almost vertical stairs to the little hall which was panelled in oak and carpeted with an ivory-coloured, fitted carpet that was as springy to the tread as a lush lawn.

On a richly carved ebony pedestal stood an obscene bronze statue of a woman. It never failed to make Butch blink and he had often asked Celie to get rid of it. But she wouldn't. She said it amused her.

Butch hung his hat on the statue and wandered into the front room which Celie used as her bedroom.

Celie was lying across the bed. She wore flame-coloured satin pyjamas and a heavy gold bracelet on her wrist and gold sandals on her feet. Her head was covered by a little bathing cap affair made of white silk. On any other woman it would have looked ridiculous, but it suited Celie.

Butch took out a packet of Camels, shook two cigarettes out on to the cream corduroy bedspread, put the packet back into his pocket and offered one to Celie.

When they had lit up, he said, "That's Kester Weidmann, the millionaire."

Celie's eyes opened a shade. "Are you sure?"

Butch nodded.

"Rollo will be pleased."

"What's the idea? What did he want?"

She rolled on to her back and stared up at the ceiling. It was an ornate affair, deep blue with large silver stars. Celie suffered from claustrophobia and she liked to think she was looking at the sky when she was in bed.

"He's crazy," she said. "Did you know? Insane. I could tell that by his eyes."

Butch reached out and touched her shoulder, but she pushed his hand away.

He grimaced and shrugged.

"What's on your mind, Celie?"

“Kester Weidmann,” she said softly.

“Open up, will you?” he said, a little sharply. “What’s cooking? What did Weidmann want with Rollo?”

She smiled secretively. “Why don’t you ask Rollo?”

He reached out and taking her arm, pulled her roughly towards him. “I’m asking you.”

A small coffee-coloured claw flashed towards his face, but he was expecting it. He caught her wrist and held her, grinning down at her.

“Cut it out, honey,” he said. “You know it don’t pay to get tough with me.”

“Let me go.”

He looked down at her, seeing the spiteful, furious look in her eyes and her white, even teeth as she drew her lips back like a snarling cat.

“Aw, you’re nuts,” he said, letting her go and getting to his feet. “Why the hell are we always fighting? Ain’t there enough trouble without you and me going on like a couple of savages?” He wandered to the fireplace and put his elbows on the mantelpiece, staring at his lined, hard face in the mirror.

“What are you sore about anyway?”

She rolled over on her back again and rubbed her arm where he had held her.

“I’m not sore.”

He grinned at himself in the mirror. “Okay, you’re not sore,” he said, turning.

“Well, come on. Don’t be mysterious. What did Weidmann want?”

“He’s crazy,” she said, “Something about voodooism. I didn’t pay much attention.”

Butch suddenly knelt across her on the bed. He caught her two wrists and pinned her arms to the corduroy bedspread.

“Like hell you didn’t,” he said, his face cold and forbidding. “You never miss a thing. What are you up to? Trying to play it on your own?”

She stared back at him, making no attempt to free herself. “Don’t be so suspicious,” she said and smiled. “I tell you he’s crazy. I’m not interested in crazy people.”

“Well, I am,” Butch said, still keeping her pinned to the bed. “What’s this about—what did you say it was?”

She made a little face. “Voodooism.”

“That’s not a word—it’s a noise. What the hell does it mean?”

“To do with the occult.” She was laughing at him now.

“Occult?” Lines appeared on his forehead. “What’s that?”

“Don’t you know anything?”

“Never mind that. Tell me.”

“It’s to do with the supernatural.”

Butch released her and stood away. There was disgust on his face. “If you’re kidding me . . .” he began.

She sat up and yawned. “He wanted Rollo to find him someone who knows about voodooism.”

“Rollo tell him to go to hell?”

She shook her head. “Rollo’s smart. He’s going to fix something. Eleven thousand pounds is the rakeoff.”

Butch sucked in his breath sharply. “That’s a lot of dough,” he said. “He must be awfully interested in this voodoo stuff.”

Celie got to her feet and wandered over to the dressing table. “He is,” she said quietly. “So am I.”

“Anything in it for us?”

“Eleven thousand pounds.”

“I mean—us. You and me.” She pursed her lips. “I don’t know.”

“Then you’d better start thinking. We’ve been looking for a break like this, haven’t we?”

She touched her face with a powder puff and then turned. “This isn’t right for us.”

“Sure?”

She nodded. “Rollo can handle it—but you couldn’t.”

Butch thought for a moment. “Yeah, I guess that’s right,” he said. “Maybe we can horn in when Rollo’s got started. Eleven thousand pounds would be nice pickings.”

She smiled secretively to herself. “We’ll have to wait a little while,” she said and yawned again.

He looked at her sharply. “Making out you’re tired?”

She nodded. “Very tired.”

He came towards her, but her hand went up, stopping him.

“Not tonight,” she said.

“You’ve got something on your mind,” he returned, staring intently at her.

“You wouldn’t be thinking of double-crossing me, would you?”

Her eyes went empty. “Don’t be so suspicious.”

A hard smile lifted the corners of his mouth. “I’ve taken a lot from you, Celie,” he said softly. “But I’m not grumbling. I want you to know that I’m wise to your boyfriends and I don’t give a damn. But when the time comes for me to break from Rollo, you’re coming with me. You and me are in this together and it’ll be too bad if you try anything funny.” He rubbed the side of his nose with his forefinger. “Too bad for you,” he added, a little unnecessarily.

“Goodnight, Mike,” Celie said, not moving, her eyes watchful. “And don’t be so suspicious.”

Butch grinned. ‘I’ll go in a little while,” he said.

Susan Hedder, crouching at the foot of the stairs, heard the sound that an open hand makes when it slaps flesh. She heard a thud that a body makes when it falls heavily to the floor. Then she put her hands over her ears to shut out the half-animal sounds that followed.

chapter two

Doc Martin thumbed the bell push set in the glittering brass disc and waited. There was scarcely a pause between the distant sound of the bell and the door opening.

Long Tom, Rollo's man, a lean, elderly creature, servile and shifty, eyed the Doc with startled curiosity.

"You're early," he said, blocking the doorway. "He can't be disturbed at this hour. Blimey! He'd create old 'Arry."

Doc Martin snorted. "Get out of the way, my man," he snapped querulously.

"Your master sent for me." He pushed his way past Long Tom and hung his battered trilby hat on the hallstand.

"What's the matter with him? Isn't he well?"

Long Tom eyed Doc Martin doubtfully. "He's all right," he returned. There was a wistful note in his voice as he spoke.

"He always is. Well, if he sent for you, you'd better go up."

Doc Martin granted. "Just like him to call me at this hour. Doesn't he ever sleep? It's not nine-thirty yet, is it?" He scowled at the hall clock. "All right, all right, I'll go up. I suppose he's still in bed?"

"He is," Long Tom said, "and he's busy stuffing his guts."

Doc Martin walked briskly up the broad stairs, along the corridor to Rollo's bedroom and rapped on the door.

He found Rollo propped up in a gigantic bed. His great, thick body was

supported by a number of pillows and across his knees lay a large bedtray. He glanced up as Doc Martin came in, nodded his bald head in greeting and pointed with a fish fork to a chair by the bed.

“Sit down, Doc,” he said. “Have some coffee?”

“No, thanks,” Doc said and then added wistfully, “I wish I could eat like that. I can’t look at any food until lunchtime and even then I haven’t any appetite.”

Rollo poured coffee into his cup. “You’ve probably got an ulcer,” he said indifferently. “But never mind that. I want to talk to you.”

Doc leaned forward. Small and compactly built, he had a big, dome-shaped head. His deepset eyes were restless, old and bitter. His long, thin nose hinted of an aristocratic birth and his thin lips and square chin revealed his strength of character.

There was a time, some fifteen years ago, when Doc Martin had a practice in Harley Street, but in a moment of reckless compassion he had helped a young woman and things had gone wrong.

Now, at the age of sixty-five, Doc Martin was on Rollo’s payroll. He not only served as the physician to the Gilded Lily—it was a useful acquisition to have a medical man on the premises who did not ask questions—but he also gave Rollo the benefit of his remarkable general knowledge and high standard of education, something which Rollo had not had the time to acquire.

Doc Martin had a lot of time on his hands. He used this time to keep his fund of knowledge up-to-date and quite recently he had increased his value to Rollo by making a study of the various members of the club. Doc Martin had completed full dossiers of nearly all of them and these dossiers were at the disposal of Rollo whenever he needed such information.

Doc Martin was now turning his attention to Rollo’s staff and his immediate discoveries were so startling that he had decided not to let Rollo know what he was doing. He felt that such tramp cards might stand him in good stead if he ever crossed swords with Butch or, for that matter, with the beautiful and

fascinating Celie. Doc Martin had found out that Celie and Butch were double-crossing Rollo and the old man had not the nerve to touch off the powder barrel of Rollo's fury by telling him.

As he sat on the edge of his chair, his small bony hands clasped on his knee, Doc Martin wondered uneasily if Rollo suspected what was going on, but Rollo's first words reassured him.

"What do you know about voodooism, Doc?" Rollo asked, holding a large piece of salmon on his fork and eyeing it greedily.

Only for a moment did Doc show his surprise, then he said, "It's a religious cult practised by the natives of the West Indies—witchcraft and that kind of stuff."

A look of grudging admiration showed in Rollo's eyes. "I thought you'd know," he said. "Not much you don't know, is there?"

Doc shrugged a little impatiently. He was used to surprising Rollo with his knowledge. At one time it had amused him, now it rather bored him.

"And zombiism—know about that too?"

"Animating the dead," Doc replied promptly, wondering a little uneasily where all this was leading to. "It's a branch of voodoo," Doc explained, leaning back in his chair and closing his eyes. He felt tired and his eyes ached. "The natives believe it happens, but I assure you it's so much ridiculous nonsense."

"Never mind how ridiculous it is," Rollo said, thinking of the eleven thousand pounds he had been promised. "What happens? Explain the thing to me."

"I had a friend once," Doc returned, "who lived for a long time in Haiti. He told me about the zombies. He actually saw some—or so he said. A zombie is supposed to be a soulless human corpse, taken from the grave and endowed by witchcraft with a mechanical semblance of Life." It's a dead body which

is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive.” Doc glanced quickly at Rollo’s astonished face and smiled. “I told you it was ridiculous nonsense.”

“Yes,” Rollo said uneasily. “That’s beyond me.”

He brooded for a moment. “What happens to these— these zombies? I mean, suppose we believe that such a thing happens, what do they do?”

“The natives who have the power to animate dead bodies,” Doc returned, beginning to enjoy himself, “or shall I say the natives who are supposed to have this power, go to a grave, dig up the body before it has time to rot, galvanize it into motion and then make it their slave. Usually a zombie does all the dirty and hard work in the fields while its keeper draws its wages. It has been known, so my friend told me, for a zombie to be made to commit murder.”

“How are they supposed to come alive?” Rollo asked, pushing his plate away and reaching for some toast.

Doc pursed his lips. “No one can tell you that,” he returned. “That is a voodoo secret.”

“That’s something you’ve got to find out,” Rollo said, piling butter and marmalade on his toast. He bit into the soggy mess and chewed contentedly.

Doc gave a short, hard laugh. “It can’t be done,” he said.

Rollo glanced at him, saw he meant it and sighed. “It’s a pity,” he said, “but if you say so, I suppose—”

“You have a good reason for asking?” Doc said, his curiosity getting the better of him.

“Yes.” Rollo finished his toast and wiped his thick fingers on his serviette.

The two men looked at each other.

“If there isn’t anything else,” Doc said softly, “I think I’ll be getting along.

I've got some reading to do." But he made no move to get to his feet.

Rollo sighed. He regretfully decided that he would have to tell Doc.

"Don't be in such a hurry," he said. "I've been given a commission. You can help."

Doc Martin smiled. "Anything I can do," he said, waving his small hands.

"I know." Rollo had difficulty in hiding a sneer. "It'll cost me plenty, but you'll do what you can."

Doc Martin wasn't offended. He smiled again. "I have to live," he said, rather unnecessarily. "Experts are always expensive. What is it?"

Rollo told him about Kester Weidmann's visit, but he did not mention the eleven thousand pounds.

"Butch find out who he was?" Doc asked.

Rollo hesitated. "Yes," he said. "He phoned me this morning. It's Kester Weidmann."

Doc Martin drew in a sharp breath. "The international banker?" he said, leaning forward. "He's worth millions."

"I know," Rollo said sadly. "That's why I want your help." He stared at Doc for a second. "He's mad. Did you know?"

Doc frowned. "Are you sure?"

Rollo nodded. "No doubt about it. He's as mad as a hatter."

Doc got to his feet and began to pace the large room. He had difficulty in suppressing his excitement.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked abruptly.

Rollo pulled at his underlip. "We have got to find someone who knows about voodooism," he said. "That's the first thing."

Doc Martin came to the foot of the bed and rested his hands on the walnut bedpost. "What's it worth?" he demanded, his eyes glittering.

Rollo thought quickly. Doc was too smart to be fobbed off with a hundred or so. He decided that he would have to make a sacrifice. "A thousand to you," he said.

Doc Martin smiled. "That wouldn't interest me," he returned. "This business is likely to be very difficult. I'm too old to bother with small stuff now. No, I wouldn't do it for that."

Rollo pushed the tray off his knees with sudden vicious impatience. "You'll take what you get and like it," he snapped.

Doc Martin shook his head. "No," he repeated calmly. "This is something you can't do yourself. You must be fair."

Rollo glared at him, but Doc did not flinch. "How much?" he asked angrily. "How much do you want?"

"A third," Doc returned. "That's fair. It'll be big pickings. The more I get for you, the more I get for myself."

Rollo relaxed back on his pillows. "You'd better be careful," he said slowly. "I can do without you, Doc. I can throw you back where I found you."

"I don't think so," Doc returned, walking with stiff, uneasy steps to the chair and sitting down. "I'm useful to you. You can trust me." He glanced at his fingernails and then looked up quickly. "I am, perhaps, the only one you can trust."

"What do you mean?" Rollo demanded, immediately suspicious.

"I am old," Doc returned. "It doesn't pay old people to be disloyal Young

people are different. They have their lives ahead of them.”

Rollo leaned forward, his fat face congested. “What do you know? What are you hinting at?”

Doc shook his head. “Nothing.” He looked away, wondering if he had said too much. “I was just saying you can trust me.”

“Don’t you think I can trust Butch?”

Doc smiled secretively. “I don’t know anything about Butch. I don’t think I want to.”

Rollo stared at him for a long time, but Doc did not lower his eyes. Rollo leaned back on his pillows again and grunted.

“You be careful,” he said, as if he were thinking aloud. “One of these days you’ll open your trap once too often.”

“I’ll be careful,” Doc returned, delighted to see that he had made Rollo uneasy. “We agree then—a third?”

“A quarter,” Rollo growled without much hope.

“A third.”

“Weidmann’s coming tomorrow,” Rollo reminded him. “We must be ready.”

Doc got to his feet. “We will,” he said.

“A millionaire and a lunatic. A delightful combination. This may mean anything. You realize that?” Rollo grunted.

“I wonder if you do,” Doc said, staring at him. “I wonder if your mind is big enough. It could be a million, you know.”

Rollo’s eyes darkened. What was the old fool talking about? He was crazy. The most he hoped for was eleven thousand pounds.

“A million?” he repeated. “Where do you get that talk from?”

Doc drew a deep breath. “I understand lunatics,” he said gently. “Properly handled they are easy to milk. Weidmann is worth at least three million, if not more. If we handle this right, we can squeeze him dry.”

* * *

Susan Hedder got off the bus at the Green Man, a public house that faced Putney Heath. She glanced at her wristwatch and found that she had a few minutes to wait before ten o’clock. She wondered if the chauffeur would keep the appointment.

The previous evening had been a frightening and thrilling experience. Now that it was over and she was still alive to tell the tale, she was glad that she had gone through with it.

The extraordinary thing about the business was that she no longer minded about George. In fact when she finally reached her bed-sitting room in the Fulham Road she had not even thought about George. Admittedly, she had not gone to bed until past two o’clock, and she was very tired. Even then, she did not sleep. She had imagined that she would have been very miserable about George when she was alone, but George had just not entered her mind.

“You got here all right?” the soft, timbreless voice said, breaking into her thoughts.

She turned quickly. Her heart gave a little bound and began to beat more quickly.

She scarcely recognized the chauffeur. He looked even younger now that he was out of uniform. He was bareheaded and he wore a pair of baggy flannel trousers, a drab grey sports coat and a faded blue shirt. His hair, long and

untidy, fell over his right eye and she noticed that his tie and shirt were frayed.

In spite of his shabbiness, she thought he looked more human out of uniform. If it were not for his bleak, stony eyes, she would have looted upon him as a rather ordinary young man, perhaps a student of sorts, but most certainly not a person to fear.

His eyes made her uneasy. They were cold, unfriendly, cynical and bitter.

“Hello,” she said in a small voice, feeling suddenly shy of him. “I was wondering if you were coming.”

“What happened?” he asked abruptly. “Did you follow him?”

“Yes.” Susan hesitated and then plunged on. “But I want to know who you are first. I was stupid last night. I shouldn’t have done it. I—I might have got into trouble.”

“Never mind who I am,” he returned curtly. “I paid you, didn’t I? I didn’t ask a favour.”

“You didn’t follow him then?” His eyes had become cold. “You were scared. Then why have you come here? To return the money?”

She was half-angry now. “I did follow him, but I want to know who you are first. I’m not going to tell you anything until I know that. I don’t like any of this. I didn’t like him either.”

He regarded her thoughtfully and for a moment she felt a fleeting fear. The heath was deserted. She did not know if anyone would hear if she screamed. There was something about this man, the way he held himself, the bleak eyes, the twisted bitter mouth, that warned her he was no good.

As she was trying to make up her mind whether to spring up and run or sit where she was, he suddenly relaxed.

“All right,” he said. “You’ll have to know some time. My name is Joe Crawford,” the chauffeur said, looking across the heath with a stolid, bitter expression on his face. “I work for Kester Weidmann. He’s rich. You don’t know how rich he is. I liked his brother best. His brother did me a good turn once.” He turned on her almost fiercely. “If anyone does me a good turn, I don’t forget it.”

Susan edged away from him. “What kind of a good turn?” she asked, more for something to say.

He brooded, staring at her, but not seeing her. “I was down and out and Cornelius, that was the brother, found me. He took me to his home, talked Kester into letting me stay. They taught me how to drive a car and I’ve been their chauffeur ever since. You wouldn’t think important men like that could be bothered to be kind, but they were. Cornelius was always good to me.”

“Has he gone away then?” Susan asked.

“He’s dead.” The bitterness went out of his eyes and he looked sad. “He died six weeks ago. He got a cold. Silly thing to die of, but he wasn’t strong.”

Susan twisted her fingers in her lap. She felt she was no nearer to finding out the mystery than before he began to speak.

“Kester doesn’t seem able to get on without Cornelius. They were fond of each other.”

Susan didn’t say anything.

“It’s affected his mind,” Joe went on in a hushed whisper. He glanced at her sharply and then looked away. “You wouldn’t think that was possible, would you? But that’s what happened.”

“Is he bad?” Susan asked, her attention arrested by the rigid grief in his eyes.

Joe said, “I don’t understand these things. All I know is there’s something wrong in his mind. He acts the same. That is he’s kind and quiet and eats all

right, but he doesn't go anywhere. This is the first time I've taken him anywhere since his brother died. Why to Shepherd Market?"

Susan frowned. "I don't understand. Will you please explain?"

So he told her about taking Kester to Shepherd Market and about the Gilded Lily Club.

"Now why does he want to go there? Who's this fellow Rollo he was asking about? You see what I mean it worries me."

"But why should it?" Susan asked. "I mean it isn't your business, is it?"

Joe looked at her. "Yes, it is. They did me a good turn, and now it's up to me to pay them back. Mr. Weidmann's not well. He doesn't know what he's doing. He's rich. You can't, think how rich he is. I've got to protect him."

Susan rather admired his emphatic gratitude. "But you don't know there's anything wrong," she pointed out. "It may be all right."

"Not if they know he's got all that money."

"They? Who?"

"Rollo, whoever he is, and the man in the black shirt."

Susan bit her lip. "Yes, I had forgotten him."

"You know something, don't you?" Joe twisted round so that he faced her.

"You found out something?"

"I got in the back of the car as you said. I had scarcely hidden myself under the rug when the man in the black shirt got in the front and drove off. We drove for a long time. I was too scared to see where we were going."

"He followed me. Mr. Weidmann had gone to his club to write a letter. I picked him up and took him home. The Packard kept close behind us all the

way,” Joe told her.

“That must have been it,” Susan said. “You can imagine how I felt. I didn’t know where we were going.”

“What happened?”

“After a while, the car slowed down and stopped. I heard him lower the window and then I heard him talking to someone. I think it must have been some woman who was taking her dog for a run. Black shirt said, ‘Does Mr. Grantham live in that house?’ And the woman said, ‘No, that’s Kester Weidmann’s place, the international banker.’”

“The nosey bitch,” Joe said angrily. “She said that, did she? Why can’t people mind their own business?”

“Well, that’s what she said,” Susan went on hurriedly. “And Black shirt said, ‘Kester Weidmann? Well, I’m sure up creek without a paddle,’ or something like that and the woman laughed. ‘If I had all his money, I’d buy myself a diamond necklace. He’s worth millions,’ she said and Black shirt laughed, said good night and drove away.

“He drove a long time and then he stopped again. I was still too scared to see where we were. He sounded his horn twice, like a signal and then he drove into a garage. I heard him leave the car and I was left in the dark.”

Joe was tense with interest now. “You did pretty well,” he said. “I didn’t think you’d do as well as that.”

Susan coloured. “It wasn’t anything,” she said, although she knew it was. “I just stayed in the back of the car and kept out of sight. Well, this place was a mews flat. It is in Bruton Place, behind Bruton Street. No. 146.” She went on to tell Joe all she had heard at the flat. “Then they seemed to quarrel,” she ended, blushing at the memory. “He hit her and there was a struggle. It was all rather nasty and I didn’t listen anymore. After a while he came down the stairs. I only just got back into the car in time. Then he drove off to Market Mews, in Shepherd Market. He left the car and opened a garage door and

went inside. It was another garage flat. The number was 79. While he was turning the lights on, I slipped out and hid in the dark. He came out and put the car away. Then he locked up and after a while I saw a light in the upstairs window. I didn't stay any longer and went home." She stopped a little breathless, anxious to know if she had done the right thing.

Joe stared at her, his eyes frankly admiring. "I knew you were all right soon as I saw you," he said. "I knew you would be good and you are good."

Susan felt suddenly happy. "Well," she said, "I wouldn't like to do it again, but now it's done—"

But Joe wasn't listening. He stared across the heath, his face blank with concentrated thought. "You didn't see the woman?"

She shook her head. "He called her Celie, but I didn't see her."

"There's a lot to be done," he said. "I've got to have help. If you want to help, I can pay you."

"You can pay me?" she repeated, looking with wonder at his shabby clothes.

"They've given me presents," he explained. "Mr. Weidmann thinks nothing of giving me a fiver now and then. I've saved. I don't want the money for myself. You can have it, if you will help me."

"But what more can I do?" she asked, wide-eyed with excitement. "If you can tell me what I can do, I'll do it."

Joe rubbed his nose with the back of his hand. "I want someone in the Club," he said, looking at her slyly. "How would you like to do that?"

Instantly she became alarmed. "Inside the Club?" she repeated. "Why, I don't think—"

"You could do it," he said aggressively. "You said you couldn't follow Black shirt but you did it. You can do this too."

“But how do I get into the Club?” she said. “I mean they wouldn’t let me in. No, that’s asking too much.”

“No, it isn’t,” he said. “Maybe they want staff. Even if you got into the kitchen it’d be something. Find out. Ask someone. If you try hard enough and if you want to do it you’ll get in all right.”

Susan shook her head. “It’s no use you talking like that,” she said impatiently. “If you want me to get into the Club, you’ll have to help me. I can’t do it on my own.”

Again he looked at her admiringly. She could almost hear him saying, “You’re the right sort. I knew you were the right sort soon as I saw you.”

Although she was flushed and excited, she met his eyes calmly. “You must be reasonable,” she went on. “I’ll do what I can, but you must help me.”

He took out his notebook. “Where can I get you?” he asked abruptly. “Are you on the phone?”

She gave him her address and her telephone number.

“All right,” he said. “I’ll see what I can do. Leave it to me. If you’re out, I’ll leave a message.” He got to his feet. “I must get back. They’ll wonder where I’ve got to.”

* * *

A few minutes after eleven o’clock a.m., Celie walked briskly down New Bond Street, too preoccupied with her thoughts to notice the admiring glances shot at her as she hurried along the narrow, crowded pavement.

She stopped a taxi in Burlington Street and gave the admiring driver an address in Soho.

Celie got out of the cab, thrust a half a crown into his hand and walked quickly down the passage.

At the end of the passage there was an enclosed courtyard, surrounded on three sides by tall, dingy-looking buildings.

Celie crossed the courtyard and entered the centre building. Inside, the hall was dim and smelt of stale cooking and tobacco smoke and perspiration. An old-fashioned lift, one that you propelled by pulling on a rope, faced her. Wrinkling her nose in disgust, Celie entered the lift, slid the grill shut and pulled on the rope. The lift rose slowly and hesitantly between the floors as if it might, at any moment, part from its cable and go crashing down into the lift-well, but it finally came to a creaking halt at the top floor. The door facing the lift was resplendent under a coat of dark red paint.

The brass knocker and letterbox glittered in the sunlight that came through the skylight immediately overhead. A small brass plate was screwed to the centre of the door. On it, painted in neat black letters was one word, Gilroy.

Gilroy eventually opened the door. He was a tall, thickset negro with a broad, sensitive face. His bloodshot eyes were dreamy and sad. He was dressed in a pair of white cotton pyjamas and a thin, cheap black dressing gown relieved by white piping and a white cord.

The negro hunched his great shoulders when he saw Celie, but he didn't say anything.

"Surprised?" she said.

He cleared his throat before saying, "Would you be surprised if I came to see you?"

Celie smiled. "That kind of miracle only happens in my dreams."

A tiny grimace, a tightening of his thick lips, showed that he realized tactlessness. He pulled the door to so that he was between the doorpost and

the door, preventing her from entering.

“You mustn’t come here,” he said. “It does no good. Someone might see you.”

She shook her head. “It doesn’t matter.”

She walked past him into his sitting room. It was a vast room with long windows at either end which overlooked the greyness of the West End.

A full-sized concert grand piano took up part of the room. A divan covered with brilliantly coloured cushions stood before a large empty fireplace. Books lined the walls and in one corner of the room stood a set of primitive native drums.

Gilroy wandered to the piano and leaned against it. He twirled the cord of his dressing gown and frowned down at the carpet.

“You’re the only man who treats me like this,” Celie said, looking out of the window, her slim back stiff with nervous anger.

“All coloured men would treat you in the same way,” Gilroy returned. “It’s no good. You’re no longer of our people.”

