

*you've got it
coming*



james hadley chase

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III

You've Got It Coming
James Hadley Chase
1955

chapter one

I

The moment he came into the room she knew something was wrong.

He said in a flat, cold voice, "Hello, baby," and without looking at her, he took off his hat and his topcoat, tossed them on to the settee and walked over to the fire and sat down. His face was hard and pallid and the sullen expression in his eyes made him a stranger.

During the six months they had been going around together, she had never seen him like this, and she could only think of one explanation: he was set to give her the brush off.

For weeks she had been wondering how much longer it would last. Not that he had shown any signs of growing tired of her, but he was now the ninth man in her life and she had come to expect a brush off sooner or later.

She had long ceased to kid herself about her