Celie turned. “You always say that,” she said. “Why? Aren’t I the same colour as you? Aren’t I? Aren’t I?”

He sat down at the piano. “You have no thought for my race, otherwise . . .” he shrugged. “But we have gone over that before. What is it you want?”

She leaned her slight body against him. Her body ached for this man. To her, he was Haiti. In a few years, Rollo, Butch and all the other men she knew would have tired of her. Then what was going to happen to her?

Unless Gilroy or some other man of her race accepted her, she would never be able to return to Haiti, and there were times when Celie longed to go back to her birthplace.

“What will it mean?” she asked, after a long pause.

“No good will come of it,” he returned, his hands suddenly sliding from the keyboard. “Leave it alone.”

She looked at him helplessly. “I can’t even ask you to help me.”

He shook his head. “Because you know what you want me to do is bad. But it is going to happen without you asking.”

He clenched his great fists. “And I shall do it.”

Celie put the glass of whisky down on the table. “What do you mean?” she said uneasily.

“If Rollo asks me to do it, I will,” Gilroy said, moving to the window and standing with his legs planted apart and his hands thrust into the pockets of his dressing gown. “But, it will be the end of us all.” He hunched his shoulders. “And that will be good.”

Superstitious dread long dormant, lulled by the hard, cynical life she had been leading, stirred in Celie.

“If he asks you what?” she said, clenching her hands into fists.

“Is there nothing you people won’t do for money?” he demanded, not turning. “Keep away from them, Celie. I’ve warned you. I shall not do it again.”

She stood up. “You talk in riddles,” she said, trying to shake off her feeling of fear. “You’re in a strange mood today. Perhaps, tomorrow . . .”

She took a step forward, rage and fear contorting her face. “You’re trying to frighten me . . .” she began, and then her words were cut off as the front door bell rang sharply. “Who’s that?” she asked, looking across the room, tense and suspicious.

He shook his head. “I don’t know.”

They stood listening. The bell rang again.

“You’d better go in there,” he said, pointing to his bedroom.

“Don’t answer the door,” Celie said, thinking of Butch. “If anyone found me here . . .”

Gilroy smiled. “You should have thought of that before,” he said indifferently.

She saw that he was determined to go to the door, so she ran into the bedroom.

Gilroy waited until she had shut the door and then walked into the hall. He found Doc Martin in the passage.

“I want to talk to you,” Doc said, pushing his way into the hall.

“I was expecting you,” Gilroy said, closing the door and following Doc into the sitting room.

Doc sniffed. Celie’s subtle perfume was faint but unmistakable. He looked sharply at Gilroy who met his eyes calmly.

Was there no end to Celie’s amorous activities? Doc asked himself, as he lowered his bony little body into an armchair.

“You’ve been a dance drummer long enough,” he began, placing his fingertips together. Then he frowned. “What did you say? Why were you expecting me?”

Gilroy sat at the piano again. “Never mind,” he said. “Go on. You think I’ve been a dance drummer long enough?”

Doc stared at him. “You’re an odd fish,” he said, frankly puzzled. “Don’t you think so yourself?”

Gilroy shrugged. "Perhaps."

"I can give you a chance to get in the money," Doc went on, after a pause. "There's a man who wants to know about voodoo. He'll pay big money. You can help."

Gilroy fiddled with the music rack, adjusting it and then laying it flat.

"Voodoo? What makes you think I know anything about it?"

Doc shrugged. "I don't. I've been reading about it. It's nothing but a primitive superstition. You're intelligent. You can pretend you are an expert. That's all we need until we clean up. It'll be worth a thousand pounds to you."

Gilroy closed his eyes. "What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"It's simple enough," Doc returned. "I can coach you. We can fake a few tricks so that he'll believe you're the goods. Then when he's paid up, we can slide out. We'll discuss the details tonight with Rollo. I just wanted to make sure that you'd be willing to do it."

Gilroy nodded. "If it is as simple as all that," he said, "but are you sure?"

"We have to find out exactly what he wants us to do, of course," Doc said, "but I think it will be simple enough. The man is not right in his head."

"You don't believe in voodoo?" Gilroy asked the question very casually.

Doc laughed. "Don't be ridiculous," he said. "Do you?"

Gilroy shrugged. "They believe in it in my country," he returned, "but then, we are only ignorant niggers."

Doc looked at him sharply. "You aren't," he said. "There's something about you I don't quite understand."

Gilroy stood up. "Suppose we talk this over with Rollo?" he said. "Tonight?"

Doc looked up at him. "I thought there might have been difficulties . . ." he said as if he were thinking aloud. " You'll help us?"

Gilroy nodded. "I'll do the thing you want me to do," he returned. "If that's what you mean."

Doc got to his feet. "A thousand pounds is not to be sneezed at," he said, following Gilroy to the door. "I'll have it all worked out by tonight."

Gilroy opened the door. "I'm sure you will," he said. "Until tonight, then."

Doc paused as he was moving into the passage. "I'd give up using scent if I were you," he said. "People might jump to conclusions."

Gilroy lifted his shoulders. "I don't have to bother with people," he said firmly and closed the door in Doc's face.

* * *

155A Fulham Road was a large, semi-detached house separated from the street by a low wall and a long flight of white steps that led to the front door. The house was owned by Cedric Smythe who had, a few years ago, forsaken one of the best-known repertory companies in the country to take up an equally prosperous career in the board and resident business.

Cedric Smythe ran the house on his own. A woman came in three times a week to do the rough work, but Cedric did everything else. He had six regular boarders —Susan Hedder was one of them—and he reckoned that he was unlucky if he did not have two or three temporary ones— "Chits that pass in the night" as he called them.

Apart from Susan and the temporary boarders who were, more often than not, chorus girls working for a couple of weeks at the Fulham Empire, the

remaining boarders were elderly and staid.

One of them managed a bank, two of them were L.C.C. school teachers, another worked in the hat department of Peter Jones and the other, a professor of sorts, spent most of his time in the Reading Room of the British Museum.

Although interested in all his boarders, Cedric singled Susan out for his special attention. He thought she was a nice, sensible girl and since she was young, pretty and on her own, he regarded her as his own particular responsibility. He was always on at her to change her wet shoes, to take a hot drink before going to bed and not to stay out too late at night. He also followed her romance with George with considerable interest.

Susan had no idea that Cedric knew anything about George. She thought he was a little odd but harmless, and she found his fussy kindness rather touching.

Cedric, who was forty-five and running to fat, led a lonely life. He missed his theatrical friends, the boisterous parties and the far-into-the-night drinking sessions that followed the weekly first nights of the various plays put on by his repertory company. Except for a hurried excursion to the shops each morning, he was chained to the house. The running of the house kept him occupied more or less continuously for nine hours of the day. It was not to be wondered at then that he gradually began to rely on the activities of his boarders for his mental recreation. Having investigated the private affairs of his five elderly and staid boarders and found them, without exception, exceedingly dull, Cedric concentrated on Susan's private affairs.

He soon discovered that she was in love. Youth in love always seemed to Cedric to be a very beautiful and inspiring phenomenon. It was a pity, of course, that Susan was so secretive about her romance. Nothing would have pleased Cedric better than to have had the opportunity of listening to her confidences over a cup of strong tea. That was to Cedric the height of bliss. Strong tea and a cosy gossip gave him more pleasure than anything else.

Susan, however, was most discouraging when Cedric offered her the obvious

openings and no matter how hard he pumped her, she refused to be drawn.

His curiosity, however, soon got the better of him and as he had long since learned to recognize George's crabbed handwriting, he, rather guiltily at first and then with increasing confidence, intercepted Susan's letters, steamed them open in the privacy of his kitchen and, in this way, kept in touch with Susan's romance.

Intercepting George's letters was really quite a simple and safe business.

Susan left the house a quarter of an hour or so before the postman arrived. Cedric therefore had plenty of time to steam open the letters, read them, seal them again and put them on the hallstand ready for Susan on her return from work.

George's final letter came as a great shock to Cedric. He read the letter through three times before it dawned on him that there would be no more letters to steam open and no more romance to thrill him and brighten his dreary routine. He sat all the morning by the fire, the letter in his hand, wondering what he should do. He would have liked, of course, to have broken the news gently to Susan, but that he knew was out of the question.

He hoped that this time perhaps she would confide in him and he rehearsed a little speech of kindness and comfort which so moved him that his eyes became misty and a lump formed in his throat.

When, at last, he heard the front door open and he recognized Susan's brisk step, he opened the kitchen door silently and watched her pick up the letter. He shook his head sadly as he watched her go up the stairs. What a shock for the poor lamb, he thought and feeling that he must do something for her, he began heating some milk and put on a kettle for a hot water bottle.

Cedric was quite elated with the prospects and his dismay was devastating when, just as he was pouring the milk into a glass, he heard Susan run downstairs and a moment later the front door slam.

That was the last straw. Cedric felt so miserable that he immediately went to

bed, taking the milk and the hot water bottle with him, but even then he did not sleep. When he heard Susan return, he put on the light and stared in astonished horror at his watch. Twenty minutes past two!

But worse was to follow. Instead of leaving the house at her usual time, Susan did not get up until nine o'clock and she did not leave her bedroom until twenty to ten.

Cedric made a point of being in the hall when she came downstairs. He looked at her sharply expecting to see her white-faced and red-eyed from weeping, but not a bit of it. Susan looked radiant.

Her eyes were bright, her cheeks were flushed and she actually smiled happily at him as she slipped past him to the front door. He was so dumbfounded that she had gone before he could think of anything to say.

The postman added to the mystery by bringing a letter with a City postmark for Susan which contained her Employment and National Health Insurance cards and a curt note saying that she had forgotten to collect them from the cashier when she had given notice.

Cedric, who had no qualms whatsoever in steaming open this letter was flabbergasted. What in the world was the poor child going to do? he asked himself over and over again. Why had she left her job? What had she been doing last night?

And—this was the most perplexing of them all—why had she looked so excited and happy this morning?

He puzzled over these problems all the morning and he was still worrying about them after lunch when the front door bell rang sharply startling him almost out of his wits.

He put down the frying pan he was scouring, wiped his hands, whipped off his apron and hurried up the basement stairs to the hall.

A young man in a drab sports coat and baggy flannel trousers stood on the

doorstep.

“Trying to sell something,” Cedric thought peevishly, and was just about to snap, “Not today, thank you,” and slam the door when he suddenly caught the look in the young man’s eyes. So instead of slamming the door in the young man’s face, Cedric stood gaping at him.

“Does Miss Hedder live here?” the young man asked in a curiously soft, abrupt voice.

“Yes,” said Cedric, “but she’s out at the moment.”

This statement did not seem to surprise the young man. He took out a crumpled envelope from his pocket and thrust it at Cedric. “Give her that as soon as she comes in,” he commanded.

Cedric took the envelope as if he expected it to bite him and began to close the door.

The young man looked at him contemptuously. “And don’t steam it open,” he threatened. “I know what you nousey fat louts are like.”

He went down the steps and along the street, leaving Cedric gasping with guilty fear and fury.

“The idea!” Cedric gasped, slamming the front door. “Well, really! I mean if that’s the way young people talk these days . . .! I’ve never heard such a thing!” He went back to his kitchen and, still holding the envelope, he sat limply in a chair.

When he had recovered sufficiently to put on the kettle for a cup of tea, he examined the envelope with curious eyes. He hesitated for some time before finally making up his mind. It was his duty he told himself to find out what was going on. Who was this desperate-looking young man? What did he want with Susan? What in the world did it all mean?

He took a long time opening the envelope, taking the greatest care not to tear

the flap. His fingers trembled as he pulled out the scrap of notepaper and read its message: Go to Fresby's Agency 24c Rupert Court, W.C.2. He'll get you in. J.C.

Cedric replaced the note and carefully resealed the envelope. He was as wise as he was before and it worried him. He put the envelope on the hallstand, returned to the kitchen and made the tea.

As he was pouring out a cup, he heard the front door open and recognized Susan's quick, light step.

"Only just in time," he thought to himself. "I really must be more careful. What would she have thought if she'd come in five minutes sooner?"

He went into the hall to find Susan reading the note.

"There you are," he said. "You're early, aren't you?"

Susan looked up quickly, nodded and picked up her other letters. "Hmm," she said, then remembering her manners, went on, "Yes. It's a lovely day, isn't it, Mr. Smythe?"

Cedric noted that she was moving casually to the stairs. "I've just made a nice cup of tea, Miss Hedder," he said. "Do come and have a cup. Now come along, I just won't take no for an answer."

"It's very nice of you, Mr. Smythe, but I'm in rather a hurry," Susan said, smiling at him. "Thank you all the same," and she flashed up the stairs before Cedric could stop her.

In her room, Susan sat on the bed and re-read Joe's note.

He must mean that if I go to Fresby's Agency, they'll get me a job at the Gilded Lily Club, she thought excitedly, putting the letter away in her bag. As she did so her mind dwelt on the man in the black shirt and the strange but thrilling voice of the woman in the mews flat. Should she go? she asked herself, or should she forget all about Kester Weidmann, his dead brother and

Joe? She couldn't do that, not now she knew all about them. Besides not many girls had the opportunity of an exciting job like this. She was, after all, her own mistress now and that was something in itself.

She got up and looked at herself in the long mirror.

Susan was a nice-looking girl. She was fair, her eyes were blue and her complexion was excellent. She had dimples when she smiled and her teeth were small, even and white.

Fresby's Agency was hidden away in a grimy little court leading off Rupert Street, Piccadilly. It was on the third floor, but there was no lift.

Susan walked up the stone stairs, aware that her heart was beating rapidly rather more from excitement and nervousness than from the exertion of climbing the stairs. On the first floor was a bookmaker's office, and as she passed the door she could hear telephones ringing and a number of men talking in rough, coarse voices. The second floor offices were empty and as she mounted the stairs to the third floor she noticed the stairs were dirty and the banister rail was coated with dust.

She pushed open a door marked Enquiries, but there was no one there. The little room contained a desk and a chair. On the desk was a telephone directory and a vase of dead flowers and a saucer full of cigarette butts. There was a smell of dirt and stale air in the room. She waited a few moments and then explored further, trying another door.

A thin, elderly man, wearing a baggy brown suit glanced up suspiciously. He was sitting at a desk, a cup of tea and a rock bun on a piece of paper before him. He was chewing slowly and crumbs decorated his drooping, nicotine-stained moustache.

"Excuse me," Susan said, in a small voice. "There seemed no one about."

The thin man scowled at her. "It's no good expecting any tea," he said, crumbling the rock cake between two dirty ink—stained fingers. "I haven't got another cup. I don't know why people call at tea time."

Susan repressed a desire to giggle. There was something pathetic about the dignity of this thin, pinched looking man. His collar was a little frayed and his shirt was not quite clean. The crumbs on his moustache made him look rather ridiculous and yet he did somehow manage to retain a sad dignity which was quite out of place in the dilapidated dirty little room.

“I don’t want any tea, thank you,” she said, moving further into the room. “I wanted a job at the Gilded Lily Club,” Susan said, suddenly wondering if she had come to the right place. This man—she presumed he was Mr. Fresby—did not look as if he had jobs to give away. He looked in need of a job himself.

“Oh,” Fresby said and grunted.

Susan sat down. “Perhaps you don’t understand,” she said patiently. “Mr.—er—Crawford told me to come and see you.”

“I know,” Mr. Fresby said and looked at her. She realized with a little stab of fear that he was looking at her very strangely. His dim, pale eyes seemed to be looking under her clothes and she felt suddenly hot, embarrassed and angry.

“If you haven’t anything for me,” she said sharply, “then I won’t waste your time.”

The telephone began to ring.

Fresby eyed it suspiciously, then he picked up the receiver and said “Hello?”

He sat listening to a soft male voice which Susan thought sounded like Joe’s.

She glanced at Fresby and noticed that he looked suddenly older and very tired.

“Yes,” he said. “All right. Oh, yes. I understand. No, you needn’t worry, you know me. Well, you know what I mean. No . . . no . . . of course not.” He listened some more and then hung up.

“That was Joe,” he said in a low voice and Susan saw beads of perspiration on his forehead. “He’s a devil. You be careful of him. He thought I wasn’t going to be polite to you. He’s wrong, isn’t he, Miss? I’ve said nothing out of place?” His sudden anxiety to please was as pathetic as his former dignity.

“No,” Susan said. “It’s all right.”

“Is there a vacancy at the Gilded Lily Club?” she asked.

He shook his head. “Not at the moment,” he said. “But there will be. I’ll arrange that. Go and see them tomorrow morning. Ask to see Mr. Marsh. I know him. He lives on women. I’ll speak to him tonight.” He stroked his moustache thoughtfully. “They give you six months for living on women in this country. He’ll give you a job. What can you do? A receptionist?”

Susan nodded. “I suppose so,” she said a little helplessly, feeling that she really did not want to have anything more to do with Mr. Fresby nor the Gilded Lily Club.

Mr. Fresby’s nose twitched. “I suppose so,” he said, “but you’ve got to be careful.” Just for a moment his eyes took on the look of lewdness that had embarrassed her before.” A nice girl like you. They’ll be after you if you’re not careful.”

Susan got to her feet.

“It’s Miss Hedder, isn’t it?” he asked, his eyes on her legs. “I’ll tell him. You go round there tomorrow about ten. Ask for Mr. Marsh. He’ll fix you up.”

“Thank you,” she said and walked quickly to the door. She did not look back, but somehow she felt that there was a wild animal behind her, about to pounce on her, and she ran blindly down the stone stairs in sudden panic.

chapter three

He was out there not five minutes ago,” the old woman said, pointing through the window at the wooded part of the sprawling, uncared-for grounds. “Skulking, that’s wot ‘e was’, a thin, ugly brute with a fag ‘anging out of ‘is mouth and a ‘at pulled down over ‘is face like ‘e was ashamed of ‘is own ugliness.”

Joe Crawford thrust his hands into his trouser pockets and hunched his shoulders. “What did he want?” he asked, knowing who the man was and feeling a tightness in his stomach.

The old woman snorted. “ ‘Ow do I know? ‘ E said ‘e was selling insurance, but ‘e didn’t take me in. ‘E wanted to know ‘oo was living in the ‘ouse, but I told ‘im to ‘op it and I banged the door in ‘is face. You ought to ‘ave ‘card the way ‘e carried on, muttering and swearing to ‘isself. ‘E didn’t go far. Soon as ‘e got into the wood, ‘e dodged behind a tree, but I was watching ‘is lordship. ‘E’s still there now if I ain’t very much mistook.”

“All right,” Joe said, clenching his hands tightly. “I’ll see what he wants. You get on with your work. There’s no need to make a fuss.”

“Fuss?” the old woman repeated, her faded eyes alight with indignation. “

“Oos making a fuss?”

“Get on with your work,” snapped Joe, and he went out of the kitchen, through the big scullery, across the cobbled yard and into the garden.

It was a still, hot, bright afternoon. It was not an afternoon for fear, yet Joe was afraid deep down in his stomach which felt cold and tight. But that wouldn’t stop him going into the wood and hunting for the man in the black shirt. He had made up his mind that he’d show this man that it wasn’t going

to be easy. If he showed him that then perhaps they would leave Kester Weidmann alone. Perhaps they'd think that whatever they had planned to do wouldn't be worth the risk.

Joe didn't really think that he could put them off, but he was desperate and he felt at least he had to try.

He walked down the winding path that led to the wood, his hands in his pockets and his head sunk down, feeling the old woman's jeering eyes following him as she stood at the window.

It was cool and silent and dark in the wood. The sun penetrated the first fringe of the trees and then seemed to give up.

Although Joe was expecting to meet the man in the black shirt, he did not expect it to happen the way it did. He expected the man to jump out on him or he expected to come upon him hiding behind a tree or a bush and he expected there would be a struggle. But it didn't happen like that at all.

He came into a clearing where the sun shone through the trees. It was a small, isolated glen surrounded by the trees and carpeted by grass and primroses. At the far end of the glen there was a great elm tree that had uprooted itself and had fallen years ago and no one had bothered to move it. The glen was a charming spot. The kind of place you would select for a picnic. It was an oasis in the silent, cold, hostile wood.

Joe was halfway across the glen, glad of the sudden sunlight, when he paused.

Butch was sitting on the fallen elm, his hat resting on the bridge of his nose and a cigarette hanging from his thin lips.

Joe looked at him.

"Hello," Butch said, his big muscular hands folded on his knees.

Joe didn't say anything.

“You know me, don’t you?” Butch said, after a pause.

Joe nodded. He envied Butch’s cold, unflurried confidence in himself and his strength.

Butch took his cigarette from his lips and flicked ash on to the grass.

“There’re only two of you, aren’t there?” he said, looking at Joe from under his hat brim. “You and the old woman.”

“It’s enough,” Joe said quietly.

Butch looked at him blankly. “The old woman’s useless,” he pointed out.

“What do you think you can do?”

Joe shifted his feet nervously, feeling the soft grass through the soles of his shoes yield to his tread. He didn’t say anything.

“If I were you I’d scram,” Butch went on. “I’d pull out while the going was good.”

“Not me,” Joe said, hunching his shoulders. “If people make trouble for me I make trouble for them.”

Butch paused to stub out his cigarette. He didn’t seem prepared for such obstinacy. “Yeah?” he said at last, pushing his hat to the back of his head. “Well, it’ll be your funeral.”

Joe flinched. “Why don’t you leave him alone?” he blurted out. “What’s he done to you?”

“Forget it,” Butch said standing up. “Nothing you can do will make any difference, so why don’t you get wise? Pull out while you’re in one piece.”

Some eight yards of grass separated them. They stood very still in the bright sunlight looking at each other, their shadows black and sharp on the grass.

“I’ll get along all right,” Joe said through stiff lips.

Butch wandered towards him until he was close and then he stopped.

Joe clenched his fists which were hidden in his pockets and again hunched his shoulders. His mouth was dry and his heart pounded, but he didn’t draw back, nor did he take his eyes from Butch’s cold, impressive face.

“If I thought you were going to be a nuisance, I’d kill you,” Butch said evenly.

Joe didn’t say anything. He stared into the empty eyes that threatened him and somehow he kept his fear a secret.

“I’m a killer,” Butch went on in a low conversational tone. “I haven’t killed a guy for a long time. It gets you if you keep off it for long.” I guess it’s in my blood. It’d do me good, but I want to be fair. I don’t want to knock you off unless I have a good excuse. It’s up to you. If you go away, I’ll have to forget about it, won’t I?”

“I’m not afraid,” Joe lied. “It won’t be easy. I’ll do what I can to stop you and to stop them.”

Doubt came into the empty eyes. “What can you do?” Butch asked. “You’re trying to stop a runaway steamroller.”

“They’ve been stopped before and they’ll be stopped again,” Joe said simply, aware of Butch’s doubt and feeling a spark of triumph light up in his mind. “It won’t be easy. I just want you to know that. I like to be fair too.”

Butch frowned. “You’re crazy,” he said, his black eyebrows drawn down into a frown. “A kid like you can’t do anything.”

“I’m just telling you,” Joe said, sensing that in some mysterious way he had managed to dominate the man in the black shirt. He knew it would only be a brief moment before Butch recovered. It would be dangerous and futile to say more so he turned abruptly and walked away, across the glen and into the

dark wood.

He did not look back, but he knew Butch was staring after him, still doubtful, the ground, for a moment, cut from under him.

Joe walked steadily through the wood until he came to the big garden again.

His body ached with fear. His hands, still clenched tightly, were hot and wet. But that did not matter. He had stood up to the man in the black shirt and he had shown him that it would not be easy. That was all he could hope to do at the moment.

He went to the big garage, climbed the stairs and entered his small sitting room. It was a bright, clean room, skimpily furnished, masculine and hard. He stood by the window, his mind busy for some moments.

There was no doubt that Butch would kill him if he went on with this. Again he had no doubt in his mind that he would go on with it. He would stop them if he could. But suppose they went after him before he could do anything? They might. Butch might recover from his surprise and come after him right away.

He couldn't afford to take risks. If he was killed who would protect Kester Weidmann? The old woman was useless.

The police? He shook his head. They wouldn't believe him until it was too late. Besides they'd put Kester Weidmann in an asylum. He was sure of that. He didn't want that to happen. The little man was harmless enough and he was happy in his sad way near the body of his brother. He wouldn't last long if they put him away.

He sat down and ran his fingers through his long, unruly hair. Would the girl be any use? He liked Susan. She was the right sort. She had guts. But could she do anything if he wasn't there to direct her? He remembered how she had followed the man in the black shirt across London. She wasn't a fool. He thumped his fist on the arm of the chair. She was the only one he could trust. Fresby was no use. He couldn't trust him, but he could trust Susan.

He got abruptly to his feet, crossed the room and opened a small wall cupboard. He took out a steel box about six inches square. This he put on the table together with ink, pen and paper. With a long thin key he opened the box. It was crammed with one pound notes. He knew exactly how many of these notes were in the box. They had been given to him at one time or another by Cornelius and he had saved them for a rainy day.”

Three hundred pounds would be useful he thought. Surely Susan would do what he asked if he gave her all this money?

He sat at the table and wrote for several minutes. Then he laid down his pen, gathered up the sheets of paper and read them through. Satisfied, he folded them and forced them into an envelope.

He put Susan’s name on the envelope and sealed it. He laid the envelope underneath the pound notes and locked the box.

He pulled another piece of paper towards him and wrote a short note to Susan.

Keep this key, he wrote, until you receive a small steel box. You may not receive it, but if you do, the key will open it.

J.C.

He put the key and the note in an envelope, sealed and stamped it and then, picking up the box, he left the room.

It was after six o’clock when he reached Earl’s Court station. He knew Fresby would be in the Duke’s Head. He was always there at that hour. It was always his first call” after leaving his office in Rupert Court before going to his dingy little house off the Earl’s Court Road.

Fresby stared at him with blank frightened eyes. He was sitting in a corner on a plush-covered bench. There was a pint of bitter before him on a table which was covered with dirty used glasses.

Joe sat down beside him. "Hello Jack," he said, looking at Fresby with cold dislike. "I thought you'd be here."

"I've got a job for you," he said, pushing the steel box into Fresby's hands. "I want you to keep this by you." He stared at Fresby for a long minute. "If you lose it, I'll tell the police about you. I mean it this time." If you lose it, you'll have a crowd of coppers round you like wasps round honey."

Fresby shivered. "I won't lose it," he said. "I'll put it in my safe at the office. No one can get at it there."

Joe shook his head. "That's just where they'd look," he said. "You'll have to find a better place than that."

"They? Who?"

"Never mind who. Just put it somewhere safe or I'll tell the cops about you."

Fresby clutched on to the box. "What's in it?" he asked. "It's nothing hot, is it? I don't want to get into trouble."

Joe sniggered. "You couldn't be in more trouble than you are now," he said cruelly. "Don't worry, it's nothing hot, but there're certain people who'd like to get hold of it."

Fresby nodded his head. He didn't know what it was all about, but he knew if he asked any more questions Joe would become angry and he was frightened of Joe when he was angry.

"I'll look after it," he promised. "You know me, Joe. I'd do most things for you."

"You mean you have to do most things," Joe said, hunching his shoulders.

"All right, Jack, you keep it safe. Now listen," he moved forward so that his thin white face was close to Fresby's.

"Every morning at half-past ten I'll ring you. If I don't ring you you must go

at once to 155A Fulham Road and give this box to Miss Hedder. Do you understand?”

Fresby picked up his beer. He drank some of it, wiped his moustache with the back of his hand and put the glass down on the table.

“Expecting something to happen to you?” he asked softly. The look of hope in his eyes chilled Joe’s blood.

“Maybe,” Joe said quietly, “but don’t think you can double-cross me. That box’s got to go to Miss Hedder if I don’t ring —understand?”

A wintry smile passed over Fresby’s face. “I’ll do it,” he said. “You don’t have to worry. Who’s after you?”

Joe picked his nose. “Never mind who’s after me,” he said. “I want you to get this clear. If I don’t ring at ten-thirty tomorrow, what will you do?”

“Go to 155 A Fulham Road and give this box to Miss Hedder,” Fresby said promptly, and again the thin, watery smile passed over his face.

“Why do you think you’ve got to do it?”

Fresby fiddled with the glass of beer. “Maybe someone’s put you away and this is what you want the girl to have.”

Joe nodded. “Don’t rely on it,” he said. “I may be trying you out. I may ring every day for a month and then I might decide not to. If you don’t deliver the box, what’ll I do?”

Fresby’s face fell. He hadn’t thought that this could be a trap. “I suppose you’ll go to the coppers,” he said surlily.

“That’s just what I will do,” Joe said and stood up. “You understand now why it’d be unsafe to double-cross me?”

Fresby glared up at him. “Yes, yes,” he said, choking back his fury. “But who said I was going to double-cross you? I wouldn’t do a thing like that.”

“You wouldn’t do it a second time,” Joe said softly and he went out of the bar.

Fresby stared after him, his face twisted with hate and fear. Then he picked up his beer and took a long pull at it. He grimaced. Somehow the beer now tasted flat and sour.

Clem Marsh stood behind the reception desk in the lobby of the Gilded Lily Club, his soft, fat hands busy counting the guest tickets of the previous evening. There were not many of them. Rollo only allowed the most trustworthy members to bring guests to the club and even then he charged a guinea entrance fee.”

Marsh was a fat, puffy young man with crisp, curly hair, a grey pallid complexion and a wet, loose mouth. He dressed expensively in “City” clothes, his linen was immaculate and his grey and white tie the acme of fashion. Around his fat wrist was a platinum wristwatch which Margaret had given him and peeping out of his waistcoat pocket was a heavy gold cigarette case, a gift from May. Both these young women kept him. He never could understand why they should so willingly turn the bulk of their street earnings over to him, but as they both seemed happy to do so, and didn’t seem to mind sharing hers, he did not hesitate to accept what was offered. Both the girls seemed terrified that they would lose him to some society beauty who might come to the club. Whenever he was a little short of cash, he had only to hint that some society woman had been pleasant to him for either Margaret or May, or both of them, to give him what he wanted.

Although his fingers counted the guest tickets, his mind was elsewhere. He was thinking of Fresby. Who was this Susan Hedder? Why did she want a job at the Club? He scowled down at the tickets. It’d mean he’d have to pay her out of his own pocket. Rollo would never agree to extra staff. Damn that snake Fresby!

He would have to do it because Fresby could shop him. He had only to tell Margaret and May about Joan and the balloon would go up. Just the kind of rat’s trick Fresby would play.

How he found out about Joan, Marsh couldn't imagine. A couple of months ago he had met her walking up and down Old Burlington Street. She seemed a nice kid, new to the game. Marsh had fixed her up in a flat in Conduit Street.

Before, she had a place in Pollen Street which was a pretty awful dump, but the Conduit Street flat was all right. She'd do well there. Of course, he expected something for his trouble. She didn't seem to mind giving him fifteen quid a week.

He only had to see her once a week, so if it wasn't for Fresby, neither Margaret nor May would ever know about her.

Now, unless he gave this Susan Hedder a job, Fresby was going to blow the gaff. If Margaret knew, she'd shop him to the cops. She was a vicious little bitch when she got her rag out. May wasn't so bad, but even then, she might turn nasty too.

Marsh sighed. Oh well, he thought, it won't cost me more than three quid a week and it'll give me more time to myself.

The hall porter, in shirt sleeves and holding a broom, put his head round the door. "Young lady asking for you, Mr. Marsh," he said and winked.

Marsh sniffed, "Well, tell her to come in," he said stiffly, "and take that silly look off your face."

The hall porter stood aside. "There you are, love" he said to Susan Hedder.

"That's 'is lordship over there. 'im in the fancy weskit."

Susan advanced across the wine-coloured carpet. She looked at Marsh nervously and disliked him on sight. "Good morning," she said in a small voice, "I'm - I'm Miss Hedder."

Marsh compressed his thick lips. "Oh, are you?" he said. "Hmm, yes, I was

expecting you. Mr. Fresby recommended you, didn't he?"

Susan said, "Yes. Mr. Fresby thought you might have a vacancy."

"Mind you," he went on, coaxing a smile to his fat face, "the pay won't be very good, but then, of course, the hours are easy. You need only come in at seven every evening and you can get off at midnight. Would three pounds do?"

"Oh yes," Susan said so promptly that Marsh realized in dismay that he could have got her for less. "Yes, that would do splendidly. What should I have to do?"

"Rollo likes the place to have tone. It's half the reason why it's so successful."

"Who is Rollo?" Susan asked, anxious to begin to learn.

Marsh sniffed. "He's the owner of the club. I don't suppose you'll ever see him. He never uses this entrance."

As he was speaking Doc Martin wandered in.

"Good morning," Marsh said, scowling at him.

"Hello," Doc replied, looking at Susan with surprise. "God bless my wicked soul, what have we here?"

"This is Miss Hedder, the new receptionist."

"Good Lord!" Doc exclaimed, "we are getting important." He smiled at Susan. "How do you do? Be careful of that young man. His hands are only safe when they're in his pockets."

Susan blushed and murmured something unintelligible while Marsh glared angrily at Doc.

"There's no call for coarse remarks," he said reprovingly. "Did you want

anything?”

Doc jerked his thumb to the ceiling. “Rollo’s calling a meeting,” he said with a grimace. “Too bad you’re not included, but it’s only for the elite.” He winked at Susan and whistling softly under his breath, ambled up the stairs that led to Rollo’s office.

Marsh looked after him and compressed his lips. “Now he’s nobody you need worry about,” he said spitefully. “I’d like to know what he’s supposed to be doing here. Calls himself a doctor. Why should we need a doctor here anyway? The food’s not as bad as all that.”

Susan laughed dutifully while her mind was busy wondering why Rollo had called a meeting and whether it had anything to do with Kester Weidmann and whether she could think of an excuse to get upstairs.

“Well, new Miss—er—Hedder, let me see what else you can do.” Marsh looked vaguely round the little office. “As a matter of fact the work’s very light. You’re really only getting the job because I want to do Jack Fresby a favour and— well, after all you are a pretty little thing and I’ve a weakness for blondes.”

He leered down at her. “You might have to see the members pay for their guests. You’ll have to be pretty slippery getting to know who they are. I hope you have a good memory.”

“Oh yes,” Susan said, sure on that point. “I’m very good at remembering faces.” She stopped short, feeling herself go cold.

Butch had come in and was staring at her with empty eyes.

Marsh glanced up, smiled in a vague, sickly manner at nobody in particular, and hurriedly opened a ledger which he placed before Susan.

“In this ledger,” he flustered, “we enter—” He broke off as Butch came up and rested his elbows on the counter. He still stared at Susan who felt herself cringing inside although she managed to meet his stony eyes without

flinching.

“This is Miss Hedder, our new receptionist,” Marsh said, a sudden squeak in his voice.

Butch tipped his hat over his nose. “Yeah?” he said, “I’ve seen you somewhere before.”

“Oh?” Susan said coldly and looked away, conscious that her heart was pounding.

“Who said we wanted a new receptionist?” Butch asked, looking at Marsh.

“It’s a private arrangement,” Marsh said, with a ghastly attempt at being at ease. “Miss Hedder wanted a job and I wanted a little freedom. If I like to pay her, it’s my business, isn’t it?”

Once more Butch turned to Susan. “I remember now,” he said and there was a look of sudden suspicion in his eyes.

“And so do I,” Susan said quickly. “I remember that shirt. I saw you in a little cafe in Glasshouse Street last week, didn’t I?” Her hands were clenched tightly behind her back, but, somehow or other, she managed to sound very casual.

Susan drew a deep breath. She felt cold, excited and scared. No wonder Butch had reminded her of Humphrey Bogart, she thought. He was just how she imagined an American gangster would look.

“You keep out of his way,” Marsh advised. “He doesn’t trust anyone and he might make trouble. You see,” he went on, with a sudden burst of uneasy confidence, “I don’t know what Rollo says when he hears you’re working for me. He might even throw you out.”

For a moment an ugly look came into Marsh’s eyes, but it went immediately.

He stepped round the counter and left her the little office to herself.

“All right, Miss Hedder,” he said, with an ingratiating smile, “I don’t think you need stay any longer. Your hours are from seven to midnight. I’ll be seeing you tonight?”

The outer door opened and Celie came in. She swept across the hall and up the stairs without looking either to right or left. She was wearing a silk ivory-coloured turban, a black water-silk coat and round her neck was a heavy gold collar.

Marsh looked after her with admiring eyes.

“Who’s that?” Susan asked, impressed in spite of herself.

“That’s Mademoiselle Celie,” Marsh said. “A stunner, isn’t she?” He heaved a sigh. “Rollo’s little piece.” He winked. “Dark but tasty.”

Before Susan could think of a suitable snubbing retort, Gilroy came in. He was halfway across the hall before he noticed Susan and then he stopped short. He looked at her with intent, interested eyes, then he went on, up the stairs and out of sight.

“Well, he thought you were something to look at,” Marsh, said, with an oily smile. “You’re seeing everyone this morning.” He looked at the stairs thoughtfully. “Now I wonder what’s going on up there.”

“Who was that?” Susan asked, wondering what was going on up there herself.

“That’s Gilroy, the dance band leader. I don’t hold with niggers myself, but he isn’t a bad chap,” Marsh returned absently. It was obvious that he was more interested now in Rollo’s meeting than in Susan.

Somehow, Susan thought, I’ve just got to get upstairs.

“Before I go, Mr. Marsh,” she said, trying to look coy, “could I—er—powder my nose?”

Marsh blinked. "Of course. The Ladies' room's just upstairs on your right. You can't miss it. It's written on the door."

Susan smiled. "Then I'll go up before I put on my hat and coat."

At this moment, the telephone rang and Marsh hurried to answer it. Susan, seizing the opportunity, Lipped upstairs. The stairs led in a half circle to the next landing. Halfway up was the Ladies' room, but Susan did not pause. She ran on until she came to a long passage. The thick carpet deadened her footfalls. she sped down the passage, pausing at each door she came to, listening and then speeding on. The door at the far end of the passage had private written on it in gold paint.

She leaned forward to listen, her head almost against the panels. Voices came to her distinctly.

* * *

In the big, lonely house on Wimbledon Common, somewhere in one of the many empty rooms, a telephone began to ring.

Sarah, the old housekeeper, peeling potatoes in the dark kitchen, glanced across at Joe.

" 'Oos that, I wonder?" she said, jerking her head towards the ceiling. "You'd better go. I don't 'old with them things. Lot of nasty whispering in your ear."

Joe was already moving to the door. He hurried up the twisting narrow stairs that led to the hall and entered the big sitting room which overlooked the front garden. The furniture was covered with white dust sheets and the heavy, brocaded curtains were drawn. There was a creepy, lonely atmosphere in the room.

He picked up the telephone. “Hello?” he said, a little crossly, expecting a wrong number.

Susan said in a tight, urgent voice, “Is Mr. C there, please?”

Joe sat on the arm of a chair. “Yes,” he said, recognizing her voice. “This is Joe.”

“I’ve got the job at the Gilded Lily,” Susan said, after a pause. She waited hopefully, expecting a little praise.

“I know that,” Joe snapped. “I told Fresby to get you in there. He does what I tell him. Well? What happened?”

“They’re expecting Mr. Weidmann tonight,” Susan said, a little crushed.

“There was a meeting in Rollo’s room. They were all there and I managed to get upstairs and listen.”

“Who were all there? Why don’t you begin at the beginning?”

“I’m trying to tell you,” Susan said, feeling irritated that he should take it all so calmly. “There was a little man named Doc Martin. He did most of the talking. Then there was a girl they call Mademoiselle Celie— she’s a negress or a Creole. I don’t quite know which, but she’s very dark and awfully attractive.”

Joe made impatient noises. “Never mind that,” he said. “Who else was there?”

“There was a negro—Gilroy. He’s the band leader. Then the man in the black shirt. He recognized me. I thought at first he was going to be suspicious, but I bluffed him.”

Joe’s face twisted. She bluffed him! Was she lying?

He recalled his own fear of the man in the black shirt. “What do you mean?” he demanded, not wishing to believe her.

She told him, not without pride, what had happened.

Joe could not bring himself to praise her. “Maybe he’s pretending. Maybe you didn’t fool him after all,” then he added spitefully, “Maybe he’s just waiting to trap you.”

Such a long silence followed that he wondered uneasily if he had frightened her away.

“Hello?” he said. “Are you there?”

“Yes,” she returned. He could tell from her tone that he had hurt her. “I thought you’d be pleased. But you’re not. You’re being horrid.”

“It’s all right,” he said quickly. “I’m sorry. It’s just that I’m worried. You’ve done well. You’ve done very well.”

She kept him waiting for a few seconds and then she went on, “Well, it wasn’t very nice for me. I was scared. I keep thinking I shouldn’t be doing this. They’re all rather frightening, especially Butch Egan—that’s the man in the black shirt.”

He immediately lost his feeling of irritation. “Yes,” he said. “You’d better be careful.” Then he repeated, “You’re doing well. You’re the right sort. I know. You’ve got guts.”

“Well, it’s what I’m being paid to do, isn’t it?” she said, as if she were trying to convince herself. “But I mustn’t waste time. They’re expecting Mr. Weidmann tonight. I couldn’t understand what they were talking about. It was something to do with voodoo.”

“With what?” Joe’s eyes became vacant.

“Voodoo. Isn’t that some kind of witchcraft? Doc Martin was giving Gilroy instructions. I couldn’t hear everything that was said. I didn’t have time to listen to it all, but the word zombie was used a number of times. I don’t know

what it means, do you?”

“No, but I’ll find out,” Joe said, a little bewildered and out of his depth.

“Doc said it would be worth a lot of money. He said something about a million pounds. They discussed how they would divide it up between themselves. They seemed to be quarrelling about it, but I couldn’t stay any longer. I had been up there over five minutes and the man in the reception desk was waiting for me. But I have found out something, haven’t I? I haven’t wasted time?”

“No,” Joe said. “We’ve got something to go on now. Zombie, did you say? I must find out about that. Will you be there tonight?”

“Yes. I work from seven o’clock to midnight. I’ll try to find out more. They said Mr. Weidmann would be along about eleven o’clock.”

“Well, he won’t,” Joe said grimly. “I’ll put the car out of action. I’ll see he doesn’t go. I’ve got to keep him away from those people. You leave that to me.”

“All right,” Susan sounded relieved. “They’re bad. I’m sure they’re bad, but we’ll have to be careful. A million is an awful lot of money, isn’t it? They all sounded very anxious to get hold of it.”

“Listen,” Joe broke in. “I’ve sent you a key. Keep it carefully. If anything happens to me, you’ll be given a steel box. The key opens it.”

“What should happen to you?” Susan asked, alarmed. “What do you mean?”

“I like being prepared. I might get run over. Anything might happen.” He made an effort not to dramatize his fears, but he could not resist saying, “The man in the black shirt might do something. I’m not saying he will, but you never know.”

Susan was now badly frightened. “Don’t you think we ought to go to the police?” she pleaded. “I mean that’s what they’re there for—to give

protection.”

“No,” he said emphatically. “Whatever happens, you mustn’t go to the police. I’ve told you why. They’d put him away. It’d be even better to let them have all his money than for him to be put away.” He gripped the telephone tightly.

“You’ve got to promise me. Whatever happens, you won’t ever go to the police.”

“I can’t make a promise like that,” she returned sincerely, “I mean—”

“You’ve got to,” he said urgently. “They won’t believe you and they’ll just put him away. Promise me.”

“All right,” Susan returned weakly. “I promise, but I may not be able to go on with this.”

“You will,” Joe said hurriedly. “I know you. You’ve got guts. You watch them. I’ll keep him away from the club. Let me know what happens.”

“I’ll ring you tomorrow,” she said. “I don’t think we should meet. They may watch me. We mustn’t be seen together.”

“That’s right,” Joe returned. “You’re being smart now. And listen, if anything happens to me, Fresby will help you. He’s done something bad and I’m the only one who knows about it. I’ve told you about it in a letter. You’ll find it in the box. You’ll only have to threaten him to make him do what you want. Fresby’s all right. You might need him. Goodbye now” and before she could ask any more questions he hung up.

He went immediately to the library, took down a copy of Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary and looked for the word Zombie.

“The supernatural power or essence which it is believed may enter into and reanimate a dead body,” he read.

He sat staring at the definition for several minutes, understanding now what

they were planning to do.

Then he got slowly to his feet, put the dictionary away and walked into the hall. He walked up the broad stairs that led to the upper rooms and down the long dark passage to Kester Weidmann's room.

He hesitated outside the door. This was the first time he had gone to Kester Weidmann without being summoned and he was unsure of his reception. He tapped on the door and opened it.

"Who's there?" Weidmann asked querulously.

The room was dark. The only light came from a desk lamp over which was a cone-shaped shade, directing the light on to the white blotter on the desk. Although it was early afternoon, the curtains were drawn. There was a stale, acrid smell in the room.

Joe peered into the gloom. He could see Kester Weidmann at the desk. A pile of papers were scattered before him and several heavy ledgers lay close at hand.

"What do you want?" Kester asked, a little sharply. "I didn't send for you, did I?"

"It's the car," Joe said. "There's something wrong with the magneto. I thought you ought to know in case you wanted to use it."

Someone was sitting in the big chair, facing Kester, his back to Joe. Joe could make out the top of a head and he could see the outline of an arm and hand resting on the arm of the chair. He felt a sudden horror as if he had stretched out his hand into the darkness and had felt something that squirmed under his touch.

"We want the car tonight," Kester said abruptly, looking from the figure in the chair to Joe. "We are both going out."

Joe clenched his teeth. "You can't have the car," he jerked out and then,

unable to restrain himself, he said, “Who’s that —who’s that sitting in the chair?”

Kester smiled. His crazy little eyes twinkled. “Why, Joe,” he said, “you haven’t forgotten Cornelius? Joe doesn’t recognize you,” he went on to the motionless figure in the chair. “Come round here, Joe, and see for yourself.”

Joe shook his head. “No,” he said. “Mr. Cornelius is dead. I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Kester got slowly to his feet. “We’re soon going to remedy that,” he said, advancing on Joe with a sly little smile. “Before long, Cornelius will be walking about again.”

Slowly, as if hypnotized, Joe walked round to the front of the chair.

Releasing his arm for a moment, Kester tilted up the light.

“Doesn’t he look well?” he whispered.

Joe suddenly wanted to be sick. His stomach heaved, and cold sweat ran down his face. He backed away, holding a handkerchief to his mouth and nose in the endeavour to shut out the faint but sickening smell of the embalmer’s oils.

“In a little while,” Kester said, smiling at the body of his brother, “I’ll have you walking about. It’s the best I can do, Cornelius.” His mouth squeezed into a thin, miserable line. “They’ll call you a zombie, Cornelius, but it’s better to be that than in the cold, wet ground away from me.”

The macabre atmosphere in the room, the insane rambling talk from Kester, the acrid smell, Cornelius’s livid face were the ingredients of a terrifying nightmare which threatened Joe’s sanity.

He turned and blundered out of the room and he did not stop until he had reached his own ordered bedroom where he slammed and locked the door.

It was some time before his quivering nerves allowed him to think clearly.

He lay on his bed, the cold feeling of horror still with him, and stared up at the ceiling.

Somehow, he decided, they had persuaded Kester that they could bring Cornelius back to life. In return, Kester was going to pay them a million pounds. Of course, they could never bring Cornelius back to life, but Kester, who wasn't well, believed they could. They would go on bleeding Kester, kidding him that any moment his brother would come back to life, and Kester would go on paying them until he had no money left.

Later, after he had cut himself some bread and butter and had made a cup of tea, he sat by the window and ate his simple supper. It was just after seven o'clock. Susan would be starting work at the Club. Perhaps she would find out something. She might telephone him later to say how they reacted when Kester did not turn up. There was plenty of time before she did that. He wished he had the telephone in his room.

A few minutes past ten o'clock, he decided that he would see what Kester was doing.

Then he heard the Rolls-Royce start up and he sprang to the door. It opened outwards and as he turned the handle in the attempt to throw it wide open, it jammed. He kicked at it savagely as he heard the Rolls back into the drive. Someone had put a wedge under the door and he knew the harder he shoved, the faster the door became jammed.

He spun round and rushed to the window in time to see Kester sitting at the wheel of the Rolls. It was just a momentary glimpse and then the big car vanished round the bend in the drive.

* * *

Butch stood looking down at Celie, his face hard and his eyes suspicious. He knew Kester Weidmann had been to the club and had met them all except himself. He had not been invited. As soon as Celie had left the Club, he had driven after her, determined to find out what had happened.

“Come on,” he said, “let’s have it. Don’t sit there like a goddam dummy! I’m not going until you’ve shot your piece, so get going.”

Celie lolled indifferently on the bed. A cigarette hung from her full, red lips and one of her small feet tapped impatiently on the floor. Her face was sullen and her eyes thoughtful. “It’s nothing to do with me,” she said, as if it hurt her to talk.

“Doc’s handling it. If you must know, Weidmann’s brother died and Weidmann wants him brought back to life. He’s crazy and believes that Doc can do it.”

Butch ran his fingers through his close-cropped hair. “Go on,” he said, restraining his irritation with difficulty. “What about the money?”

Celie looked up sharply. “Nothing’s been arranged about the money.”

“Yeah? You don’t kid me,” Butch said coldly.

“That’s the first thing Rollo would arrange. Don’t try to pull a fast one on me. What’s the matter with you? Do you think you can work this on your own?”

“You’re always suspecting something,” Celie said impatiently. “I keep telling you there’s nothing in it for us. Rollo and Doc are handling it.”

“Where’s the dinge come in?”

“Gilroy?”

“You know who I mean.” Butch’s eyes snapped.

“He’s supposed to do the voodoo stuff.”

Celie became suddenly cautious. She had to be careful. If Butch found out too much, he might force her to give him a cut. "I don't know what he's going to pay," she said, stretching out her long legs and craning her head to admire her neat little feet.

"All right, never mind how much it is. The point is we've promised to bring his brother back to life?"

"For God's sake, how many more times? Yes! Yes! Now are you satisfied? And where do you get all this 'we' stuff from? I'm not doing it. You're not doing it. Doc, Gilroy and Rollo are doing it!"

Butch shrugged. "I'm going to be right there when the payoff takes place," he said. "Weidmann's worth a pile of jack. He could lose two million without going into a decline."

"If you believe that, you'll believe anything," Celie said, reaching for a cigarette in the ebony box on the bedside table.

She glanced up, saw the tight, cruel mouth now set in a hard line and the small eyes like chips of ice and she realized that it wouldn't be wise to goad him further. "Listen, Mike," she said, resting back on her elbow, "you know I want to get out of all this when the time's right. But this isn't the time. We must wait. We can't afford to take chances—"

"Aw, shut up!" Butch said viciously. "You're trying to walk out on me. I know. I can smell it a mile away. Well, you're not going to do it. I'll kill you first. Do you hear?"

She smiled at him. "Don't get mad, Mike, I'm not going to walk out on you."

The cold look went out of his eyes, and he grinned. "I'd get a kick out of killing you, baby," he said. "Know what? I'd break your back across my knee. You'd take a week to croak."

Celie's smile remained fixed. "Now we know," she said.

“Yeah,” Butch returned. “But never mind that.” He tossed his cigarette butt into the fireplace and scratched his head.

“Maybe I’ll figure out a way to cut us in. Even I have ideas now and then.”

“Oh, forget it,” Celie said, suddenly standing up. “Go home, Mike. I’m tired.”

He pulled her to him, feeling her hard, thin back through the silk of her wrap. “You’re always tired when I come along, aren’t you? Well, that don’t matter. I can wait.” He let her push him away and then said suddenly, “Weidmann keeps his brother’s body in the house?”

Celie suddenly stiffened. “I don’t know,” she said “Why?”

Butch grinned. “I think I’ve gotta idea. Listen, suppose I went out there and snatched the body. Neither Rollo nor Weidmann could start anything then, could they? Maybe Weidmann would pay plenty to get the body back.”

Celie’s eyes were wide open now. “You’re crazy,” she gasped. “You couldn’t do a thing like that.”

“Why not?” Butch said, grinning at her. “It’s a pushover.” All I’d have to do would be to go out there one night, knock the body off and hide it some place. There might be a million in it!”

Celie turned away so that he could not see her alarm. If the fool did that he would upset everything. “You can’t double-cross Rollo,” she said, over her shoulder. “Don’t be a fool, Mike. That’s a crazy idea.”

“It’s a pip,” Butch said excitedly. “And you know it, only it don’t suit you to play along. Okay, baby, I’ll pull it without you.”

She spun round. “You dare!” she said, her voice rising.

Butch’s face became suddenly ugly with menace. As he lifted his hand to strike her, the front door bell rang.

Both of them remained still, rage draining from them. Butch slowly lowered his hand and jerked his head. “Rollo?” he whispered, his hand instinctively going to his hip pocket.

Celie shook her head. “He has a key,” she whispered back. “The door’s bolted, but we would have heard him trying to open it.”

Butch relaxed a trifle. “Expecting anyone?”

Again Celie shook her head.

“Well, let ‘em ring,” Butch said savagely. “They’ll soon get tired of it.”

The bell was ringing incessantly now.

“I can’t stand this,” she went on, after a pause. “I’m going to see who it is. That bell’s driving me crazy.”

Butch pulled a snub-nose automatic from his pocket, “Careful who you let in,” he said, showing his teeth in a tight, mirthless smile.

“I’m not letting anyone in,” Celie snapped. “I won’t even take the chain off the door.”

Butch glanced at the big, glass-fronted wardrobe standing in a corner. “I can always duck in there,” he said. “But don’t let anyone in unless you have to.”

The bell was still ringing and with an impatient, nervous exclamation, Celie pulled her wrap more closely round her and ran downstairs,

She put the chain on the door before opening it, then she peered round the narrow opening, seeing the dim figure of a man standing in the shadows. “Who is it?” she demanded.

“Having a bath, Celie, or was it a lover who kept you so long?” Doc Martin asked.

“Doc!” Instantly Celie’s fears vanished and suspicion took their place. She

hated Doc Martin, knowing he was the only person beside herself who shared Rollo's confidences. "What do you mean by coming round here at this time of night?"

Doc leaned against the wall, "I want to talk to you, my pretty," he said.

"I'm not going to talk to you now," Celie snapped. "I'm not dressed."

"I think I could bear that," Doc returned with an irritating chuckle. "I could always close my eyes. What a skinny little rat you must look without your clothes, Celie."

Celie caught her breath. "Get out, drunken old fool," she exclaimed furiously. "Who do you think you're talking to?"

"Dear, dear," Doc sighed. "I don't want to be unpleasant, Celie. Let me in, there's a good girl"

"No! You're not coming in. Will you please go away?"

"If I do go away, you'll be sorry," Doc returned. There was a sudden threatening tone in his voice.

Celie's temper blazed up. "How dare you threaten me," she exclaimed, jerking off the chain and throwing open the door. "Who the hell do you think you are, you washed-up quack? Get out or I'll tell Rollo!"

Doc Martin swept off his hat and bowed mockingly. "I love a woman with spirit. Even if she has been dipped in coffee," he said, grinning broadly. "Now, make up your mind. Either I come in or else I go straight to Rollo and tell him Butch is your lover. Please yourself, but make up your mind quickly. This damp air's bad for my chest."

Celie went cold. How did he know about Butch? Was he bluffing? She bit her lip as she suddenly saw what this might mean. If Rollo learned about Butch, he'd throw her out. She was sure of that and that'd mean no cut of Weidmann's money.

“Why, Doc,” she said, trying to look amazed. “What are you talking about? Butch my lover? Are you crazy?”

Doc moved forward and shouldered her out of the way. “Let’s go upstairs, duckie,” he said, “and have a cosy little chat about it all.”

With a quick movement, half in fear and half in rage, she turned and ran upstairs. Butch had just time to slip into the wardrobe and pull the curtains across the glass doors before Doc wandered in.

As soon as Doc settled himself, Butch drew the curtain back a few inches so that he could see what was going on. He met Celie’s eyes and grimaced.

“An interesting meeting, wasn’t it?” Doc observed, placing his fingertips together and smiling at Celie. “Properly handled it should bring us a mint of money.”

Celie didn’t say anything. There was a cold, calculating look in her narrowed eyes and her heart thudded dully with apprehension.

“Unfortunately, although the money is pleasant to contemplate, it doesn’t help me. The truth is I’m in urgent need of immediate funds,” Doc went on, pursing his lips apologetically. “Even if this brilliant swindle we are preparing for our friend Mr. Weidmann is successful, I don’t imagine well see the colour of his money for a few weeks. It so happens I can’t wait. I have certain commitments and I can’t disappoint my creditors.” He glanced across at her and inclined his head. “I wonder if you’re intelligent enough to see what I’m driving at?”

Celie drew a deep breath. “I think so,” she said, her face stiff with rage and alarm. “You’re tired of being a quack and you’re now turning to blackmail.”

Doc positively beamed. “It’s such a relief to deal with someone quick on the uptake,” he said, stretching out his short, skinny legs. “Well, that’s about all there’s to it. You don’t want Rollo to know about your infidelities. I want some money. It’s now surely just a matter of arranging terms. Let me see, you stand to pick up twenty thousand pounds—that was what Rollo promised

you, wasn't it?"

Celie made a warning movement, and then relaxed, her eyes glowing with fury. She ought to have guessed the little rat would have brought that up. Now Butch, listening to every word, would know that she was double-crossing him. She could not bring herself to look at the wardrobe, but she was conscious of Butch's hard eyes boring into her.

"Well, if Rollo learns what you've been up to, I don't think—in fact, I 'm quite sure you 'll never get your pretty little claws on any of that money," Doc went on pleasantly.

Celie stood there, hating him. She knew he was right. She clenched her fists in helpless rage and glanced quickly at Butch for guidance. For a moment they stared at each other, then Butch pushed open the cupboard door and stepped softly into the room.

"Hello, Doc," he said.

Doc twisted round in the chair. His eyes bulged and his face went livid.

Butch wandered round the chair casually until he stood beside Celie. His eyes were unnaturally bright and his mouth hung open as if he had difficulty in breathing. His short, hairy hands were steady.

Celie looked at him with frightened, puzzled eyes. She had never seen him look like this before and she had a sudden terrifying presentiment of impending disaster. She put her hand on his arm, but he immediately drew away, snarling at her. "Hello, Doc," he repeated. Doc made a gasping sound and his small hands fluttered to his throat. He squirmed down in the armchair, staring at Butch as a rabbit stares at a ferret.

"You've got all the proof you want now, haven't you, Doc?" Butch went on, fumbling for a cigarette and lighting it without taking his eyes from Doc's face.

"I was only having a bit of fun," Doc said. His words tumbled from his

trembling lips in a slobbering rush.

“Sure,” Butch said, blowing a long stream of tobacco smoke down his pinched nostrils. “You wouldn’t blackmail Celie, would you? Not a guy with your education.”

“That’s right,” Doc said with a ghastly attempt to smile. “I wouldn’t do a thing like that. I was just pulling her leg.”

Butch nodded. “You ‘ve got a swell sense of humour.” He turned suddenly to Celie. “Doc and me want to talk. You’d better go and draw your bath.”

Celie stared at him “My bath?” she repeated, shrinking away from him.

Doc struggled to his feet. “I’m going,” he said. His panic was gruesome to watch. “Don’t let me disturb you. I’ll run along.”

Butch looked at him. “Sit down, Doc,” he said softly.

The strength went out of Doc’s legs and he dropped limply into the chair. He put his hands to his face and began to moan softly to himself.

Butch pushed Celie roughly to the door. His bright eyes made her feel a little sick. “Get going and draw your bath,” he said, “and don’t make it too hot. Go on. I want to talk to Doc.”

She went out of the room and a moment later the two men heard the water gushing from the taps.

“Well Doc,” Butch said, lolling against the mantelpiece, “you sure spoke out of turn this time. What’s the matter with you—tired of life?”

Doc drew a shuddering breath. He couldn’t bring himself to speak.

Butch took his cigarette from his lips and snapped it into the fireplace. “The next time you try to put on the squeeze,” he said quietly, “take care you pick on someone your own weight.”

Very slowly, Doc raised his head and stared at Butch with blank eyes. “The next time?” he repeated, and then hope came into his face. “You mean I can go?”

Butch’s mouth twisted. “You don’t think I’d swing for you, you goddam little rat?” he said, leaning forward, his eyes glowing like hot coals. “They hang you for murder in this country. Get out! And if you open your trap I’ll come after you. Do you understand? I’ll take a chance on swinging if you squeal.”

Doc scrambled to his feet. “I won’t tell him,” he babbled, hysterical with relief. “I was only having a little fun. It’s all right, Butch. I won’t ever tell.”

“Get out, you yellow-gutted monkey! You make me sick.”

Doc jerked open the door and blundered into the passage. He paused for a moment when he saw Celie standing by the bathroom door, her hand to her face and her eyes enormous with fear. Then he moved forward to the head of the stairs.

A sudden gasp from Celie froze him in his tracks. He turned his head and had one brief, terrifying glimpse of Butch stealing down on him, a blanket held in both hands. He gave a sharp squeal of terror and tried to throw himself down the flight of stairs, but he was just too late. The blanket enveloped him and he was jerked backwards.

“So long, Doc,” Butch said, as he knelt on the squirming bundle. “This is your one-way ride. Found drowned, Doc, and nobody will send flowers.”

He twisted the blanket tighter and then gathered the kicking, helpless bundle in his arms.

Celie stood in the bathroom doorway, her face ashen. “No!” she screamed.

“You’re mad! You’re not to! No! No! No!”

“Get out of the way you black bitch,” Butch said without raising his voice and with a sudden vicious kick he sent her sprawling to the floor.

He entered the bathroom and stood over the bath, holding the bundle tight against his chest. “If you take it easy, Doc,” Celie heard him say in a calm conversational tone, “you’ll go quick.”

Then the bathroom door was kicked to and she tried to shut out the sudden splashing sound that followed.

chapter four

A soft tap came on the door and Rollo granted,

“Come in.”

Gilroy opened the door and stood looking at Rollo, his black, sensitive eyes uneasy.

“The others gone?” Rollo asked. He had made a sign to Gilroy to come back as he had left the room with Celie and Doc.

Gilroy nodded.

“Come in and shut the door,” Rollo said, pointing with his cigar to a chair. “Sit down.”

Gilroy sat down. He sat on the edge of the chair, his big, black fists on his knees.

“You don’t like any of this, do you?” Rollo asked. “Don’t be afraid to speak out. I want to know.”

Gilroy shook his head. “No good will come of it.”

“And yet you’ll go through with it?”

“Yes.”

Rollo drew on his cigar and let the heavy, oily smoke drift from his half-open mouth. “Still think you owe me something?”

Gilroy nodded.

“I suppose you do.” Rollo touched off the flake of white ash on to the floor.

“You’ve a long memory, Gilroy. Most people would have forgotten.”

“I don’t forget.”

“It was quite a simple thing,” Rollo went on. “Your mother was a lovely woman. She was too proud, too beautiful to be a slave.” He sighed and then said, “So you really think you owe me something because I bought her from that trader and set her free?”

Gilroy nodded.

“Why are you so anxious to square the debt?” Rollo asked, after a long pause.

“I don’t like you or the rest of them,” Gilroy replied. “I want to return to Haiti. You have never given me the chance to wipe out the debt. I have waited too long in this country. Now the chance has come and although it is evil, I do it because I can wait no longer.”

Rollo nodded as if satisfied. “He is very rich,” he said. “He’ll never miss the money.”

“That is not the evil thing,” Gilroy said indifferently. “It matters nothing to me who gets the money. But you are tampering with our religion. You are mocking at it. And no good can come from that.”

“We are pretending to bring the dead back to life,” Rollo said, waving his hand. “If you claim to be able to do that, you’re a liar. If Weidmann wishes to believe it is possible, he’s a madman. If I wish to make money out of it, I am astute.”

“No good can come of it,” Gilroy repeated. Rollo got to his feet and plodded over to the sideboard. He poured himself out a stiff whisky and then returned to his chair. “You can keep that stuff for weak Willies,” he said. “It doesn’t impress me.”

He glanced uneasily at Gilroy. But could he handle Gilroy? He thought he could. Gilroy was only doing this for his sake. He finished his whisky and put the glass on the desk. As he did so the telephone rang shrilly. He glanced at Gilroy, his shaggy eyebrows lifting and then he picked up the receiver.

“Yes?” he said.

A high-pitched voice grated against his ear. Words tumbled from the receiver in a hysterical torrent.

“What?” Rollo said, holding the receiver away from his ear. “I can’t hear you.” His face showed his alarm. “Who is it? For God’s sake, don’t shout like that! Who is it?” He tried to understand what the babbling voice was saying, but only panic, fear and hysteria were conveyed to him. “It sounds like a madman,” he said to Gilroy. “I don’t know what he wants. Here, you speak to him.”

Gilroy hesitated, then took the telephone from Rollo. “Yes?” he asked in his rich, rolling bass. “Who is it, please?”

Rollo could hear the voice quieten. Gilroy half closed his eyes. He listened for a moment or so and then said, “Hold on Mr. Weidmann, I will speak to Rollo.”

“Weidmann?” Rollo said, heaving himself to the edge of his chair. “What is it? What’s the matter with him?”

“He says his brother’s body has been stolen,” Gilroy said softly. “He doesn’t know what to do.”

Rollo bounded from his chair. “What?” he shouted. “His brother’s body stolen? What’s he talking about? He’s mad! Who the hell does he think would want his brother’s body?”

Gilroy didn’t say anything. He sat looking quietly at Rollo and Rollo suddenly stopped talking and stood glaring down at him. Weidmann’s tiny voice began to speak again, but neither of the men paid any attention.

“Without the body we’re sunk!” Rollo said, sitting down abruptly.

A thin smile appeared on Gilroy’s lips. “What do I tell him?” he said. “He is waiting.”

“Let him wait,” Rollo said savagely. “Who could have done it? Doc? Do you think Doc’s double-crossing us?”

Gilroy lifted his shoulders. “He would not have had the time,” he pointed out.

“Then who? Don’t sit there like a graven image. What am I going to do?”

Weidmann’s voice was shrieking now. “Hello?” the receiver squeaked. “Why don’t you answer? Why don’t you answer? Hello? Hello? Hello?”

Rollo pulled himself together. “Tell him we’ll be right with him. Tell him we are coming now.”

When Gilroy had conveyed the message, he hung up.

“Someone else knows about this,” Rollo said, pacing up and down. “My God! Whoever’s got the body can wring Weidmann dry! What a fool I was not to have thought of it. I could have done without Doc.” He paused as he met Gilroy’s eyes. Then he looked at the desk. The little wooden doll was lying on its side.

“You don’t have to worry about Doc,” Gilroy said.

Rollo took two quick steps forward and thrust his great, red face into Gilroy’s. “Listen, you goddamn nigger!” he said violently. “Cut this stuff out! I’ve had enough of you for tonight. Now shut up!”

Gilroy nodded. “I thought you would want to know,” he said, lifting his shoulders. “I’m sorry.”

“I haven’t time to waste,” Rollo said. “I’ve got to get organized.” He stroked his heavy jowls with a hand that was none too steady. “Tell Tom to get the car. Get hold of Butch. We’ve got to get out to Weidmann’s at once.”

Gilroy silently left the room.

A big Packard waited at the end of the alley. Long Tom was sitting at the wheel, a sullen, bored look on his face.

“Mademoiselle Celie’s apartment,” Rollo said, climbing into the car. Gilroy followed him and as he slammed the door, Tom drove off.

They reached Bruton Place in a few minutes and Rollo pulled out a keychain, selected a key and opened the door of Celie’s flat.

The light was on at the top of the stairs.

“Wait here. If I want you, I’ll call you,” he said to Gilroy and breathing heavily, he heaved himself up the steep stairs.

Celie came out of her bedroom as he was halfway up. Her face was ghastly in the hard electric light.

“What do you want?” she demanded in a quavering voice. “I don’t want to see you. Go away!”

Rollo paused, bewildered to see her like this. Her face was ashen and her great black eyes rolled in terror. Her mouth, a smear of lipstick, worked horribly.

“What’s the matter?” he said. “What’s the matter with you?”

She leaned forward. “Get out!” she screamed at him. “Get out!”

Rollo moved slowly up the stairs. He reached her and his great hands sank into her shoulders. “What’s the matter with you?” he snarled and shook her so that her head snapped back.

“Leave me alone,” she moaned, sinking at the knees.

He had to support her. Picking her up, he walked into her bedroom and

dumped her on the bed.

“You’re wasting time,” Gilroy said from the doorway.

Rollo turned. “Did I tell you to come up?” he demanded, his face contorted with fury.

“Weidmann’s waiting,” Gilroy returned. “I thought he would be more important to you.”

Rollo straightened and stepped away from Celie who lay still, her face buried in the pillow.

“Yes,” he said, “you’re right.” He pulled Celie over on her back. “Listen,” he said, glaring down at her. “Get hold of Butch. Tell him to come out to Weidmann’s. I don’t know what game you’re playing, but I’ll see you tomorrow. Do you hear? I’ve more important things to worry about just now. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

He pushed past Gilroy and went down the steep stairs.

Gilroy said softly, “Clean up the bathroom, Celie, it smells of death,” and he followed Rollo without a backward glance.

* * *

“A Detective Sergeant!” Cedric Smythe exclaimed. “Really, it’s fantastic. I don’t know how you’ve done it!”

The tall, pleasant-looking young man seated opposite him, grinned shyly and raised his glass of beer. “Well, you must admit I would never have made an actor,” he said. “Come on, Cedric, be honest.”

Cedric shook his head. “I don’t know so much about that,” he returned,

shaking his head.

Cedric sighed. He was happy. For the first time for many months one of his friends had called on him. It was a pity that Jerry Adams had lost touch with the theatre. What a sinful waste of talent, Cedric thought dismally. Fancy becoming a policeman! At one time, Jerry looked a most promising juvenile lead. In fact, Cedric had predicted a big future for him.

Jerry finished his beer. "Well, I've got to get back to the station," he said, getting to his feet. "Now I know where you are I'll come in again. It's been grand to hear all the gossip."

Cedric looked at the time. It was just after eleven. "Must you go?" he said wistfully. "Well, I suppose I mustn't keep you from work. You'll come again, won't you? I'm lonely, Jerry. You wouldn't believe how lonely I get."

Jerry smiled. "I'm lonely, too," he said. "Of course, I'm coming again. I've enjoyed every moment of this. Besides, I'm curious to meet this Miss Hedder you keep talking about."

Cedric looked worried. "She's such a nice girl, Jerry," he returned, as they walked to the front door. "I'm so anxious about her. When a girl's been jilted like that, you never know what the rebound is going to be." He looked at Jerry with a smirk. "I've often thought what a splendid wife she'd make a young fellow like you."

Jerry laughed. "You're just the same old Cedric," he returned, slipping into his overcoat. "Always on the lookout for romance. Why don't you marry the girl yourself?"

"My dear boy," Cedric protested. "The very idea! Why, I'm old and done for. Anyway, you must meet her. I'll try to arrange it. Only just now, she seems very busy. I can't imagine what she's doing."

Jerry grinned. "Well, if she's breaking the law, you know where to come. As a matter of fact, Cedric, I'm hoping for an important case. If you know of anyone contemplating murder, you might give me a ring."

He rinsed the glasses under the tap, put the bottle with several empties and turned off the light. He groped his way to the foot of the stairs and as he began the journey to his bedroom on the top floor, the front door bell rang.

For a moment, Cedric was startled. He turned on the hall light and glanced at his watch. It was eleven fifteen. He went to the front door and opened it.

Joe Crawford stood on the step. "I've got something for Miss Hedder," he said, looking at Cedric with cold, baleful eyes.

Cedric, with a startled gasp, took an involuntary step back. He had not expected to see Joe again and the sight of his cold, hard face shocked him.

"What?" he said. "What do you mean, ringing at this time of night?"

He became aware of a taxi waiting and the driver, standing by a big trunk, looked up at him expectantly from the bottom of the steps.

"Shall I bring it up, Guv'nor?" he asked.

Joe turned. "I'll give you a hand," he said, then glancing contemptuously at Cedric he said, "This is for Miss Hedder. We'll take it up."

"What is it?" Cedric asked, his curiosity getting the better of him. "I don't know if I want you in my house after the way you spoke—"

"Aw, shut up!" Joe snapped and he ran down the steps and seized the trunk by one of its leather handles. The taxi driver caught hold of the other end and together they staggered up the steps and into the hall.

They let the trunk down with a thud and stood up, both looking at Cedric.

"Blimey!" the driver gasped, "that ain't full of feathers."

"Where's her room?" Joe said to Cedric.

"What is it?" Cedric asked, staring at the trunk uneasily. "Who are you and what do you want to bring that in here for?"

Joe reached out and pulled Cedric towards him. His face was pale and frightening. "Listen, fat," he said, speaking through set teeth, "where's her room? I don't want a lot of talk from you. Show the way and shut up!"

The driver chuckled. He was a fat, elderly man with a flaming red nose and watery eyes.

"Ain't he a caution?" he said to Cedric. "Been swearin' and cursin' like billy-o all the time." Come on, don't keep 'is lordship waiting."

Speechless with anger and fright, Cedric went upstairs. Joe and the driver, carrying the trunk between them, followed him. They banged the trunk against the wall and they had difficulty in getting it round the narrow curve of the stairs as they reached the first landing. "My stars!" the driver gasped, letting his end down with a thud, "give us a rest, guv'nor. Blimey! I ain't as young as I was."

Joe leaned against the wall. His face was livid and his breath came in gasps.

The trunk was obviously too much for him, but he seemed to be making a desperate, frightening effort.

Cedric eyed them uneasily.

"Well, come along," he snapped, seeing how exhausted they were and gaining some courage. "I want to go to bed even if you don't."

Joe snarled at him. "Shut up!" he said, but he seized hold of his end of the trunk and heaved it off the floor.

"Proper young slavedriver you are", the driver said with a good-humoured grin. "Well, ups a daisy," and taking up his end, they went staggering up to the second floor.

Cedric went ahead with as much dignity as he could muster. He threw open Susan's door and turned on the light.

“I hope she’s expecting this,” he said coldly as they staggered into the little room. “I don’t know if I ought to take it in. I really don’t know, I’m sure.”

“Well, it’s in, old top,” the taxi driver said, letting the trunk down with a thud that shook the house. “If you don’t like it you can blooming well carry it down yourself.”

“He’ll keep his nose out of this,” Joe said viciously.

“Well, come along,” Cedric said, holding open the door. “You can’t stay here. This is a lady’s room.”

They went downstairs and the driver got into his cab. Joe turned on Cedric.

“Tell her she’s not to touch that trunk until I’ve spoken to her,” and without giving Cedric a chance to reply, he went down the steps and got into the cab.

He would really have to talk to Susan, Cedric decided. He liked the girl, but the past two days had been very disturbing.

He again thought of the trunk. What was that odd smell? Where had he smelt it before? What on earth could be in the trunk?

He sat for a long time nursing his fears and his grievance. It was half-past twelve when he heard the front door open and he got up immediately and went into the hall.

Susan looked at him in surprise and confusion. “Good evening, Mr. Smythe,” she said. “I—I thought you’d be in bed.”

“I wanted to speak to you,” Cedric said, looking at her severely. “Really, Miss Hedder, things have come to a pretty pass. I know it’s not my business, but really— I mean, I do think you owe me an explanation.”

Susan coloured. “Why, Mr. Smythe, I—I don’t know what you mean . . .” she began, but Cedric with a dignified gesture stopped her.

“I hope you will spare me a few moments,” he said. “Will you please step

into my sitting room?”

“Very well,” Susan said, wondering uneasily what he had discovered.

She followed him into the sitting room and pulling off her pert little hat, she nervously fluffed out her hair.

“Miss Hedder,” Cedric began, taking up his position before the fireplace, “who is this odd person who leaves notes and trunks for you?”

Susan stared at him. “Trunks?” she repeated blankly.

“Well, a trunk. He came here not an hour ago and was most rude. I’ve never been spoken to like that in all my life. If he hadn’t said you were a friend of his, I’d have sent for the police.”

“But I don’t understand,” Susan said, bewildered. “What trunk?”

“This person brought it for you tonight,” Cedric explained. “Surely you were expecting it?”

“You mean—Mr. Crawford?”

Cedric sniffed. “He didn’t mention his name. He was young, quite a hooligan. And he used a dreadful expression. Of course, in the Army . . .” He waved his hand expressively. “But one doesn’t expect to hear that sort of thing in one’s own house.”

“Perhaps I’d better go up and see,” Susan said, seeing the opportunity to get out of the room. “I don’t know anything about a trunk.”

Joe had said he was sending her a steel box. Could this trunk be it, she wondered, on her way up. There was so much she wanted to ask him. Why had Kester Weidmann turned up at the club when Joe had said he would keep him away from Rollo?

As she turned the handle of her door, the telephone began to ring. The telephone was the only luxury in her room. It had been installed by one of

Cedric's late boarders and as it had a few months still to run before the subscription was renewed, Cedric had left it in the room.

As she crossed over to answer it, she became aware of a faint, acrid smell that vaguely reminded her of funeral flowers.

She saw the trunk, black, large and stark, standing against the wall. She felt a cold shiver run down her back as she lifted the receiver.

"This is Joe." The soft, timbreless voice sounded urgent.

"What happened?" she asked. "And what is this trunk doing here?"

"Don't talk, listen," Joe said. "Mr. Weidmann tricked me. I found he had his brother's body in his room. The body has been embalmed. He wants to bring it to life. Rollo's pretending he can bring it to life and he'll make money out of it. Well, they can't do it now. I've hidden the body. It was the only thing to do. Do you understand? Whatever happens they must not find the body."

Susan sat rigid, the telephone clamped to her ear, her mind only half grasping what he was saying.

"I don't understand," she said, looking fearfully over her shoulder at the trunk. Her heart contracted and she began to tremble. "Body? What do you mean?"

"Don't be soft," Joe said fiercely. "The body's embalmed. It doesn't look very nice, but that can't be helped. You needn't look in the trunk."

The room spun before Susan's eyes. "No!" she cried. "Oh Joe . . . please . . ."

"I can't talk anymore. Someone's coming . . ." his voice broke off. There was a moment's silence, then he said, "They're here! He's sent for them . . ." and the line went dead.

Joe put the telephone down on the table and looked at Rollo and Gilroy with sullen, expressionless eyes.

Kester Weidmann, his face working loosely, his eyes blank with grief, looked like a pygmy beside Rollo. He fluttered his hands at Rollo and then pointed to Joe.

“That’s Joe,” he said. “Joe’s a good boy. He’ll help. Where have you been, Joe? Cornelius has gone. Someone has taken him away.”

Joe felt Rollo’s eyes were watching him suspiciously.

“What do you mean—gone?” he said, through dry lips. “He was dead, wasn’t he?”

Weidmann wrung his hands. “Someone has taken him away,” he repeated.

Rollo put his hand on Weidmann’s arm. “I’ll get him back,” he said soothingly. “I want to talk to Joe. Suppose you go and lie down, Mr. Weidmann? You’re tired. Gilroy, see he goes to bed.” All the time he was talking he did not take his eyes off Joe.

“No! I couldn’t rest. I must find Cornelius,” Weidmann protested feebly, but Gilroy led him away and Rollo and Joe were left together.

“So you’re Joe,” Rollo said, coming further into the room. “Who were you telephoning to just now?”

“My girl,” Joe said, trying to keep calm. “I can phone my girl, can’t I?”

Rollo smiled. “Of course,” he returned, pulling a chair to the table and sitting down. He glanced round the room, ghostly and cold with its furniture hidden by dust sheets. “Tell me about her, Joe. Who is she?”

“That’s my business,” Joe said, backing away. “Who are you?”

“I should be careful how you talk to me,” Rollo said, still smiling, but his little eyes gleamed viciously. “Why did your master ask where you’ve been? Have you been out, Joe?”

Joe shook his head.

“Are you quite sure?”

“I’m sure,” Joe said, clenching his fists. “You’d better get out. You and the nigger. You’re not wanted here.”

Rollo glanced down at his great hands. “Your master asked me to come,” he said gently. “He’s in need of friends.”

Gilroy came back. “He’s resting,” he said to Rollo. “Have you found out anything?”

“Not yet, but I will,” Rollo said, watching Joe thoughtfully. “I think he did it, but I’m not quite sure.” He pointed at Joe. “You took Cornelius away, didn’t you?”

Joe sneered. “Why should I do a thing like that?” he said. “He’s dead. Who’d want a corpse?”

“Don’t be a young fool,” Rollo said, with a smile. “I can handle this better than you. Sit down. Let’s talk it over.”

Joe didn’t move.

“Sit down, Joe,” Rollo repeated, pointing to a chair on the other side of the table.

Joe drew in a sharp breath, hesitated and then walked stiffly to the chair and sat down.

“That’s better,” Rollo went on. “Now we can talk. You’re young. You can’t handle this yourself. Weidmann’ll pay big money to get his brother back. Let’s save time. You know where the body is. I can get the money out of Weidmann. Suppose you and I become partners? You can have a third of what I get out of Weidmann. How’s that?”

“If I knew where his brother was, I might think about it; but I don’t,” Joe said.

“Perhaps that wasn’t your girlfriend after all,” Rollo went on. “Perhaps it was the person you’ve taken Cornelius to?”

Joe didn’t say anything.

There was a long pause, then Rollo said softly, “I could persuade you to talk, Joe, but I don’t want to be dramatic. It would be so much better if you collaborated.”

“If I knew where he was I’d tell you,” Joe said, flinching inside.

The door pushed open and Butch wandered in. A cigarette hung from his lips and he looked at Joe with a thin smile.

Rollo said, “You’ve timed your entrance brilliantly.” He waved his hand across the table. “That’s Joe.”

“Yeah,” Butch said, leaning against the wall. “We’ve met before.”

Joe shivered. Why had he thought he could get away with this? Now that the man in the black shirt was here, his courage, his hopes and his determination melted away.

“Well, Joe, are you going to tell me, or do you want me to leave you alone with Butch for a little while?” Rollo asked.

Again Joe shivered. He knew if Butch tortured him he would not be able to keep silent. He knew his own limitations.

He had no stamina for pain. He had no courage to face Butch alone. He would talk all right. Then they would kill him.

He was sure of that. When they had killed him they would go to Susan’s place and they would find the trunk. Maybe they’d kill Susan, too, and the fat old geyser. And then they would bleed Kester white. All because he hadn’t the guts to keep his mouth shut.

He ran his tongue over his dry lips. "All right," he said, "I'll talk."

Rollo nodded. "He seems afraid of you, Butch," he said, and smiled.

Butch said, "Maybe I'd better soften him now."

"We'll hear what he has to say first. Well, Joe?"

"He's here—in this house," Joe said, not looking at any of them. "I knew what your game was, but there's not much use going on, is there?"

Rollo leaned forward. "In this house?" he repeated. "So you didn't go out?"

"Why should I?" Joe said. "How could I get a body away from here? No, I hid it upstairs."

"He's lying," Butch said.

"It won't help him," Rollo returned. "It may gain him a few minutes but that's all."

"I'll show you," Joe said, getting to his feet. His heart thumped dully against his side and his mouth was dry. "He's upstairs."

"Where?" Rollo asked.

"He's in the box-room at the top of the house."

"Go and see," Rollo said to Butch. "We'll wait here."

"You'll never find it," Joe said, with a satisfied smile. "But go if you want to."

The three men stared at him. Rollo leaned forward. "You'll be sorry if you trick us," he said.

Joe looked at him. "He's up there. You can all come. I'll take you to him."

“We’ll wait here,” Rollo said, after a moment’s thought. “Go with him, Butch, and be careful. I think he’s got something up his sleeve.”

Butch jerked his head to the door. “Come on,” he said, “and watch your step. If you try anything funny, I’ll tear your ears off.”

Joe walked past him into the hall. Together they began to mount the stairs.

“I told you to pull out while you could,” Butch said, as they came to the first landing. “Now, see what a jam you’ve got yourself into.”

Halfway up the stairs; Joe decided that now was the time to start something.

His knees went suddenly weak and his heart beat so violently that he felt breathless and dizzy. If he made a mistake now, nothing could save him. If he waited a second longer, the opportunity would pass.

They were exactly halfway up the broad stairs and there would be no more stairs after these. He gulped in a deep breath, swung round and putting both hands on Butch’s chest, pushed savagely. Butch gave a sharp cry, tried to recover his balance, clutched at Joe and then took a blind step back.

Joe struck at him as he fell. Butch heeled over, his fingers sliding off Joe’s arm and away he went down the stairs.

Joe didn’t look back. He flew up the stairs, his head down and his shoulders hunched. He reached the landing as Butch crashed against the banisters, clutching wildly at anything to save himself, but failing to get a grip strong enough to stop the momentum of his falling body. He thudded on the landing below and lay there, stunned.

Joe ran down the long corridor to a small window that overlooked the roof.

He could hear someone—it was probably

Rollo—shouting up the stairs. He put his trembling hands to the window frame and heaved, but the window wouldn’t move. He heaved again feeling a

sick, terrifying panic enveloping him. The window was immovable.

Below, he heard Butch cursing as he dragged himself to his feet. He would be up in a moment and then all escape would be cut off.

Joe rattled the window frame, trying to loosen it, but it had not been opened for a long time and paint and dirt had fixed it solid.

He glanced over his shoulder, his breath sobbing in his throat. He could hear Butch stumbling up the stairs. He could also hear Rollo's great booming voice coming closer. Turning once more back to the window, he crouched and then drove his shoulder through the pane of glass. He stood away and kicked out the remaining splinters as Butch came reeling into sight. Then he ducked through the broken window on to the roof.

"Stop!" Butch shouted, coming to a halt.

Joe paid no attention. He scrambled up the tiles until he reached the top of the gable. He sat astride the gable, his back to the garden, facing the window through which he had come.

The night was hot, and a big moon hung in the sky. Far below, he could see the vast garden and the wood stretching out like a child's plaything.

Butch peered through the window, his face a blend of savage fury and alarm.

He saw Joe perched on the roof not more than twenty feet from him; he glared at him.

"You'd better come in," he said, "or I'll come and get you."

Joe showed his teeth. He was feeling a little dizzy, but he knew that Butch couldn't hurt him now.

Rollo came panting down the corridor and shouldered Butch out of the way.

He peered through the window at Joe, sucked in his breath, then he looked at Butch in vicious, snarling rage.

“I told you to watch him, didn’t I?” he said furiously. “What do you think you’re going to do now?”

“I’m going after him,” Butch said. “He can’t get away.”

“Don’t be a fool! You might slip. It’s a long drop down there.”

“I won’t slip,” Butch said, but he made no move to get through the window.

Rollo again looked out of the window at Joe. “Now be sensible, my boy,” he said mildly. “This won’t get you anywhere. You’d better come in before you meet with an accident.”

Joe gripped the warm tiles and leaned forward. “In a little while,” he said, “I’m going to jump. I’ve thought it all out. If I don’t, I’ll talk. I know that, so I’m going to jump.”

Rollo stared at him. Joe’s white face was stark and frightening in the moonlight and Rollo suddenly realized with a feeling of chill that he meant what he said.

“Don’t be a fool,” he urged. “We won’t hurt you. Tell us where the body is and we’ll leave you alone.”

Joe shook his head. “No!” He had difficulty in stopping his teeth from chattering. Although the night was hot and the roof still kept the heat of the summer sun, he himself was shivering with cold fear.

Rollo whispered to Butch “Get a rope. We might drop a noose over him.”

Butch grunted and went away down the corridor.

Rollo turned back to the window. “Let’s be sensible about this,” he said persuasively, as if talking to a child. “You’re young. You don’t want to die. Tell me where the body is and I’ll give you ten thousand pounds. Think of it, my boy. Think what you could do with ten thousand pounds.”

“You don’t understand,” Joe said, peering at Rollo’s great face. “They did everything for me. You’ve no idea how good they’ve been to me. I know what you’re going to do, and I won’t let you. You’ll never find Cornelius now and without him you can’t do anything. That’s why I’m going to jump. It’ll spoil your little game and Mr. Kester will be safe from you.” He glanced over his shoulder, looking down at the garden below.

Rollo saw him sway and clutch at the roof and for a moment he thought Joe was going to fall.

“Take care!” he said in sudden agony, knowing that if Joe fell the chances of finding Cornelius were very slim.

Just then Butch came back. He had a long thin rope in his hand.

Rollo whispered, “Keep out of sight. Don’t let him see you. How will you do it?”

“I’m going to try to get on the roof from some other point,” Butch said. “You keep the little rat talking while I sneak up on him.”

Rollo wiped the perspiration from his eyes. “I think he means to jump,” he said. “He’s mad. He must be. You can’t afford to make a mistake.”

Butch’s face went sullen. “I won’t make a mistake,” he said.

“Be careful. He may try to drag you after him.”

“Just keep him talking,” Butch returned and went away down the corridor again.

Joe, out of the corner of his eye, saw something move. He jerked round and as he did so, there came a faint swishing sound of a falling rope.

“You fool!” Rollo shouted, seeing the rope tighten round Joe’s throat.

It was too late.

With a thin scream of terror, Joe disappeared off the roof. The slack of the rope suddenly whipped tight, and jerked with a loud snap against the tiles.

Butch crawled into sight. He paid no attention to Rollo's vituperation. He reached the gable, swung himself across it and crept forward to the edge. He leaned forward and looked down at Joe's white face, as he swung limply at the end of the rope.

* * *

Cedric Smythe had just taken off his coat and waistcoat as he prepared to go to bed when he was startled by Susan's wild scream. For a moment he stood petrified, then seizing his dressing gown, he hurried along the passage and halted at the foot of the stairs.

The house was in darkness and after the first alarming scream, there was silence. Cedric wished some of his other boarders would join him to find out what was the matter. But apparently they were too preoccupied with sleep to bother with his fears.

"Miss Hedder!" he called. "Are you all right?"

He listened and as he could hear nothing he began a slow and reluctant move up the stairs.

Then suddenly he heard a door open, slam shut, the sound of a key being turned in the lock and hurried footsteps down the passage.

"Oh, my goodness!" he exclaimed under his breath and crouched against the wall, his eyes popping out of his head and his heart racing with alarm.

Susan swept to the foot of the stairs and came down with a rush. She was holding her hat and coat in her hand and she didn't see him until she was on

top of him.

It was doubtful whether Cedric startled her more than her horror stricken face startled him.

She shied away from him with a little squeak, hesitated for a second and then made as if to rush on.

Cedric stopped her. "What is it?" he said, looking past her to the upstairs landing as if expecting to see someone creeping down on them. "What's the matter? You're frightening the life out of me!"

"I can't tell you," Susan said, wrenching herself free. "I can't tell you now. I've got to go out," and away she went again, down the stairs, into the hall and out into the street.

Somewhere in the far distance a clock struck two. The long Fulham Road was deserted and the moon lit up the faces of the houses and on the windows, making them look like great blind eyes.

A taxi suddenly turned from a side road into the main road and waving frantically, Susan stopped it.

The taxi driver peered at her curiously. "Out late, Miss, ain't you?" he asked, then added a little wearily, "I was just going home."

"It's not far," Susan panted, jerking open the cab door. "It's just by the Green Man. I'll tell you where to stop."

It did not take more than three or four minutes to reach the Green Man and then Susan leaned forward. "I want Mr. Kester Weidmann's place. Do you know where it is?"

"You bet I do," the driver returned. "The millionaire? Wot do you want with 'im?"

"Oh—I work there. I'm a maid there," Susan explained after a moment's

frantic thought. “Don’t drive in. Just put me down at the gates. If anyone hears me, I’ll—I’ll get the sack.”

The driver pulled up after a moment. “ ‘Ere you are, Miss.”

Susan got out, gave him his fare and then hurried through the great stone gateway and down the long twisting drive towards the house. She had no idea where she would find Joe, but even if she had to rouse the house, she was determined to see him. He would have to come back with her and remove the trunk. She was determined to accept no excuse nor to listen to any attempt to persuade her to keep the trunk.

Whatever happened he would have to take it away.

It was a long, lonely walk up the drive. She would have been hopelessly lost had it not been for the brilliant moonlight.

The drive was cut through a dense wood and she walked some distance before she caught a glimpse of the house. As she did so, she noticed a big Packard car standing in the drive. Only then did she remember what Joe had said over the telephone. “They’re coming. He’s sent for them.”

Instantly she stepped off the driveway into the thick undergrowth. They—Rollo and the man in the black shirt—were already there. She had been about to walk right into them. What were they doing? Why had Kester Weidmann sent for them? Where was Joe?

She began to move very cautiously through the undergrowth until she got nearer the house. Then she paused again and peered through the bushes. A tall, thin man was standing in the middle of the broad circular drive. He was motionless, his head thrown back; he seemed to be staring at the sky.

A voice called from above. “I can’t pull the little rat up. I’m going to cut the rope and let him drop.”

The thin man who was looking up, granted. “I’ll get out of the way,” he shouted back.

Susan edged forward until she was standing on the fringe of the undergrowth. From there she had an uninterrupted view. She looked up and saw a man sitting astride one of the gables. She recognized him because of his white tie which stood out starkly against his black shirt in the moonlight. What was he doing? She stared, forgetting the man near her, forgetting everything in the sudden feeling of cold horror as her eyes made out the limp figure that dangled at the end of the rope. Even as she recognized the thin frame and the thick untidy hair, the rope suddenly parted and the body fell.

Susan hid her face. She couldn't scream. She couldn't run away. Her whole body cringed while waiting for the sound of the body to strike the ground. When it came, she fell on her knees, her knuckles forced into her mouth. She felt herself falling forward and for a little while she did not remember what happened.

She must have fainted, she told herself when next she became aware of what was going on. She did not know how long she had been lying on the dry, stubbly grass, but when she peered through the bushes she saw there were three more men in the drive. She recognized Gilroy and the man in the black shirt. The other man, gross and ponderous, she guessed must be Rollo. They were all grouped around Joe's body, which lay huddled on the cement drive.

She lay flat, watching them, a feeling of horror numbing her senses. It had all been so sudden and so unreal that she knew she would not realize the full hideousness of what had happened until much later. Now, feeling curiously weak and stunned, she was content to lie on the grass and watch these men.

Gilroy said in a soft voice, "Someone's watching us. I feel their eyes."

Butch snarled at him. "Shut up, nigger!"

Gilroy continued to stare at Rollo, his great eyes rolled uneasily.

"What do you mean?" Rollo demanded, feeling the short hair on his neck rising.

"Someone's watching us," Gilroy repeated. "I'm sure of it."

Rollo glanced at Butch.

“He’s cracked,” Butch said, looking uneasily at the dark undergrowth.

“Where?” Rollo asked Gilroy. “Who is it?”

Gilroy was staring directly at the bush where Susan was hiding.

Susan became aware of the tense attitude of the men as they turned and looked in her direction. Her blood froze as she realized that they were looking at her and for a moment she forgot that the undergrowth was too thick for them to see her.

She saw them speak together and again they looked in her direction. At that moment, Tom came back carrying a pickaxe and a spade. They turned on him and after a moment’s talk, he and Gilroy picked up Joe between them and moved away behind the woodshed. Rollo and the man in the black shirt conferred together, staring all the time at where Susan crouched and then very slowly they began walking towards her.

For a moment, she remained petrified with terror and then realizing that if they caught her she would never escape, she sprang to her feet and ran madly into the wood.

A shout spurred her on. She could hear someone running after her and the crashing of the undergrowth as a heavy body hurtled forward. She guessed it was Rollo and she did not really worry about him. It was the man in the black shirt who terrified her. He was quick, lean and strong. He would glide soundlessly through the undergrowth and would try to cut her off.

She had no idea where she was running to. As she plunged deeper into the wood, it became darker, but her terror was so great that she kept on, tearing her coat and the brambles and feeling the branches of the trees slashing across her face.

As soon as Susan began to run, Butch sprang forward. So the nigger was right. Whoever it was must not get away. A feeling of exhilaration filled

Butch as he swung forward into the wood. This time he would use his hands. Already he felt the urge to get his hands on a throat and to squeeze and keep squeezing.

Rollo was blundering along in the rear making a row like a herd of elephants. The noise he made prevented Butch from picking the right direction and he shouted to Rollo to stand still. Rollo was glad to. The first rush forward had completely winded him and he came to a gasping halt, feeling dazed, breathless and a little faint.

Butch stood listening. To the right he could hear Susan blundering through the undergrowth. Drawing in a deep breath, he began to run forward, moving to the left, moving very fast and silently, preparing to come in in a sweeping circle when he thought he had gone far enough.

Whoever it was running ahead also moved quickly. This irritated Butch and he put on a spurt. Moving at that rate he was unable to keep silent and Susan heard him, alarmingly near. She knew who it was and she wanted to scream for help, but she knew that was the worst thing she could do.

He was coming up fast now and she guessed he was moving in a wide sweep to head her off. Any moment she expected him to crash into view and sobbing for breath, she suddenly shied into a thick clump of bushes and stopped running.

She stood there, trembling and panting, her ears pricked and her eyes wide with fear.

Butch came on and then he too stopped because the sound of Susan's headlong flight had ceased. She had stopped! He pulled up in a little clearing, motionless and menacing, his head on one side, his eyes intent.

Susan, not more than twelve yards away, knelt in the cover of the bushes and watched him. She began to pray under her breath feverishly and with childish panic. "Oh, God, please don't let him find me. Please don't let him find me," she kept saying to herself.

Butch felt that whoever it was he was chasing could not be far away. The idea that this person might be watching him from some hiding place infuriated him.

“You better come out,” he shouted suddenly. “Do you hear? I can see you, so you better come out!”

Susan caught her breath in a gasp of relief. As he spoke he had turned his back on her. That could only mean he had not as yet guessed where she was.

Butch began to walk slowly forward. Susan watched him move away. Her heart began to beat more steadily. It was going to be all right. He had missed her and she would give him a few minutes’ start and then she would run back the way she had come. She saw Butch move further and further away until she lost sight of him. She listened until finally she could no longer hear his stealthy steps.

Softly she moved out of her shrub and walked into Rollo.

They stood staring at each other in the moonlight. Rollo was the first to recover. He reached out and took her arm. The power of his grip made her fall forward on her knees. She beat at his great fist with her free hand, but it was as if her arm was seized in a vice.

“So,” Rollo said, peering down at her. “Joe’s girlfriend. Yes? that’s who you are, aren’t you?”

Susan couldn’t speak. She just remained on her knees before him, feeling the blood drain out of her heart.

“Butch!” Rollo roared, “Butch! Come here. I’ve got her.”

In the distance she could hear Butch coming, crashing through the undergrowth with a recklessness that told her he was coming to kill her.

She bit Rollo’s hand. Her sharp teeth sank into the fleshy heel of the hand that held her. The taste of his blood made her feel sick. He was taken by

surprise. He let go and started back with an oath.

Instantly she was on her feet and away. She heard his bellow of rage and she heard Butch coming swiftly. She put her head down and ran blindly. She suddenly stumbled and then under her feet she felt the hard gravel drive. She had left the wood behind and she was now in the open. She did not pause or attempt to get back into the undergrowth. She ran.

Footsteps pattered after her. Footsteps that seemed to be gaining on her. But she did not look back. She kept on, running like a deer, startled to find how swiftly she could move.

She was on the road now, and she was running towards the Green Man.

Ahead of her she saw someone walking towards her. Behind her, the footsteps suddenly died away. She glanced back. A dim shadowy figure was standing watching her. She slowed down to walk, as a lone policeman drew near. He glanced at her suspiciously and it was only with the greatest difficulty that she did not let him see her distress. She kept on walking and when she reached the Green Man, she began to run again.

chapter five

Jack Fresby regarded Susan dubiously and nibbled at the ends of his moustache. Something was up, he decided. She looked as if she'd been out all night and her nerves were obviously in a shocking state. He eyed her, noting that there was a streak of dirt under her chin and one of her stockings was laddered.

Shouldn't be surprised if she hadn't been having a roll in the hay, he told himself. He looked at her again and grunted.

Well, perhaps not. She didn't look the type.

He flattered himself that he could spot a wrong 'un and there was nothing bad about this young woman. Anyway, she wasn't at all the smart young woman who had called on him previously.

He scratched his head, humming under his breath. Frankly, he didn't know what to do. Joe had said, "Every morning at half-past ten, I'll ring you. If I don't ring, you must go at once to 155A Fulham Road and give this box to Miss Hedder."

It was now twenty to eleven and Joe hadn't rung and this young woman, jumpy as a cat and suspiciously dishevelled, was asking for the box. Had anything happened to Joe? Fresby had a pretty good idea what was in the box. If he could be sure that Joe was out of the way, he could open the box and destroy its contents. But he would have to be careful. "I may be trying you out," Joe had said. "If you don't deliver the box, you know what I'll do?" And he would too, the dirty little rat!

He decided to hedge. "What box?" he said, looking up at the ceiling.

"Anyone could come here asking for a box. Do you think I make 'em! I

don't. I've other things to do."

That ought to put her off, he thought, mildly pleased with himself. What's she going to say to that?

Susan, very white and breathless, but coldly determined, leaned forward.

"You know what I mean! Joe told me things about you. He said if you tried to play tricks I was to go to the police and I will if you don't give me the box."

Another of them! Fresby glanced away so that she shouldn't see the sudden murderous look that came into his eyes. He muttered under his breath, and then, "What things did he tell you?" he asked, his voice dropping to a confidential whisper.

"You know as well as I do," Susan said, drawing back. "I'm not going to talk about it—it's too unpleasant."

Bluff, of course, but she guessed whatever he had done must have been pretty bad otherwise Joe would have told her about it. Anyway, she could see she had said the right thing.

Fresby's face seemed to fall apart and he hurriedly looked away to hide the fear and dismay in his eyes.

"What's happened to Joe?" he asked, after a long pause.

Susan got to her feet. "If you won't give me the box, I'm going," she said firmly. "I didn't come here to talk about Joe."

"Here," he said, "that's a pawn ticket. I thought it'd be the safest place for it.

Herring and Hobbs in Greek Street. They'll give you the box for ten shillings. I don't see why I should pay for it."

Susan snatched the ticket from him. "I'll be back," she said. "I want to talk to you again."

Fresby mumbled to himself. "All right," he said finally, "I can't stop you. But don't blame me if something happens to you. I don't like girls like you. You're a hard little piece."

In less than an hour, Susan was sitting in the basement of a Lyons tea shop.

The steel box, a cup of coffee and a roll and butter stood on the marble-topped table before her. The table was in a corner and the basement was nearly empty. No one was paying her any attention.

She took from her bag the key that Joe had sent her and opened the box. The pile of treasury notes startled her.

Gathering them up hurriedly, she crammed them into her bag. There must be several hundreds there, she told herself, hoping that no one had seen what she was doing.

At the bottom of the box was an envelope, addressed to her in a fine spidery handwriting.

Joe had written: I'll be dead when you read this. The man in the black shirt was here this afternoon, He told me to clear off or else I'd be sorry. He's a killer. I know what he'll do, so I'm taking precautions. As soon as they get rid of me, they'll go after Mr. Kester. They want his money and unless someone stops them, they'll get it. You must stop them.

You can do it, but you mustn't go to the police. They'll put him away and he's harmless. He'd die if they put him away.

The money in the box is all yours. It isn't much, but it ought to be enough.

Anyway, it's all I have. I suppose you'll ask yourself why you should help Mr. Kester. There isn't any special reason except he is not well and can't help himself. It's pathetic, because he's been a good man. I wouldn't want you to do anything more than you have done already, but I've got no one else to turn to except you. You're no fool and I know, if you keep out of sight, you can upset their apple cart.

Fresby will help you. He won't want to, but he will if you threaten to give him away to the police. He's done something bad. I won't tell you what it is because it would make you an accessory. He'll try to frighten you with that, as he tried to frighten me, but I don't care and you don't know, so he can't frighten us, can he? Take care he doesn't think you're bluffing. He's dangerous. Tell him that you know where Vera is and that'll be enough. Don't try to find out anything more about Fresby. It'll only get you into trouble. If you can't stop them milking Mr. Kester then there's nothing more you can do. Whatever you do don't go to the police. One more thing, if you don't help Mr. Kester, remember there is no one else to help him. That's why I'm giving you the money.

Joe Crawford.

Susan read this note several times.

Fresby would have to help her. She would go to him and tell him the whole story. She would give him money and threaten him at the same time. Yes, she couldn't move without Fresby's help.

She'd have to be careful. There was something frightening about Fresby.

"Don't blame me if something happens to you," he had said. Well, she'd take precautions.

She took a fountain pen and a sheet of notepaper from her bag and wrote a letter. She put the letter together with Joe's note in the steel box and locked it.

It was half-past three before she again climbed the dirty stairs that led to Fresby's office. This time she entered his room without misgivings.

He was making himself a cup of tea and he glanced round sharply as she came in.

"So you're back," he said, frowning at her.

"Yes," she said and sat down by his desk. "There're things I want you to do."

He poured the tea into the cup, added milk and sugar and came back to his seat.

“Me to do?” he repeated. “You’ve come to the wrong shop, young lady. I’m busy. I’m not doing anything for you.”

“Joe’s dead,” Susan said, watching him closely. She shivered when she saw the look of intense satisfaction that came into his eyes.

“Oh,” he said, fingering his moustache, “so Joe’s dead.” He smiled. “You don’t expect me to say I’m sorry, do you?”

Susan shook her head. “I’ve taken his place,” she said, trying to keep her voice steady. “He told me where Vera is.”

Fresby sank down into his chair. “He told you that?” he said. “Has he told anyone else?”

Susan shook her head.

“Have you?”

Again Susan shook her head.

He eyed her for a long time. “I don’t think you’ll live much longer,” he said, his fists clenching. “I’m tired of being blackmailed.”

“I’ve taken precautions,” Susan returned, stifling a desire to run from the room. “I’ve written it all down and I’ve given the letter to my bank manager to be opened if I don’t see him in a week’s time. I didn’t think they’d do that sort of thing, but when I deposited the money, they were most helpful.”

Fresby scratched his head a little helplessly, relaxing once more in his chair.

“You’re a fool to meddle with this,” he said. “The cops’ll make you an accessory.”

“What do you want me to do—tell them?” Fresby shrugged. “All right,” he

said, “Joe told you about that one, I suppose. It didn’t cut any ice with him.” He sipped his tea. “Well, what do you want?”

Susan told him about Cornelius, Kester and Rollo. She explained everything as clearly as she could. Fresby sat hunched up, his tea forgotten, his eyes intent on her face. When she had finished, he drew in a long, deep breath.

“What a yarn!” he said. “It’s true, every bit of it!” Susan retorted. “It could be,” Fresby said, chewing the ends of his moustache. “Kester Weidmann, eh? The millionaire.” He grunted, crossed his long, spindly legs and placed his fingertips together. “There’s money in this,” he went on and two spots of red showed in his cheeks. “That’s what Rollo thinks.”

“Well, where do I come in?” Fresby asked abruptly. “What’s all this got to do with me?”

Susan screwed up her courage. “You’ve got to hide the body,” she said with a little shiver. “I can’t keep it in my room. Mr. Smythe—he’s my landlord—might get suspicious. If he found it, he’d send for the police.”

Fresby stared at her. “Hide the body? Where do you think I’d hide it? I’m not going to do that.”

Susan opened her bag and took out the slim roll of notes she had put aside for Fresby. “I don’t expect you to do it for nothing,” she said. “But you’ve got to do it. I’m desperate. I’ll pay you for the trouble, but if you won’t do it, I’ll have to tell the police about you.”

“That won’t get you anywhere,” Fresby returned, eyeing the roll of notes with interest. “I’ll tell them you’re hiding a body in your room. What do you think of that?”

“If you won’t do it, then they’ll have to know anyway,” Susan said, hoping that he’d believe her bluff. “I can’t keep such a thing in my room. If you don’t take it away, I don’t care what happens.”

Fresby gnawed at his moustache. Maybe she meant what she said, he thought.

He couldn't afford to take the risk.

"How much?" he said. "What have you got there?"

"Twenty-five pounds."

"Don't be a little fool," Fresby returned scornfully. "I'm not going to risk my neck for that. How much more can you pay?"

Susan put the money back in her purse. "All right," she said. "I needn't give you anything. If you're going to be like that, I'll just tell you to do it and if you don't, I'll go to the police."

It was Fresby who at last broke the silence. "Very well," he said, "give me the money."

"Where will you hide it?" Susan asked. "I'm not giving you the money until you've thought out a plan." Fresby came back to his desk and sat down. "I don't know," he said. "I'll have to think. Give me half. I won't do it unless you give me something."

She hesitated and then counted twelve pound notes from the roll. "Here," she said, pushing them across the desk. "But, you've got to do something quickly."

He snatched up the money and put it into his waistcoat pocket.

"A trunk?" he said. "Well, that shouldn't be difficult. I could take it to Charing Cross."

She shook her head. "No," she said. "You don't understand. It—it smells."

Fresby scratched his head. "Well, I can't have it here," he said. "Maybe I could drop it in the river."

"No! We've got to give it back to Mr. Weidmann when all this is over,"

Susan said, and then she held up her hand.

“What was that?”

“I didn’t hear anything.”

Susan got up and went swiftly to the door. She listened and turned a white, frightened face towards Fresby. “Someone’s coming up the stairs,” she whispered.

Fresby shrugged. “It doesn’t matter,” he returned indifferently. “They won’t be coming here. They seldom come—”

Susan didn’t wait to hear what he was saying. She crossed the outer room, opened the door softly and went out on the landing. She did not know why she had taken fright, but the faint scrape-scrape of shoe leather on the stone stairs below filled her with sudden dread. She peered over the stair rail and instantly recoiled. The man in the black shirt was coming up the stairs. He was already on the second landing and preparing to mount the stairs leading to Fresby’s office.

Scarcely breathing, Susan whipped back into Fresby’s room. “It’s the man in the black shirt,” she gasped. “He’s coming here. Hide me! Quick! He mustn’t find me here!”

Fresby’s face contracted. He just sat staring at her stupidly, his brain refusing to work.

Susan looked wildly round the room and then darted to a big cupboard that stood at the far end of the room. She threw the door open. Inside, hanging on a nail was Fresby’s hat and coat. There was plenty of room and she stepped inside and closed the door.

Fresby remained motionless, his mind confused and alarmed. The cupboard door had scarcely shut when Butch walked in.

“Hello, Jack,” he said, looking at Fresby with cold, searching eyes. “All alone?”

Fresby grunted and opening a drawer in his desk he took out a pipe and a shabby tobacco pouch. He began to fill his pipe slowly and carefully. It gave him time to recover his nerve.

Butch leaned against the wall, pushed his hat over his nose and seemed in no hurry to begin a conversation.

“What do you want?” Fresby asked, without looking at him. “I’ve got nothing for you.”

“Who’s Susan Hedder?” Butch asked softly.

Fresby lit his pipe, stared at the burning tobacco and blew a thin jet of smoke in Butch’s direction. His brain was functioning again. He’d have to be careful. Rollo’s gang was dangerous to monkey with.

“Susan who?” he asked to gain more time.

“Hedder,” Butch returned. “Don’t stall, Jack. You know who I mean.”

Fresby shook his head. “I don’t,” he said. “Hedder, eh? That’s a name I ought to remember. Who is she?”

“That’s what I’m asking you,” Butch returned. He slouched across the room and sat down. “Come on, Jack, you don’t want to get in bad with us”, do you?”

Fresby shook his head. “I’m not kidding, Mike,” he said. “I’ve never heard of the girl. Mind you, I get a lot of girls in this office. I can’t remember all their names, but Hedder doesn’t ring a bell.”

Butch stared at him thoughtfully. “You sent her along to Marsh for a job at the Club,” he said.

So Marsh’s blown the gaff,” Fresby thought. All right, he’d fix him for that.”

He’d tell Marguerite about Joan. If he got out of this mess with a whole skin, he’d fix that damn little rat!

“That wasn’t Susan Hedder,” he said, looking at Butch with calculated surprise. “Her name was Betty - Betty something or other. Now let me think. Betty Freeman. Yes that’s the name she gave me.”

He congratulated himself that he had put that over pretty smoothly. Anyway, Butch didn’t seem to think he was lying.

“All right, Susan Hedder or Betty Freeman. I don’t care what she called herself. Who is she?”

Fresby shrugged. “How do I know?” he said. “Girls come here. I get ‘em jobs if I can. I don’t ask questions. It doesn’t pay in this game. So long as they settle my bill, why should I want to know who they are?”

Butch took out a packet of Camels, lit one and put the packet away again. He stared round the room with blank eyes.

“You’d better not lie,” he said at last, but Fresby could see he had lost confidence. “Marsh said you put a lot of pressure on him to get the girl the job.”

Fresby chuckled. “I did,” he said, “the rotten little pimp!” The girl wanted the job and she offered me twenty-five quid to fix her up. She wouldn’t take anything else. That’s a good fee, Mike, so I oiled the works to get her in.”

The two men stared at each other for a long time and then Butch got up.

“So you don’t know who she is or where I can find her?”

Fresby shook his head. “Anything wrong?”

“I don’t know yet. If she doesn’t turn up tonight there’ll be a lot wrong. If she does, maybe it don’t matter. “ He turned to the door. “ Find out who she is, Jack,” he went on. “Rollo’ll pay you a hundred quid for the right information. Somehow I don’t think she’ll turn up tonight. We want her bad. I’ll come and see you again.”

Fresby nearly glanced towards the cupboard, but then he remembered the letter lying at the bank waiting to betray him.

He stared down at the floor, his mind seething with fury and greed. To think there was a hundred quid in that cupboard and he couldn't get at it.

"That's dough," he said, glancing up. "What's Rollo paying out money like that for?"

"Never mind," Butch said, opening the door. "And the next time you ship a dame into the club without asking me, I'll fix you good. I shan't tell you a second time."

Fresby grinned uneasily. "I shan't do it a second time. All right, Mike. Leave this to me. I'll find her if I can."

Butch grunted and went out, closing the door behind him.

Fresby relaxed in his chair, listening. He heard Butch go down the stairs, but even then he did not call to Susan. His mind was fully awake now. If Rollo was willing to pay a hundred pounds to get hold of this girl, it was obvious that there was a lot of money involved. The whole business revolved round the body in the trunk. Rollo wanted it. No doubt that was why he was so anxious to get hold of Susan. Well, Fresby had Susan and he was also being offered the body.

Surely there must be some way for him to capitalize on this set-up?

The cupboard door opened and Susan came out, very white and shaky.

Fresby looked at her and smiled. "Did you hear?" he said. "Well, it's all right. From now on you and me'll work together on this. I've got an idea. I know now where I can hide the body."

There was an ominous silence in Rollo's office. Celie stood behind Rollo in her usual place by the empty fireplace.

Rollo sat at his desk and Butch leaned against the wall near the door.

“She must have been a plant,” Rollo said suddenly. “It’s half-past seven and she hasn’t come. That boy Joe must have planted her here.”

“Yeah,” Butch said, “that’s how it looks.” He glanced beyond Rollo at Celie.

“The girl I nearly caught was slight, blonde, about twenty-one, round face, small nose.” Rollo went on. “Is that like the girl Marsh engaged?”

Butch grunted. “That’s her. If it hadn’t been for the copper I’d’ve caught her.”

“Well, we’ve got to find her, Mike,” Rollo said. “She knows something. She must know something. Get Marsh up here.”

“Sure,” Butch said, and heaving himself away from the wall, he slouched from the room.

Rollo reached out and took a cigar from the box on his desk. “Doc’s worrying me.”

“Gilroy says he’s dead,” Rollo announced as if speaking his thoughts aloud.

“How does he know?”

Celie swung round. “Stop it!” she exclaimed hysterically. “I’m not interested in that old fool!”

The door opened and Butch came in followed by Marsh.

Butch looked at Celie, saw her frantic expression and his mouth tightened.

He had come back just in time, he decided.

She would blow her top if he didn’t take her aside and quieten her.

“Here he is,” he said, jerking his thumb at Marsh.

Rollo leaned forward. “Has this Hedder girl come?”

Marsh cringed back. His fat face was like a lump of putty. “No, sir,” he said.

“I—I can’t think—I don’t know . . .” he stopped and put his hand to his mouth. “It’s not my fault,” he went on. “I don’t know anything about her. Jack Fresby wanted her to have the job. It’s his fault.”

Butch groped in his hip pocket and pulled out a .38 police special. Holding it by the barrel he began to club Marsh’s neck and shoulders, dragging him round the room by his hair as he did so.

Celie hid her face. She couldn’t stand much more from Butch. She was beginning to realize what a dangerous game she had been playing in trying to double-cross him. She now saw him for what he was, a coldblooded killer without a spark of feeling in him.

The thudding of the gun butt on Marsh’s fat neck and shoulders, his strangled screams and the stumbling, scraping feet round the room filled her with sickening terror. If Butch found out about Gilroy, he would do that to her!

Suddenly Rollo said, “Stop!”

The sudden sharpness in his voice jerked Butch round. He shoved Marsh away, slapping him across his face with the barrel of his gun as he did so.

Marsh, his face and neck black with bruises, two or three patches of hair torn from his scalp, fell forward on his knees and rolled on his side. He lay gasping and moaning, but Butch paid no attention to him. He was staring at Rollo.

“The police,” Rollo said thickly.

On his desk a red light was glowing. It flickered off and on as the doorkeeper downstairs flashed the warning.

“Get him out of here,” Rollo went on urgently. “Quick!”

Butch grabbed hold of Marsh. Half carrying him and half dragging him, he took him from the room.

“Get out!” Rollo said to Celie. “God knows what’s the matter with you, but if the cops see you they’ll know something’s up.”

Rollo was alarmed. The police had only once before come to the club and that was more than a year ago. Since then he had taken the greatest care not to give them an opportunity to come again.

Now, when he had Kester Weidmann securely locked up in one of the rooms upstairs, they had to poke their noses into the club again. Had Joe’s girl tipped them off? If they had a search warrant and found Weidmann, it’d be difficult to explain what he was doing in a club like this. He could rely on Weidmann, of course, but the police might spot the little man was crazy and suspect what was going on.

As Celie slipped through a concealed door that led to her own apartment, Rollo opened a drawer and took from it a big ledger. He picked up a pen and began entering figures in the endeavour to create an atmosphere of a business man engaged in honest work.

A rap came on the door and a tall, clean-shaven young man came in. He was wearing a shabby, but well-cut lounge suit and in his hand he carried a brown felt hat.

Rollo looked at him with a bland, enquiring expression on his fat face.

“Yes?” he said, pushing the ledger aside and laying down his pen. “You wanted to see me?”

The young man glanced round the room and pursed his lips in a soundless whistle. “I’m Detective Sergeant Adams,” he said, “of Vine Street. You’re—er—Mr. Rollo?”

Rollo nodded. This debonair young man certainly did not look like a police officer, he decided, but that didn’t mean that he couldn’t be troublesome. He

waved his fat hand to a chair." Sit down," he said affably." Have a cigar?"

Jerry Adams shook his head. "Don't use 'em," he said, sitting down. "One doesn't make much money in the police force, you know." He glanced round the room again. "The night club world seems far more profitable."

Rollo sniffed. "We have to make a show," he returned, shrugging his shoulders. "My overheads are enormous. But you didn't come here to discuss night club profits, did you?"

"No." Adams stretched out his long legs. "I believe you know Herbert Martin? Doc Martin to his friends."

Rollo stiffened. "Yes. I've known Doc for years. Anything wrong?"

Adams glanced at his fingernails and then looked at Rollo sharply as he said, "The river police fished him out of the drink a couple of hours ago."

Rollo clenched his fists. "Dead?"

"Very."

So Gilroy had been right. Poor old Doc. Fished out of the river, eh? Had someone pushed him in? Had he committed suicide? No, Doc wouldn't do that. He was too fond of life. Murder? Better be careful. This might give the cops a chance to examine all his affairs.

"I'm shocked," Rollo said mechanically. "Who'd've believed it. I always thought the old boy would have died in his bed."

Adams was watching Rollo closely. He was sure the news had come as a surprise. That was disappointing. He had hoped that Rollo might have had something to do with Doc's death.

"When did you see him last?" he asked casually.

Better tell the truth, Rollo thought. Give this copper the slightest opening and he'd get tough. He wasn't taken in by Adams' mild appearance. There was

something about the grey, steady eyes that belied his casual indifference.

“Let me see,” Rollo said, laying his cigar down. He noticed with irritation that his hand was far from steady.

“The night before last. He came to see me and left here just after eleven.” He shot a quick glance at Adams and caught the look of disappointment on the young man’s face. Ah! He’d known that already. Yes, he’d better tell the truth. These damn busies always had the story straight before they tackled you.

“What did he want?” Adams asked.

“Want?” Rollo’s eyebrows went up. “Nothing. He liked to see me now and then, I liked him. We just talked. He was a sociable old fellow.”

Adams smiled grimly. “I see,” he said. Lie number one, he told himself. “I shouldn’t have thought you’d have had much time to be sociable.”

“Oh, but there you’re quite mistaken,” Rollo returned. “I like to have a few friends round me. Doc was a very interesting old boy. I’ll miss him.”

“Anything on his mind?”

So they were wondering if it’s suicide. Rollo pursed his thick lips. “He was worried about money,” he said. “In fact, he wanted to borrow a couple of hundred from me, but I couldn’t help him. I’m a business man and he had no security.”

“I see.” Adams again examined his fingernails. “So it wasn’t just a social call?”

“Oh, yes,” Rollo said, nodding his head. “He only mentioned it as he was leaving. I didn’t take him seriously. If I’d thought the old boy was going to make a hole in the river I’d’ve given it to him without question.”

There was a long pause as the two men regarded each other. Then Adams

went on, “So you can’t help me?”

“No. Doc kept to himself. I don’t know anything about his affairs except he was short of money. He had no enemies. I don’t think you need worry about the question of violence.”

“I never worry about anything,” Adams said, getting to his feet. “If he was murdered it would be because he found something out. I understand he had a prying nature.”

Rollo stared at him. “Had he?”

“If he found out something about one of these local toughs—Egan for instance—it might be a sufficient motive for his death.”

“Why do you keep on about Egan?”

Adams smiled. “I’d like to catch that boy,” he said confidentially. “He’s too bad to be true.”

Had Doc found out anything about Butch? Rollo wondered. If he had—what was it? Butch was secretive. Then with a sudden start Rollo remembered Celie’s odd behaviour. His great fists closed tightly.

Adams watched him with interest. “Are you remembering something?”

Rollo controlled himself. “No,” he said. “Nothing. I’m sorry I can’t help you.”

“You’ll be seeing me again,” Adams said. “It depends a lot on the verdict of the inquest.”

Rollo nodded. “I’m always pleased to see members of the police,” he said without much conviction. “Have a drink before you go?”

Adams shook his head. “On duty,” he explained and crossed the room.

“Nice place you have here.”

Rollo watched him go down the stairs and leave the club. He waited until the doorman had put the chain on the door and then he hurried back to his office.

Weidmann was sitting in the chair. He sprang to his feet when he saw Rollo.

“You’ve got to do something,” he exclaimed. “If you don’t find Cornelius before tomorrow, I’m going to the police!”

“The police can’t help us,” Rollo returned, choking down his fury. “There’s only one thing to be done. Write me a cheque for ten thousand pounds and I’ll have your brother here tomorrow. I’ve found out where he is, but it’ll cost me that amount to get hold of him.”

Weidmann screwed up his face. “I haven’t any money,” he explained in his soft voice. “Cornelius has it all. He will give it to you.”

Rollo straightened his giant frame. “You haven’t any money?” he repeated stupidly.

Weidmann shook his head and smiled. “I gave it all to Cornelius. Three million pounds in bonds. It’s in a belt round his waist. He is so much better at keeping money than I am.”

There was a grumbling of thunder in the distance and a vast black cloud hung over the city. For several hours now the air had been close and oppressive and once it had tried to rain.

“I don’t want to come in,” Susan said, hanging back. She could just make out Fresby’s bowler hat outlined against the sky and hear his laboured breathing. The exertion of dragging the heavy trunk from the taxi down the dark alley had taxed even his great strength.

“You’ll do what I tell you,” Fresby returned irritably, “or I’ll wash my hands of the whole business.”

“I can’t do this on my own,” Fresby went on, in a low nagging voice.

“You’ve got to help me.” She was aware of the sound of jingling money as he fumbled in his pockets. “I’ve got it,” he said finally, and a moment later a key grated in a lock.

A door swung open and then a ray of light sprang into the alley as Fresby turned on a switch.

“Where are we?” Susan asked, her voice scarcely above a whisper.

“This is Ted Whitby’s workshop,” Fresby returned, catching hold of one of the trunk’s handles. His face was damp with sweat. “Come on, give me a hand. We don’t want anyone to see us.”

The thought of being caught with the trunk galvanised Susan into action. She helped Fresby lever the trunk into the passage of what appeared to be a dilapidated house. There was a curious odour about the air, sweet, musty, sickish; an odour of slow decay. Thunder rumbled again as Fresby closed the street door.

Susan, wide-eyed with fear, huddled against the wall, away from the black trunk. The loose wallpaper rustled as she touched it and plaster ran down the wall behind the paper making a sound like the scurrying feet of mice.

Fresby scowled at her and pushed his hat to the back of his head. He wiped his damp forehead. “Come on,” he said impatiently. “We’ll get this little lot down into the cellar.”

Susan helped him pull the trunk to the head of the stairs. He went first while she hung on to the trunk to prevent it from sliding down too quickly.

“Now, where’s the switch?” Fresby muttered as they both reached the bottom of the stairs. “Have you a match?”

Susan, in a quavering voice, said she hadn’t. It was dark in the cellar and the light from the passage upstairs only lit part of the stairs. She hated being in the dark with Fresby. She expected him to creep up to her and seize her again. She knew if she lost her head, he would become more excited and

dangerous. In sudden panic as she heard his shuffling step nearer to her, she too moved forward in the hopes of finding the light switch.

As she did so, she brushed against something and she came to a sudden stop.

“Was that you, Mr. Fresby?” she asked. Her hands clenched until her nails bit into her palms. She held her breath until her lungs throbbed with pain.

“What’s the matter now?” Fresby asked from the other side of the room.

Reluctantly, fearfully, she put out her hand. The darkness, as black as liquorice, felt almost solid as she groped. Her heart pounded. Then her hand touched something.

She felt the rough cloth of a man’s sleeve in her trembling fingers. She knew it wasn’t Fresby. He was on the far side of the cellar, still fumbling for the light switch. Paralysed with terror, she could only stand motionless, her fingers touching cloth. Thunder crashed suddenly overhead, drowning her wild scream.

“What the hell’s the matter?” Fresby grated, out of the darkness.

“There’s someone here,” Susan cried and pressing her hands to her face, she screamed again.

“Keep your hair on,” Fresby said crossly. “They’re only dummies,” and his questing fingers came upon the light switch.

The cellar was suddenly flooded by a hard, bright light.

Susan started back as she found herself confronted by a grinning, evil figure of a man. The wax features and glassy eyes seemed to be sneering at her. She caught her breath, still not quite realizing that this was only a wax effigy.

“Don’t get excited,” Fresby said, laying a hand on her arm. “I tell you they’re only dummies.”

She clung to him, staring round the vast cellar with startled eyes. The room

seemed full of wax effigies. It looked like Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors. Some of the effigies stood, some sat. All were hideous, evil, frightening.

"I ought to have warned you," Fresby went on. "Whitby supplies the Museum of Horrors at the Elephant and Castle. His stuffs pretty good, isn't it? Look, that's Crippen. Over there's Jack the Ripper. Nice-looking chap, isn't he? How would you like to spend a night with him?" He chuckled nervously. "I told you I was smart, didn't I? No one would think of looking for a corpse among all these dummies, would they?"

Susan shuddered. She didn't dare to look at the still, wax figures. Any moment, she thought, I'm going to start screaming and if I do, Fresby will attack me. I must control myself. I mustn't look at these horrible figures.

"Ted works here on his own," Fresby went on, glancing round, feeling a little uneasy himself. "Creepy, isn't it? I don't think I'd like to be here on my own."

"Why did you bring me here?" Susan asked, fixing her eyes on Fresby's waistcoat.

He moved away and began to poke around at the long bench on which stood a row of half-finished wax heads.

"All we have to do is to put a wax covering on his face and hands," he said, jerking his thumb towards the trunk, "and he then becomes just another dummy. I bet even Ted wouldn't spot him amongst all this mob."

"A wax covering?" Susan repeated, going cold.

"It shouldn't be difficult. You melt the wax and pour it on his face. It'll form a kind of mask." He looked at her sharply.

"But you'll have to help me."

"No!" Susan cried, backing towards the stairs. "No! I can't stand any more of

this.”

Fresby cursed under his breath. “Pull yourself together, you little fool,” he said savagely and began to move towards her.

Susan, now completely terrified, turned and raced for the stairs.

Fresby dived after her. “Stop!” he shouted. “Come back!”

She blundered up the stairs and into the dark passage. Fresby reached the head of the stairs as she flung open the street door. He was too late to catch her and he watched her running blindly down the alley into the street.

Only a few miles away, a green Packard drew up outside Doc Martin’s little house, tucked away in a Mews off Grosvenor Street.

Rollo eased his bulk out of the car. “Wait for me,” he said to Long Tom. “I shan’t be long. If you see a copper, sound your horn.”

He spent a few moments trying to open the front door with a bunch of keys.

One of them finally succeeded in opening the door.

He entered the small hall, shut the front door and walked into the living room. His urgent, expert search did not last long. He found what he wanted. At some time or another, Doc had told him that he kept a diary.

Rollo never forgot little things like that. It was Doc’s diary that Rollo wanted. As soon as he found it he left the house, locked the door and climbed into the Packard.

“Drive around slowly,” he said to Long Tom. “I’ll tell you where to go in a little while.”

Then he sat back and hurriedly thumbed through the pages of the neatly written diary.

The last entry told him what he wanted to know.

Tonight, I call on Celie, wrote Doc Martin, it is now or never. She will get a big cut from Weidmann's money. If Rollo learns that she and Butch are lovers, she won't get anything. She'll be glad to pay me to keep my mouth shut. I'll surprise her tonight after the meeting.

A red mist hung before Rollo's eyes. Slowly he shut the diary and slipped it into his pocket. She and Butch were lovers . . . He might have guessed it. Well, now he knew. He drew in a sharp breath and clenched his great fists. Doc had gone to Celie and Butch had been there. Butch had killed him. No wonder Celie was behaving like a scalded cat. He'd make them both suffer. Then he remembered Weidmann. Three million pounds in bearer bonds! It was incredible. He had to find the body. That was the first thing to do. Later he would think of a way of revenging himself. At the moment he needed Butch. One thing at the time, he thought, and closed down on his rage, forcing it back into his subconscious.

The girl must be found. Butch was already searching the streets for her. That would take too long. London was a big place. He might never find her.

"Gilroy's," Rollo said through the speaking tube and Long Tom nodded.

In a few minutes, the Packard pulled up outside Athen Court.

"Wait," Rollo said and walked across the enclosed courtyard.

He stood in the lift while it creaked its way to the fourth floor; half his mind brooded about Celie, the other half was concentrated on the means to find Cornelius' body.

He was glad he had urgent work to do. Otherwise he knew he would have done something hasty and vicious. He had never been so provoked and never before had he felt the need for instant revenge. That would not do. He had always made plans. If Celie and Butch were to be punished, he would make certain that the police would not come to him for payment.

He rang the bell, pressing the bell push impatiently. The door opened almost immediately and Gilroy stared at him in surprise. Although it was past one

o'clock, Gilroy was still wearing his oyster-coloured lounge suit. "You have never been here before," he said, standing to one side. "There is something wrong?"

Rollo entered the large sitting room. He walked over to the empty fireplace, took out his cigar case and selected a cigar from it. After he had lit it, he looked thoughtfully at Gilroy. "We must find Cornelius' body immediately," he said.

Gilroy shrugged. "How do we do that?"

"I have come to you," Rollo went on, watching the negro intently. "I believe you can find the body. You say you owe me something. Well, I've come for payment. Give me the body."

Gilroy wandered across the room. "The girl knows where it is," he said, picking up the little wooden doll and stroking the gold threads that were glued to its head. "She could take us to it."

"Butch is looking for her, but I can't wait. You must do better than that."

"She will come," Gilroy said indifferently, "if you wait long enough."

Rollo grunted and left the flat. As he reached the ground floor, he paused and listened.

From upstairs there came the sound of a drum being softly beaten. At first, he thought it was the distant thunder, but as he stood there listening the sound became unmistakable. The steady boom . . . boom . . . boom . . . seemed inside his own head or in his veins like a pulse beating. There was something cosmic in the sound, like the rolling of mighty waters.

He hunched his shoulders and walked slowly to the waiting car.

Detective Sergeant Adams dropped off the bus with a cheery "good night" to the conductor and walked up the steps to the front door of 155A Fulham Road. As he pressed the bell push, he stifled a yawn. It was almost midnight

and he had had a long tiring day. The desk sergeant at Vine Street Station had given him Cedric Smythe's urgent message and it had not improved his temper. It was only because he lived a few hundred yards from Cedric's house that he had bothered to look in at all.

Cedric opened the door almost immediately. "There you are," he said, his round, pink and white face lighting up with relief. "I thought you were never coming."

"Well, I can't stay a moment," Adams returned a little shortly. "I've been on my feet all day and I want some rest.

What's the trouble?"

"My dear boy," Cedric said, opening wide the front door and stepping aside, "this is far too serious to discuss on the doorstep. Come in. I'm very worried. You know I'm not the worrying kind, but this time, I am really very worried indeed."

Adams grinned rather cynically. "Bosh," he said, following Cedric into his sitting room. "You'd worry over anything.

Why if the cat had fleas you wouldn't sleep a wink."

"I haven't got a cat," Cedric returned somewhat coldly. "I dislike cats. Nasty, slinky things! But sit down, Jerry. I must talk to someone. I'm sure you're tired, but I do want your advice. Have a drink? There's whisky or beer. What'll you have?"

Jerry Adams sighed, put his hat on the table and sat down in the big comfortable armchair. "I'll have a whisky I think," he said stretching out his long legs. "But be a good chap and get to the point. Has one of your boarders run off without paying his bill?"

Cedric compressed his full lips. "Really, Jerry, you're most unfeeling," he said a little bitterly. "I tell you this is serious. It might even be a police matter."

Adams shot him a quick glance. "Oh? How do you make that out?"

"I must begin at the beginning," Cedric returned, refusing to be hurried. He carried two large whiskies across the room and after adding a splash of soda in both, he handed one of the glasses to Adams. "Here's how," he went on, sitting down in the chair opposite.

"You mustn't laugh at me," Cedric repeated. "I'm very worried about Miss Hedder. There's something going on I don't like at all."

"Oh? Miss Hedder again. What's she been up to now?"

"She's not mixing with the right people," Cedric said, shaking his head. "In fact, she's mixing with criminal types."

Adams laughed. "Oh, come on, Cedric. What do you know about criminal types?"

"I know a bad lot when I see one and this boy, Joe Crawford, is a bad lot if there ever was one."

"Joe Crawford? Who's he?"

"That's what I'd like to know. He came here a few days ago with a note for Miss Hedder. He was extraordinarily rude to me. Really, Jerry, you have no idea the words he used, and the look of him! He quite frightened me and you know I'm not easily frightened."

"He brought her a note?"

"That's what I'm telling you. The note wasn't properly fastened and, seeing what a desperate character he was, I thought it was my duty to read it."

"You'll be getting yourself into trouble if you make a practice of that," Adams said a little drily.

"Of course, if it hadn't been unsealed, I wouldn't've dreamed of reading it,"

Cedric said hastily. "I may have some faults but curiosity isn't one of them." He avoided Adams' jeering eyes and self-consciously cleared his throat. "If I remember rightly the message simply said 'Go to Fresby's Agency, 24c Rupert Court, W.C.2. He'll get you in,' and it was signed J. C."

Cedric told him about the arrival of the trunk and how upset Susan had been.

"She locked her room up and she stayed out all night. Then just after ten o'clock tonight, I heard a taxi drive up and she and a tall, thin, elderly man came in and went upstairs to her room. They came down almost immediately dragging a trunk between them. I spoke to Miss Hedder but she was in such a nervous state that she didn't seem to hear me. The elderly man told me to mind my own business in a most insolent way and they went off together with the trunk in the taxi."

Adams finished up his whisky and put the glass on the table. "You're sure the girl was upset?"

"Of course I am. She was trembling and white. I thought she was going to faint at one time."

"Can you give a better description of the man?"

"Well, he was tall and thin. I'd say he was about fifty. He had a thick scrubby iron-grey moustache and a long, pointed nose. He looked a furtive, seedy individual," not the kind of person to go around with a nice young lady like Miss Hedder."

"That sounds like Jack Fresby," Adams said, frowning. "Hmm, well, I don't know. Fresby's a bad lot, but that doesn't mean that there's much to worry about."

"But there is," Cedric said. "I haven't told you about the trunk yet."

"The trunk? What about it?"

"Jerry, there was something about that trunk that completely unnerved me.

After this boy Joe had delivered it, I went upstairs and examined it. It frightened me.” Cedric put his whisky down and mopped his temples with his handkerchief.

“There was a most peculiar smell coming from it. A smell, Jerry, that reminded me of my father’s funeral.”

Cedric held up his hand. “Listen!”

They both heard the front door close and the sound of someone running upstairs.

“That’s her now,” Cedric said, jumping to his feet.

“Wait a moment,” Adams was also on his feet. “We mustn’t be too hasty.”

He glanced at the marble clock on the mantelpiece. It was twenty minutes past midnight. “See if you can persuade her to come down for a chat. Tell her one of your old friends has called in and would like to meet her.”

Cedric pursed his lips. “She’s most unsociable,” he said dubiously. “I don’t think she’ll come.”

Adams thought for a second. “All right, tell her it’s someone from Joe Crawford. That should bring her down.”

“All right, but what are you going to say?”

“Never mind that,” Adams returned. “Go up right away before she has time to go to bed.”

After a wait of some five minutes, he heard Cedric returning. He was not alone.

Susan, her heart thudding, stared at the tall man who stood before the empty fireplace. As soon as she saw him, she felt a relaxing of her fears. He looked kind, and not, as she had feared, when she heard that he wanted to see her, from the police.

“This is Miss Hedder,” Cedric said, closing the door. “Mr. Jerry Adams.”

Adams smiled. “I hope you’ll forgive me, Miss Hedder, for worrying you at this time of the night. Won’t you sit down?”

Susan looked at Cedric and then at Adams. Her eyes were dark with apprehension. She hesitated and then walked slowly across to a chair and sat down. She again looked at Cedric uneasily.

Adams turned to Cedric. “I think Miss Hedder would prefer to talk to me alone.”

Cedric’s fat face fell. “Of course,” he said. “I’ll make some tea. Yes, you two talk. You’ll like Mr. Adams,” he went on to Susan.

“He’s a very dear friend of mine. We used to be in Rep. together.”

Susan didn’t say anything. She was now looking at Adams a little less doubtfully.

“All right, you go and make us some tea,” Jerry said, and crossing the room, he opened the door. As Cedric passed him, he murmured, “I’ll call you when I’ve talked to her.”

After Cedric had gone, there was a short, nervous silence, then Adams said, “Cedric tells me that you know Joe Crawford.”

Susan stiffened. “I don’t know him very well,” she said, her mind crawling with alarm.

“He and I used to be great friends,” Adams went on quietly. There was something wrong, he told himself. This kid was as jumpy as a cat, and every time he spoke to her, terror came into her eyes.

“I haven’t seen him for some time and when I heard he had been here, I wondered if you could tell me where I could get in touch with him.”

Susan felt a cold chill round her heart. She was sure that this nice young man was lying. Joe had been emphatic that he had no friends.

“I—I don’t know where he lives,” she said, looking down at her hands. “I don’t know him very well.”

“That’s disappointing,” Adams said, his voice hardening. “I was hoping—but if you don’t know, then I’ll have to find him some other way.”

“Yes,” Susan said, getting to her feet. “If you’ll excuse me . . . it’s late and I’m very tired.” She put her hand to her head and stood for a moment, her eyes dull and bewildered.

“Aren’t you well, Miss Hedder?” he asked sharply, crossing over to her.

She did not seem to hear him.

“Miss Hedder! “ He took her arm and shook her gently. “What’s the matter?”

“Someone’s playing a drum,” she muttered, pulling away from him. “Listen! Don’t you hear it! Someone’s playing a drum.”

Adams stared at her. No sound came to him as he listened. “I don’t hear anything,” he said.

Susan stared at him wildly. “You must be deaf. It goes on and on. Listen!”

She suddenly backed away from him, her eyes alight with alarm. “It’s beating inside my head,” she cried hysterically.

“It goes boom . . . boom . . . boom . . . it gets louder and louder . . . it goes on and on and on . . . don’t you hear it?”

“Nonsense!” Adams said sharply. The horror in her face chilled him. “Pull yourself together. You’re imagining it. There is no drum . . .”

“What’s happening to me?” Susan cried, clutching at her head. “It’s beating inside my brain. I must be going mad . . . oh, stop it! Do—do stop it!”

“Don’t be a little fool!” Adams exclaimed, now thoroughly alarmed. “I tell you there is no drum.”

She stared at him, backed to the door and before he could stop her, she had opened it and was running upstairs. The sound of her muffled sobbing brought Cedric running from the kitchen.

“You’ve upset her,” he said accusingly. “Whatever did you say?”

Adams was standing in the hall, staring up the stairs. “I didn’t say anything,” he returned, a worried look on his face.

“She suddenly said someone was playing a drum. There’s something very wrong with that young woman. She’s in a shocking state of nerves.”

“Drum?” Cedric repeated. “What drum?”

“I don’t know,” Adams went on. “Something pretty bad’s upset her. I think you’re right, Cedric, this wants looking into. What the devil did she mean? Someone’s playing a drum?”

Cedric’s eyes popped. “Do you think I should call a doctor?” he asked helplessly.

“Listen!” Adams said sharply.

They stood still, looking up the stairs. Very faintly a rhythmic thud-thud-thud came from above.

Without hesitation, Adams ran up the stairs until he reached Susan’s room.

Cedric, panting with exertion and alarm, joined him. They listened outside the door.

“It sounds as if she was beating on the table with her fist,” Adams said uneasily.

The dull thud-thud-thud went on.

Adams knocked on the door. "Miss Hedder!" he called.

"You'll wake everyone up," Cedric said nervously. "What am I going to do? Do you think I ought to send for the police?"

"Now for goodness sake control yourself," Adams said irritably. "I am the police and I can handle this."

He was not nearly as calm as he tried to sound. There was something eerie about the way this girl was beating on the table. The insistent rhythm had an odd, frightening effect on him.

Then quite suddenly the thumping stopped. He heard footsteps cross the room and before he could draw back, the door was flung open.

Susan came out into the corridor. She did not hesitate, opening the front door, she walked down the steps into the street.

"Leave this to me," Adams said, running into the sitting room and grabbing his hat. "There's something very wrong here. She looked as if she were in a trance. Don't worry. I'll follow her."

Without waiting, he set off after the slim, shadowy figure, walking rapidly down the street.

chapter six

From a darkened doorway Butch watched Rollo leave his car and enter Doc Martin's little house.

Butch had also heard of Doe's diary and as soon as he realized the danger of such a document, he had immediately gone to Doc's house. He arrived one minute behind Rollo and now, standing in the doorway, his hand on his gun, he tried to make up his mind what to do.

The obvious thing, of course, was to grab the diary as Rollo came out. If he did that and there was nothing in the diary about him and Celie, then he had ruined his chances with Rollo for good.

Rollo was not likely to let him take the diary without a fight. He would have to kill Rollo and in spite of the pressing danger, he flinched away from that thought. If he killed Rollo, he would have to knock off Long Tom. Long Tom was no fool. He also carried a gun and by the time Butch had settled Rollo, it was likely that Long Tom would have settled Butch.

While he was hesitating, Rollo came out of the house and entered his car.

Butch started forward, but he had left it too late. The big car moved out of the mews and turned into New Bond Street.

Cursing under his breath, Butch raced to where he had left his own car and followed on behind. In a few minutes it became obvious that Rollo was heading for Gilroy's place. Why Gilroy?

Butch asked himself as he stopped his car in a side street, a few yards from Greek Street. He ran swiftly to the corner in time to see Rollo's huge form disappearing into Athen Court. He ducked into a doorway, waited.

What was Rollo doing with Gilroy? Butch edged fur-flier into the dark

shadows as Long Tom got out of the car and lit a cigarette. It looked as if Rollo was going to be some time. Long Tom was now walking slowly up and down near the car. He looked into Athen Court each time as he passed as if he was impatient for Rollo to appear again.

It was nearly half an hour before Rollo came out of the alley. He stood for a moment talking to Long Tom and then they both got into the car.

Butch raced once more for his car and followed Rollo's red tail light along Shaftesbury Avenue and into Piccadilly.

Was Rollo going to see Celie? Butch asked himself or was he now going to begin the hunt for Cornelius' body? He gripped the steering wheel angrily. He had no idea how to find Cornelius.

But he was sure that Rollo had thought of something. Rollo's shrewd brain irritated Butch, who knew that he wasn't a match for Rollo's wits. He knew his only hope of getting Weidmann's money was to keep close to Rollo. If Rollo couldn't find the money, then no one could.

Well, Rollo wasn't going to see Celie. The car had swept past the Berkeley Hotel and was now moving along Park Lane.

Was he going to turn into Shepherd Market? No, the car kept on, although it was slowing down. Butch threw out his clutch and coasted along behind, his foot hovering over the brake pedal.

Rollo's car turned into Hyde Park and then stopped. Butch had to think quickly. He went past the Park gates and pulled up a few hundred yards further on. Leaving his car, he ran hurriedly back to where he could see Rollo's car. Neither Long Tom nor Rollo had got out. Butch could just make out their silhouettes. Rollo was smoking a . cigar. The red, burning tip glowed in the darkness.

Butch watched the car for several minutes, then as neither Rollo nor Long Tom made a move, he began to grow impatient. What were they up to? They weren't talking to each other, in fact, Long Tom had sunk down behind the

steering wheel and seemed to be going to sleep. Butch crept closer. Perhaps they were waiting for someone—but, who?

He clenched his hands angrily. He couldn't hang about the Park gates. Some copper would come along and start asking questions. He would have to get into the Park and hide so that he could watch Rollo and yet not be seen himself.

He made sure that Rollo was not looking in his direction, then he slipped into the Park, and keeping in the shadows, well away from the stationary car, he walked softly across the grass to a nearby clump of shrubbery. He settled down on the grass out of sight and waited.

The minutes dragged by and then, suddenly, Rollo opened the car door and stepped out. He touched off the long white ash from his cigar as he looked up and down the moonlit avenue of the Park.

A few taxis still bowled rapidly through the Park and a few stragglers loitered in the street beyond. It was a fine night and London was reluctant to go to bed.

Rollo glanced at his watch. It was ten minutes past one. He had no idea how long he would have to wait, but he had an odd feeling that Gilroy would, somehow or other, deliver the goods'. He had said the girl would come and Rollo believed him. He had to believe him as he had no alternative. If the girl did not come then he had no idea how he was to find Cornelius' body.

He sat himself down on the running board of the car and began to read Doc's diary. As he read, he again felt an overpowering desire to punish Celie. He closed the book impatiently when he had assured himself that it contained no further reference to Butch or Celie and put it in his pocket.

He got up and began to pace up and down. He had an odd feeling that he was being watched, but after looking round carefully and not seeing anyone, he decided that he was getting nervy.

Long Tom stuck his head out of the window. " 'Ow much longer do we 'ave

to wait?” he whined. “I could do with a good night’s kip, boss. Can’t we go ‘ome?”“

His thin voice reached Butch who grinned sourly. He too would be glad to go to bed, but he wasn’t going to leave Rollo for a second.

“Shut up,” Rollo growled, scowling at Long Tom. “We may have to stay here until daylight.”

“Oh Gawd!” Long Tom groaned, and settled himself once more down in his seat. He closed his eyes and tried to doze.

When Rollo had finished his cigar, he got back into the car. He was feeling heavy and tired, but he knew he could not afford to doze’. Gilroy had said she would come and he must not miss her.

It was nearly a quarter-past two, before Susan Hedder walked into the Park.

Butch was the first to see her and he nearly sprang to his feet, but restrained himself in time. He looked quickly across at Rollo’s car. Rollo had the door already open and was getting out. In his excitement, he had shoved Long Tom violently and Long Tom was cursing under his breath.

The three men from their various positions, watched Susan with concentrated attention.

Susan walked stiffly into the Park and then when she was quite close to Rollo’s car, she stopped.

Rollo stared at her. The moonlight lit her face and he could see her eyes were blank and her face expressionless. She was looking straight through him and after a moment’s uneasiness, he suddenly realized that she was not aware of his presence.

She stood there for some moments and then turning abruptly on her heel, she walked swiftly, with stiff, gliding steps towards the Park gates.

“Come on,” Rollo said. “Leave the car. We mustn’t lose sight of her.”

He set off after Susan without waiting for Long Tom. It was happening just as Gilroy had said. He knew now that Susan was leading him to Cornelius’ body. He was so excited that he did not take his usual, elaborate precautions.” Nothing interested him now but the chance he would have before long of laying his hands on three million pounds. He threw caution to the winds.

Not so Butch. If he had known that Susan was going to take him to Cornelius’ body he might have been less cautious, but all he knew was that, for some odd reason, this girl, who was in mortal dread of Rollo, had unexpectedly appeared and Rollo and she were going off somewhere. In the distance he could see Susan’s slim figure moving towards Constitutional Hill. A few yards behind her were Rollo and Long Tom, a few yards behind them was another figure which had appeared from out of the shadows. Butch suddenly went cold. He recognized the tall, broad-shouldered figure of Detective Sergeant Adams. Butch had made it his business to know every police officer in his locality and he prided himself that he could spot them at any time of the night and day.

Automatically his hand groped for his gun, but as soon as his fingers closed over the cold butt, he knew the danger and uselessness of such an action. Moving like a shadow, he came out of his hiding place and tailed on behind Adams. His immediate reaction was to warn Rollo that this copper was tailing him, but how? Then he decided that it might be a good thing if the copper pinched Rollo. It would give Butch a chance to get away with the money.

Rollo, in the meantime, unaware that Adams was behind him, kept after Susan. She had passed Buckingham Palace and was now walking towards Sloane Square. By this time the streets were deserted and Rollo and Long Tom did not bother to conceal the fact that” they were following the girl.

Adams had a far more difficult time. But he was experienced and not once did he allow himself to be caught far from a doorway or cover of some kind. But Rollo did not look round. This surprised Adams, as he expected that an

old hand like Rollo would always be on his guard against detection.

Adams had immediately recognized Rollo. The sight of the great, bulky figure had set his heart racing. There must be something up, he decided. If Rollo was mixed up in this business, and it was obvious that he was, then it looked as if Adams had a case for which he had been waiting.

From time to time, Adams glanced back to make sure that he was not being followed, but Butch was ready for that. He slunk along in the shadows, invisible in his black suit and black hat. He hugged the wall, stepped from shop doorway to shop doorway and took great care how he turned a corner.

So they went on; and it seemed to Rollo that Susan would go on walking for days and days. His great frame sagged and sweated as he lumbered along. He had never walked so far in his life and he longed for the comfort of his car. Long Tom, shuffling along at his side, was secretly enjoying the sight of Rollo's exhaustion.

"She don't 'alf like 'er walk," he muttered, unable to hold his tongue.

"Blimey! At this rate, she'll be in Brighton in no time."

Rollo snarled at him. If she did walk to Brighton, he would follow her. If he had to crawl on his hands and knees he would be there. Wasn't she leading him to three million pounds?

"'Ullo," Long Tom said. "She's stopping again."

Rollo moved into the shadows, pulling Long Tom with him. Twenty yards further back, Adams stepped quickly into a doorway. Ten yards further back, Butch flattened himself against the wall.

Susan had paused. She hesitated for a moment or so and then disappeared down the alley.

"This is it," Rollo said and stepped forward quickly. He almost ran to the mouth of the alley. As soon as he convinced himself that it was a cul-de-sac,

he turned to Long Tom. "Go back and get the car. Hurry. There's not a moment to lose. I'll handle her, but we must have the car."

Long Tom began to grouse. "Wot, walk all the way back? Blimey, guv'nor, 'ave a 'eart. Me dogs are achin' somethin' crool."

"Do what I say," Rollo said, a vicious look jumping into his little eyes.

"Orl right," Long Tom returned and walked hurriedly back the way he had come.

Adams saw him coming, but he had no time to get out of sight, so he continued towards Long Tom, his head bent and his hands in his pockets. Long Tom had no great interest in the police. He had not made a study of them as Butch had, so he passed Adams without even a glance. .

Butch ducked into a doorway as he saw Long Tom approach. Should he tell Long Tom about Adams? Should they both go back and finish Adams and then help Rollo? He shook his head. He didn't trust Long Tom. He was Rollo's man. If Rollo knew about Celie, he would twist Butch out of his share. No, it would be better to get Long Tom out of the way and then settle Adams and then Rollo.

Jack Fresby opened his front door, entered and hung his bowler hat on the hallstand. He yawned and walked into his small sitting room. His back ached from his exertions of carrying the heavy trunk. After Susan had run away, he had gone back and made a good job of Cornelius. It had been a gruesome task, but if he was to get some money out of this business it was no use letting anyone find the body until he was ready to negotiate terms.

He went into the kitchen and put on the kettle. The little house was quiet.

Except for the daily charwoman, no one came

near Fresby. He had lived alone now for more than five years and had grown accustomed to looking after himself. He was not a sociable sort of person. Fortunately for him, the next door house was empty and on the other side was

a large vacant building lot. Fresby's only companion was a thin, ginger cat which now came in through the open window and began to twine itself round Fresby's legs.

"There you are," Fresby said, looking down at the cat affectionately. "I've got something for you. A bit of fish. You'll like that, won't you?"

As the kettle boiled, Fresby collected a cup and saucer and prepared the tea.

He carried the tea into the front room and sat down limply in the big armchair. The springs creaked under his weight, but tonight he didn't care about the gradual wearing out of his furniture. With five hundred pounds, he could leave the country. He had wanted to leave the country since that ghastly night when he had dragged Vera Small's body down into the basement and buried it. He sipped his tea. Mustn't think about that, he told himself. It did no good.

There were other things to think about. His mind wandered, like groping tentacles, in the grime of eroticism. He thought of Susan and his big, flaccid hands grew damp.

To think that he had her alone in that empty house. What a fool he had been to miss such an opportunity.

Then suddenly he stiffened. What was that? He listened and a light knock came again on his front door. He glanced at the cheap little alarm clock on the mantelpiece. It was nearly half-past twelve. Who could it be? he wondered, frowning.

No one ever came near except the milkman, the newspaper boy and the charwoman. He waited. Perhaps whoever it was would realize that this was the wrong house and go away. But again the knock sounded, louder and impatient.

Muttering to himself, Fresby walked into the little hall and opened the front door.

“Are you alone?” Celie asked, stepping into the light.

Fresby stared at her. She made a striking picture, dressed as she was in a three-quarter white coat, a highwaisted skirt of midnight blue barathea and a black and white turban.

“Hello,” he said, aware that his voice had become husky. “Did you want to see me?”

She looked at him, her great eyes uneasy and watchful.

“Yes. You know who I am?”

He nodded. “It’s Mademoiselle Celie, isn’t it?”

“Can I come in?”

He stood aside and as she walked past him, the smell of her perfume made him feel weak.

“In here,” he said, trying to steady his voice. What did she want? he asked himself. What would Rollo think if he knew she had come here—or had he sent her?

Celie was now standing in the shabby little room, her back to the fireplace.

Fresby waved his hand to the bartered armchair. “Won’t you sit down?” he said awkwardly. “I apologize for the squalor; not what you’re used to, I’m sure.”

“What do you know about this Hedder woman?” Celie asked abruptly, taking no notice of his gesture towards the chair.

Fresby shifted his eyes. He hadn’t expected such a direct approach. “Butch was asking about her,” he mumbled, and to give himself time, he poured out another cup of tea. “Will you have a cup? I don’t suppose you will. A cocktail is more in your line, isn’t it? But I don’t have such things.”

Celie's eyes darkened. "I don't want anything," she said shortly. "You haven't answered my question."

"Why should I answer it?" he asked, smirking at her. The tea no longer interested him. He left it on the table and came close to her. "I'm tired," he went on. "If you don't mind, I'll sit down." He didn't wait for her permission, but sank down into the chair and looked up at her. She was only a few inches away from him and with a slight movement he could have touched her skirt.

"I haven't much time," Celie went on, sensing his confused desire for her. "It would be better if you answered my question."

"Didn't Butch tell you?" Fresby asked, trying to look unconcerned. Was she threatening him? "I told Butch all I know about the girl."

"No, you didn't," Celie returned. "You had better tell me the truth." She stared at him for a long moment, and then went on, "I'll make it worth your while."

Fresby gnawed at his moustache. He found it difficult to concentrate. What nice feet she had and how extraordinarily long her legs were. He found that rather exciting. He eyed the contours of her buttocks under her tight skirt. How he disliked women who were as flat as a board. What was she saying? He jerked his mind out of its grimy corner. Worth my while. Did she mean she would pay for information?

"I don't understand," he said and again his mind crept back into its dusty corner.

"Tell me what you know about this woman and I'll give you a hundred pounds," Celie said. "Only you must hurry."

Fresby pondered. A hundred pounds! That was what Butch had promised him. Anyway, it was a figure on which to bargain.

"Five hundred pounds would be more like it," he said and pushed his hands deep into his pockets. He suddenly had a desire to reach out and touch her.

She laughed. "Don't be a fool." There was doubt and anger in her voice. "A hundred pounds is all you'll get, so you'd better make up your mind."

"Five hundred," he repeated. He would be glad to argue with her all night.

He hated to think of this room without her.

She moved impatiently and the hem of her skirt touched his knee. His thin, muscular body reacted as if he had touched a live wire.

"Do you know where the body is?" she said, after a pause.

He stiffened. It was a movement beyond his control and it betrayed him as sure as if he had spoken.

"So you do," Celie went on, her voice hardening. "You fool! You're wasting time. Tell me where it is and I'll give you a hundred pounds." She opened her bag and showed him four thin white notes. "Look, I have it with me."

He crossed his legs. "Not nearly enough. Rollo would give me a thousand."

Celie turned away so that he could not see the look of frustrated fury on her face.

Any moment Rollo might, somehow or other, find the body. This was no time to bargain. Even if it meant giving Fresby half the fantastic sum, it would be better than letting Rollo get his claws on the lot. It might even be possible to engineer a little accident for Fresby after he had shown her where the body was. If only Butch were here! They might have persuaded Fresby to talk by other means than bribery.

She turned back to Fresby. "There's money hidden on the body," she said, clenching her fists. "Now do you understand? If anyone finds it while we are arguing, you'll be sorry."

Fresby's eyes narrowed. So that's why Rollo was so anxious to find Cornelius. And to think he had spent all that time putting wax on the dead

man's face and it had never occurred to him to search the body.

"Money?" he repeated. "How much money?" Celie hesitated. He would know before long so she might as well tell him.

"Three million pounds."

Fresby huddled down into his chair. The sum stunned him. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. Don't sit there staring at me. If you know where the body is, we must hurry. Rollo may find it at any moment."

Fresby thought this was unlikely, but he didn't say so. "If you take me to where you have hidden it, I'll share the money with you," Celie went on after a pause. Already an idea was taking shape in Fresby's mind. Three million pounds! A staggering, unheard of sum of money. Share it with her? Why should he? He knew where the body was—she didn't. All he had to do was to go to Ted Whitby's place, collect the money and leave London. In a few days he could be out of the country.

Celie was watching him uneasily. She knew it was dangerous to tell him about the money, but what else could she do?

"What are you thinking about?" she said sharply.

He got to his feet and pushed the chair back. "All right," he said. "It isn't far."

He was in two minds what to do. Whether he should do it now or wait until they were at Whitby's. He'd better do it now, he decided. It might not be so easy in that cramped space full of wax figures. Here, at least, he had more room.

He glanced round. The table was in the way. It would have to be moved. He mustn't give her any warning. The thing to do was to get his hands on her throat. Once he had her by the throat, he knew she wouldn't last long.

“I’ll change my boots, if you don’t mind,” he said, smirking at her. “My feet ache. I won’t keep you long.”

Before she could say anything, he stepped to the door. As he did so, he purposely lurched against the table.

“Why can’t she leave it in its proper place?” he murmured, as if he were talking to himself. He pushed the table against the wall and then he went out, closing the door behind him.

Celie looked at the empty space he had cleared by moving the table. Why had he done that? Her mind was alert with alarm. Was he planning something?

After waiting several minutes, she opened her bag and took out a gun. It was a tiny, toy-like thing with a mother o’ pearl handle, so small that she could easily conceal it in her hand. As she moved towards the door, she heard him coming back and she quickly took up her position again before the empty fireplace.

He came into the room and closed the door. His face was flushed and his eyes were bright and watery. He didn’t look at her directly, but out of the corners of his eyes.

Celie’s uneasiness increased. He was up to something, she thought. She still didn’t realize that she was in danger. She just thought that he was thinking of a way to leave her and get to Cornelius’ body on his own.

“Now,” he said, “I think we’re ready. Shall we go?” His voice was thick as if he had something in his mouth. He had to get her away from the fireplace. After the way Vera Small had struggled, he knew he would have to seize her throat from behind and ram his knee into the small of her back.

“Yes,” Celie said, watching him suspiciously. “Where is the place?”

“Not far,” he returned. He was now standing quite close to her and she could feel the heat from his body.

As she moved to cross the room, she suddenly realized what he was going to do. In the second of time that her brain refused to work, his hands closed round her throat.

She felt his bony knee drive into the small of her back and she could no longer breathe.

Celie did not lose her head. She knew that she had little chance of saving her life, but there was still a chance. Fresby's grip was terrifying. It was as if a steel band had been clamped round her throat and had been twisted tight by a spanner*. Perhaps she had some sixty seconds before she lost consciousness.

It was futile to struggle while he held her like this. Futile and a waste of precious time. She did the only thing possible.

She let herself go completely limp and Fresby, unable to hold her up, lost his balance. Together they sprawled on the floor.

Even then the grip did not loosen. Celie felt her mouth opening. Her tongue seemed to be swelling. Blood drummed in her ears.

Muttering to himself, Fresby sprawled across Celie's body. His fingers ached with the pressure he was exerting and he had a vague feeling of disappointment that she wasn't attempting to struggle.

This wasn't half so exciting as the other time. He couldn't even see the fear in Celie's eyes. All he could see was the back of her head and her slim, straight, motionless shoulders.

Then quite suddenly there was a violent explosion and cordite fumes rose in his face. The unexpected noise startled him. He had no idea what it was or where it came from. He released his grip and as he did so, Celie's body suddenly came alive. She rolled over and struck at him with her fingers like claws. Her long nails gashed his face and once again he heard the extraordinary explosion.

Something hit him violently in the body and he grunted, thinking that she had

kicked him.

Celie, still pinned down under his body, pulled the trigger again, but the gun jammed. Sobbing for breath she struggled to fire the gun while Fresby stared down at her with a stupid expression on his face.

Then he looked down, saw the gun and understood. He snatched it from her and holding it by the barrel, he struck at her. Celie jerked her head to one side, but the butt of the gun caught her a glancing blow. She felt her senses reeling and before she could protect her head, he had struck again. A thought flashed through her mind that she was being murdered. There was nothing now that she could do about it. She thought of Gilroy. She could see him quite clearly, looking at her with surprised eyes. Then behind him, peering over his shoulder, was Doc Martin. His face was alight with jeering laughter.

Fresby knew now that he had been shot. He could feel a hot, burning sensation in his belly and his heavy, woollen underwear felt damp. He struck at Celie again and the gun butt smashed the bone above her nose.

She ceased to straggle, but he continued to strike at her forehead with the butt of the gun. Then someone shouted and a hand seized his wrist and he felt himself pulled backwards: It was odd how tired and weak he felt. He couldn't see anything. Blood from the wounds that Celie had torn in his face ran into his eyes. He rolled over and lay quiet. The pain in his belly kept him in a curled-up position.

It seemed a long time before hands touched him.

"Be careful," he said irritably. "She's shot me."

Hands pulled him over on his back. A handkerchief wiped his eyes. He looked up into young, alarmed eyes, overshadowed by a policeman's helmet.

"You're a bit late," he said, tasting blood in his mouth. "I tried to kill her, but she had a gun."

"She's dead," the constable said briefly as he opened Fresby's waistcoat and

looked with distaste at the large bloodstain on his shirt.

“She did it,” Fresby whispered. “Get an ambulance. I’m not going to die, am I?”

The constable thought it was likely, but he didn’t say so. He satisfied himself that Fresby couldn’t move; then he stood up.

“I won’t be long,” he said.

“Tell ‘em to go to Whitby’s,” Fresby urged. He couldn’t bear to think that Rollo would succeed where he had failed.

“Three million pounds is a lot of money.”

The policeman glanced at Celie and felt a little sick. He pulled Celie’s skirt down. The coffee-coloured thighs seemed indecent to him.

Fresby closed his eyes. He was beginning to feel cold. “Hurry,” he said.

Detective Sergeant Adams watched Rollo climb the stairs with slow, cautious steps. Adams waited before he moved until Rollo had rounded the bend of the stairs.

He wasn’t overanxious to follow Rollo. He knew if Rollo took it into his head to become violent, he wouldn’t stand much chance against his brute strength. Still, there was no time to telephone for assistance. He would have to see it through on his own. He wished he was armed. If he had even a truncheon he would have felt easier, but he had nothing.

Against Rollo, his fists did not give him much confidence.

As he stepped to the foot of the stairs, he heard a sound that brought him up short. A woman had coughed. He listened. The cough came again and he judged it came from down the passage, away from the stairs.

It must be the Hedder girl, he thought. She couldn’t have gone upstairs after all. As she interested him more than Rollo, he turned away from the stairs

and crept along the passage until he came to the door leading to the cellar.

As he was standing there, listening, he heard movements down the stairs and, at the same time, he heard Rollo's heavy step overhead.

Cautiously he began to walk down the stairs. He could see that there was a light burning in the room below. He crept down, step by step, until he was able to peer into the cellar.

For several seconds, Adams stared round the sinister, rather terrifying room, too startled to move. At first glance it seemed to him that the room was full of strange, frightening people, but as he looked closer he realized that they were wax dummies.

Even at that, Adams felt spooked as he looked at the grim collection, their weird faces glistening in the shaded light.

Standing in the middle of the room was Susan Hedder. She was motionless, but Adams could see she was breathing rapidly and her eyes, although blank, moved uneasily.

A heavy, creaking step warned him that Rollo, not finding anything to interest him upstairs, was now coming down to the cellar.

Adams glanced round the room and then moved silently to one of the darkest corners where he joined three wax figures, taking his place just behind them. He pulled his hat low over his eyes, thrust his hands in his coat pockets and waited.

He was quite sure that unless Rollo turned his torch on him, which was unlikely, he would not know that he wasn't just another effigy.

Susan began to move again. Very slowly, she crossed the room and approached a group of wax figures in the opposite corner away from where Adams was standing.

As she did so, Rollo came down the stairs and stood watching her. The room

came as a shock to Rollo. Like Adams, he took some moments to realize that the figures that appeared to be staring at him were only dummies. He jerked his attention back to Susan.

She was standing before a figure of a little man who sat propped up in a chair. His wax face glistened pinkly in the shaded light and Rollo thought he looked more horrible than any of the other figures.

Susan lifted her hand and touched the little man's arm. Then she suddenly started back and gave a wild scream. Both Adams and Rollo nearly jumped out of their skins. She turned, her eyes now alive, and saw Rollo.

"Oh no!" she screamed and backed away." Go away! Let me out of here!"

Rollo moved swiftly towards her.

"Don't be frightened," he said, his great, moon-like face shining with sweat.

"It's all right—"

She put her hands to her mouth, then her eyes rolled back and she slipped to the floor.

It was only with difficulty that Adams restrained himself from starting forward. But he knew it was too soon to show his hand. He had to see what Rollo was after.

Rollo, breathing heavily, knelt beside Susan and turned her over. A quick glance assured him that she had only fainted and with an impatient grant he rose to his feet. He looked at the little man in the chair with interested eyes.

Susan had definitely pointed him out. Could this be Cornelius? The wax on his face looked new. It was brighter in colour than those of the other wax effigies. Rollo moved forward and flashed his torch on the face. He was certain now.

He could tell by the eyes. There was something gruesome about this little

figure and in spite of his iron nerves, Rollo felt a shiver run down his spine.

He looked round the room, He had a feeling that he was being watched. His eyes examined the still figures surrounding him. They were menacing and looked uncannily human. It was no good losing his nerve when he had got so far, he told himself angrily.

Pulling himself together he turned back to Cornelius and with a grimace of disgust, he hastily opened the little man's coat.

Quite close to Rollo, hidden behind a group of effigies, stood Butch. He watched Rollo and from time to time, he glanced across the room to where Adams was standing. He had seen Adams come in and he knew where he was hiding.

He was sure that Adams hadn't spotted him. It wasn't going to be easy First, he would have to knock Rollo off and then rush across the room and close with Adams. It was his bad luck that Adams was close to the stairs. Butch would have to cross the room to escape; by that time Adams would be on him. The thing to do, he decided, was to shoot Rollo and then shoot out the light. It was unlikely that Adams was armed. These British coppers never carried arms, but he couldn't afford to take chances. In the darkness and confusion he could slip across the room and if Adams tried to stop him he'd give it to him.

He looked again at Rollo.

Rollo was sweating. He hated handling Cornelius, only the thought of the money urged him on. He undid Cornelius' waistcoat. There was the belt! It was a broad affair with two leather pockets and the pockets bulged.

With fingers that trembled, Rollo undid the buckle and tried to pull the belt clear. But it would not slide off Cornelius' body. Cursing softly, Rollo gave it a savage jerk and brought Cornelius tumbling to the floor.

Rollo stepped back with a quick intake of breath. He looked round the room uneasily and then bent hurriedly over the fallen body and dragged the belt

clear.

Butch, crushing down a tremor of superstitious fear, groped for his gun. He carefully eased it from his pocket and held it down by his side.

Rollo was holding the belt, his fat face alight with triumph. He feverishly opened one of the pockets. Weidmann hadn't lied. The belt was stuffed with tightly-folded bonds. It was the greatest moment of Rollo's life. Butch raised his gun.

Adams saw the movement. He was so startled that he could not even cry out.

It seemed to him that one of the wax figures had come to life and the shock was so great that he could only stare, feeling his heart skip a couple of beats.

Rollo also saw the movement and he dropped the belt and swung round, his breath rushing into his throat in his terror.

For one split second, Rollo and Butch looked at each other and Butch grinned. Then he squeezed the trigger and the crash of gunfire rolled round the still cellar. The slug hit Rollo in the middle of his great forehead—thwack.

Rollo closed his eyes, took one hesitating step towards Butch, and then folded up on the floor like a stricken elephant.

Butch did two things almost simultaneously. He snatched up the belt and fired at the electric light bulb. The cellar plunged into darkness. Adams was on the move. Although he was unarmed and his nerves seemed to poke out of his skin, he did not hesitate. He knew that Butch could only leave by the stairs and without counting the cost, he darted across the room to head Butch off. As he did so, he cannoned into a figure and for a second he thought it was Butch, then he realized it was only one of the wax effigies and he drew a sharp breath in relief.

Butch heard him cross the room and he snarled to himself.

“You’d better get out of the way, copper,” he called, crouching, his ears pricked. “You can’t stop me!”

“I’m going to have a good try,” Adams returned, sounding more confident than he felt. “You’re not the only one with a gun.”

Butch sneered. “You can’t kid me,” he said. “I know you flatties don’t pack a rod. I warn you. Get the hell outta the way or I’ll put the blast on you.”

Adams was groping in the darkness as Butch talked. His hands touched a figure and he drew it towards him. He hoped it was solid enough to stop a slug.

“You’d better give up, Butch,” he said. “I know you—you can’t get away.”

Butch raised his gun and fired.

Adams felt the slug thud into the wax figure and he nearly dropped it. That shooting was a little too good, he thought, and gently lowered himself to the floor.

He could hear Butch creeping towards him. Reaching up he caught hold of the effigy and gave it a hard push in Butch’s direction.

The effigy crashed down nearly on top of Butch, who sprang to his feet and started back with a wild oath. He fired blindly and the bullet brought down a trickle of plaster from the ceiling.

The flash of the gun gave his position away. He was quite close to Adams who sprang forward and grappled with him.

As soon as Butch felt the detective’s hands on him, he went mad. No one was going to stop him from getting out of this house and away with the money. He let go of the belt and clawed at Adams’ face with his fingernails.

Adams had been in several “free-for-alls” during his career as a policeman and had learned what to expect from such men as Butch. The moment he felt

Butch's nails on his face, he rammed his face against Butch's shirt front and then jerked up his head, catching Butch under his chin. The impact stunned both men for a few seconds and while they regained their senses, they gripped each other's arms and rolled across the room.

Adams was the first to recover and he lashed out, catching Butch a glancing blow on his cheekbone. The blow aroused Butch who countered with two heavy punches to Adams' body.

"Don't be a fool," Adams panted, catching and holding Butch's wrists for a moment. "You can't get away and you're only making matters worse—"

Butch jerked free and exerting every ounce of strength twisted Adams on his back. He clutched at Adams' throat and at the same time, rammed his knee in his chest. He heard Adams' breath come out with a rush and grinning savagely, he tightened his grip.

Adams could no longer breathe. He kicked and squirmed, but he could not shift Butch's grip. The black cellar suddenly exploded into a mass of tiny, brilliant lights. In a detached, tired way, he realized that his chances of survival were slight. He struggled feebly, gripping Butch's wrists, but he was helpless to break the stranglehold round his throat.

"This is where you get yours, copper," Butch gasped, squeezing Adams' throat with all his strength.

Then suddenly he stiffened and relaxed his grip.

"Something's going on down there," a man's voice called from the head of the stairs. "Got a light, Jim?"

Butch, releasing Adams' throat, leapt to his feet as a powerful electric torch swept the cellar. He caught a glimpse of his gun, lying near his feet and he snatched it up, backing to the far wall.

As he did so, the beam of the torch fell fully on him and a voice called: "What's going on here?"

He could see the outline of a policeman's helmet and without thinking, he raised his gun and fired.

The torch immediately went out and by the scuffle of feet he judged the policeman had beaten a quick retreat.

If he didn't get out fast he'd be trapped, he thought, feverishly. Where had he dropped the belt? He couldn't leave without that. He cursed the darkness and, dropping on hands and knees, he began to grope about the floor.

"Hey, you, down there," a voice shouted. "Drop that gun and come up with your hands in the air."

Butch continued to crawl on, feeling sweat running down his face and cold panic in his heart. He had got to find the belt. What a fool he had been to have shot out the light!

His hands swept across the floor in wide, frenzied circles. He touched Adams' face and jerked back with a startled oath.

He could not remember where he had been standing when Adams had attacked him.

It was no good; he had to have a light. In a few minutes the cops would be here. They wouldn't be the ordinary flatties, but the flying squad with guns.

"Okay, copper," he called. "I quit. Lemme have a light—I can't see how to get to the stairs."

"Throw your gun away," the policeman shouted back, without showing himself. "Right across the room and I want to hear it go."

Butch pulled out his heavy cigarette case and tossed it into the darkness. It fell with a clatter and a moment later the electric torch lit up the cellar again.

Feverishly, Butch looked round. Adams was lying near him. Susan, curled up, her head on one arm, lay several yards away. Near her was the belt.

It had taken Butch a split second to spot all this. He dived towards the belt, snatched it up, spun on his heel and raced for the stairs. The beam of the electric torch hit him between the eyes.

“Drop that gun!” the policeman shouted, alarm in his voice.

Butch fired point blank and the torch fell out of the policeman’s hand as he slumped to the floor.

Butch kicked him out of the way and reached the head of the staircase. He stood for a moment glaring along the narrow passage towards the front door. As he hesitated, the door flew open and two policemen in flat caps sprang into the passage. Guns glittered in their hands.

Before Butch could jerk up his gun, one of the policemen fired at him. Butch felt the slug smash into the woodwork of the staircase, a few inches from his arm. He jumped back, tripped over the wounded policeman and fell backwards down the stairs.

“Look out, Harry,” one of the policemen shouted. “It’s Mike Egan.”

“I’ll look out,” Harry returned sourly and moved cautiously to the head of the stairs. “He’s got Jim, the rat.”

“Well, he can’t get away,” the other policeman returned. “You watch the stairs while I get Jim out of it.”

Butch, badly shaken, was crawling to his feet. He heard scuffling at the head of the stairs and he snapped up his gun and fired. Gunfire crashed back and two bullets thudded into the wall above his head. He dropped flat, sweating. These punks could shoot!

He listened, his mouth twisted in fear and rage, his gun pushed forward. He was trapped all right. Rollo had always said these damn British cops were dynamite. He gripped the belt—three million pounds and he wasn’t going to get a nickel of it! Well, he’d give ‘em a run before they got him and they wouldn’t get him alive.

Opening his coat, he buckled the belt round his waist. Okay, he was ready.

He might still get a break. A lucky shot might clear the way for escape, although he guessed, by now, the house had been surrounded. Well, it was no use staying here. He was going up those stairs with his gun blazing. If they killed him—well, it was better than a six weeks wait for the rope.

Suddenly a light flickered up and then a large ball of blazing newspaper was tossed into the cellar. The flickering flames lit up the darkness and gunfire crashed from the head of the stairs.

Butch felt a violent blow against his shoulder and reeling back, he dropped his gun. He fell forward on his hand and knees, cursing.

“Don’t move, Egan!” a voice called. “Or I’ll blast you to hell!”

Where was the gun?

Butch gathered himself together for a spring into the shadows. Then he jerked back.

Facing him, his gun in her hand, stood Susan Hedder, white-faced and wide-eyed with terror.

“Don’t move!” she cried hysterically, “or I’ll shoot!”

Butch flung up his hand. “Don’t point that at me!” he quavered, backing away. “You little fool! It’ll go off!”

“Hold everything,” a voice called from above and a moment later the cellar seemed full of policemen.

Detective Sergeant Adams’ office was small, sparsely furnished and without comfort. The primrose-coloured walls gave the little room a cold, forbidding look and

Susan Hedder, sitting on the edge of a hard chair, thought it was almost like a prison cell.

The door opened and Adams came in.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Miss Hedder,” he said with a friendly smile.

“Not much of a place to receive a lady visitor, is it?”

He sat down behind his battered desk and offered her a cigarette.

Susan nervously refused.

“It’s all right,” Adams said, grinning at her. “You don’t have to be frightened. Of course, you’ve been a little foolish, but if it hadn’t been for you, we should have had a long and expensive investigation on our hands. Luckily Butch came clean about Crawford, so I haven’t told my boss that you’ve been concealing a murder. That wasn’t too bright of you, you know.”

Susan twisted her hands in her lap and didn’t say anything.

“What in the world made you mix yourself up in such a business?” Adams went on after a pause.

Susan avoided his eyes. “I don’t know,” she said. “It was Joe really. I felt sorry for him and he did want to help Mr. Weidmann. I—I was really—I couldn’t help myself.”

“Well, we’ve been trying to get our hands on Rollo for some time,” Adams went on. “But he was far too cute for us. Thanks to you, the gang’s been broken up.”

Susan shook her head. “It was really nothing to do with me,” she protested.

“Indirectly it was,” Adams returned. “Anyway, I’m grateful. If I hadn’t followed you, an awful lot of money would have changed hands.”

“I still can’t make out why I went there.”

“That’s something I don’t understand,” Adams said, frowning. “It was as if

you were walking in your sleep. Butch said Gilroy was practising voodoo, but I can't believe a yam like that. Anyway, when we called on Gilroy we found he had gone. He slipped over to France and we've just heard that he's now on his way to the West Indies. We can't do anything about him as he doesn't seem to be connected with the case."

Susan fidgeted. "What's happened to Mr. Weidmann?" she asked, at last.

"That's why I've asked you to call. He wants to see you."

"Wants to see me? Why?"

Adams shook his head. "I don't know. Anyway, I've got a car. If you want to see him, we can go now."

Susan hesitated. "Where is he?"

"Well, he isn't well, you know. We've had him taken care of. He's in a home."

"Joe said that would happen to him."

"Yes. There's nothing to worry about. He's happy enough. I don't think he cared much for the way Rollo treated him and I think he's glad to have someone to look after him. We couldn't let him roam around without some kind of supervision. He hasn't any relatives and he has a fantastic fortune. His bank has taken over his affairs and he seems to have settled down." Adams stood up. "Well, shall we go?"

"I can't think what he wants with me," Susan replied, getting to her feet. "But I suppose I can't very well refuse to see him—it wouldn't be polite, would it?"

Adams looked at her and smiled. He liked her. He liked her young, candid face, her hair and her rather frightened, bewildered eyes. "There's nothing to be scared about. I'll be there—if you want me."

Susan smiled. "After what I've been through, it does seem silly to be nervous of a poor old man like that, doesn't it?" she said. "But I am." She pulled on her gloves. "All right, I'm ready."

As they drove rapidly through the London streets in the dark blue police car, Adams tried to put Susan at her ease.

"Now that all the excitement is over," he said, "what are you going to do with yourself?"

Susan shook her head. "I don't know," she confessed. "Find a job, I suppose. It'll seem pretty flat after this."

Adams laughed. "Well, you mustn't think this sort of thing happens often. Why I've been in the police force for more than five years and this is my first murder case."

Susan pulled a little face. "Perhaps you don't look for excitement. If I had the money and could be independent—I think I'd try to find excitement. Although I'm scared at the time, I do like it afterwards."

"We don't want you getting into any more mischief. Poor Cedric was so worried about you. I'm sure he wouldn't survive another bout of thrills."

"I've still got some money left from the sum Joe gave me," Susan said after a pause. "After that's gone, I shall really have to find something to do."

"Here we are," he said, opening the car door. "Do you want me to go in with you, or shall I wait outside?"

Susan hesitated and then squared her shoulders. "I can manage, thank you," she said, remembering her new attitude of independence.

"Think I might become too possessive?" Adams asked with a grin.

"I shan't give you the opportunity," Susan returned primly.

"All right. I'll wait here. If you want me, throw something through the

window.”

Susan ran up the steps and rang the bell.

A loose-limbed, elderly man opened the door. “Of course,” he said when Susan had told him who she was, “we were expecting you. Mr. Weidmann is quite bright today and he’s been looking forward to your visit.” He went on to introduce himself as Doctor Edgely and then conducted her along a passage and up some stairs.

“Mr. Weidmann mustn’t be excited,” Edgely said, unlocking a door at the head of another passage. “He’s here for a good rest and then perhaps he will be able to go home.”

He led Susan to a door, tapped gently and opened it.

“Miss Hedder has come to see you, Mr. Weidmann,” he said in that false, breezy tone doctors have for their patients. “I was saying that we mustn’t excite ourselves and we mustn’t keep the young lady too long.”

Kester Weidmann was sitting before a large fire, a rug over his knees and a book in his hand. Susan found the room stiflingly hot.

“Don’t bother me with your claptrap,” Weidmann said, scowling at Edgely. “Let the young woman come in and you go away.”

Susan advanced nervously into the room.

“Sit down,” Edgely said, pushing a chair forward. “There now, we can have a nice cosy chat.”

Weidmann again waved him away. “Do go away,” he implored. “I don’t want a cosy chat and I don’t want you hanging around. I see far too much of you as it is.”

Edgely gave Susan a sly, warning look and took himself off. When he had gone, Weidmann turned in his chair and stared at Susan thoughtfully. He

stared so long that she became not only uncomfortable, but distinctly nervous.

“So you are Susan Hedder,” Weidmann said at last. “Forgive me for looking at you so intently, but from what I’ve heard, you are a remarkable young woman.”

“They’re trying to make out that I’m insane. It’s a lot of nonsense. I’m as sane as that old fool of a doctor, not that that is saying much; but if it pleases them to keep me here, I don’t mind. The fact is, my dear, I’m getting old. I can no longer run my business. Do you know why? It’s because my brother is no longer with me. Together we could do anything, but alone, we are very feeble, I’m afraid. Anyway, I’ve got my money, the place is comfortable, and I’m tired of looking after myself, so why not let them keep me here?”

Susan suddenly found that she was not afraid of this little man. He certainly did not look insane and she thought he was nice in a kindly, fatherly way.

So Susan told him how she had met Joe, how she had followed Butch and what had happened after that. She told him everything, including the moving of Cornelius’ body.

Weidmann sat in his chair, his fingertips together and his eyes closed.

When she had finished—it took her over half an hour—he nodded.

“It’s a remarkable story,” he said. “The police— what’s his name—Adams, told me something of what happened, but it seems if it hadn’t been for you, I might have lost all my money. I should have been very angry. It took me a long time to acquire. I should like to thank you.” He shook his head. “Poor Joe, I’ll never forget him.”

Susan squirmed uneasily. “Oh, it was nothing really,” she said. “I—I liked doing it. I was scared, of course, but now— well, now I’ve got no excitement. It’ll be terribly dull, Mr. Weidmann.”

He looked at her sharply. “It need not be,” he said, “so long as you don’t

throw yourself away on some man. A young woman of your courage and determination could go far if she's prepared to go alone. You've tried to help me, and now I'm going to help you." He took a long envelope from his pocket and placed it on his rug-covered knee. "I've talked things over with my trustees. They think I'm cracked too, but I've managed to persuade them to let me have some money for you. I want you to have it. Don't be proud. Money can bring a lot of fun. You're only young once and now's the time to have a good time." He tossed the envelope into her lap. "Don't open it now. It is not a great deal, but it'll buy you a little freedom to do with what you will, anyway for a year or so."

"Oh, but I couldn't," Susan said, flushing. "You see Joe paid me to look after you and I still have some money he gave me."

"Now don't argue. Take it as a fee, if that'll make you happy. I hear that old fool of a doctor coming back. Have a good time and don't waste your opportunities."

Dr. Edgely came in. "I think it's time we had a little sleep," he said, giving his toothy smile. "Then we'll be as fresh as a daisy for our nice little dinner."

"Did you ever hear such drivel?" Weidmann said, shrugging his shoulders and smiling at Susan. "Well, I suppose I must humour the poor fellow."

Susan got to her feet. "Thank you, Mr. Weidmann . . ." she began.

He raised his hand. "Run along, my child. If you want help come and see me again. If you don't, then stay away. This is no place for a pretty child like you."

Then quite suddenly, without any warning, his smile went away and his expression changed. It was as if a shutter had fallen behind his eyes, leaving them blank and stupid looking. "Take that woman away. Who is she? What's she doing here?" he said in a high-pitched querulous voice. "I want Cornelius. Ask him to come here at once. There's the Headway Steel Merger to discuss."

Susan found herself gently but firmly pushed out of the room by Edgely, who closed the door and turned the key.

“You see how it is,” he said, shaking his head. “He has these spells. Some days he is quite normal. Then something happens and he calls for his brother. It is very sad and I’m afraid he’ll take some time to recover.”

Susan, upset and shocked, did not know what to say. “But he is happy?” she asked at last when they reached the head of the staircase.

“Oh yes,” Edgely assured her. “You needn’t worry about that.” He offered his hand. “You can find your way out? I must go back and talk to him.”

In the hall, Susan paused and examined the envelope Weidmann had given her. After a moment’s hesitation she opened the flap and drew out a slip of pink paper. It was a cheque made out in her name and signed by the Weidmann bank directors for the sum of five thousand pounds.

She stood for some moments staring at the cheque, her mind in a whirl. It must be all right, she told herself. Weidmann had given it to her and the directors had signed it.

An impatient growl of the police klaxon outside made her start. She pushed the cheque hurriedly into her purse. She was independent now. Why, she could even go into business. She could set up an office, buy a shop or even open a detective agency.

The police klaxon growled again and quickly opening the front door, she ran down the steps to the waiting car.

THE END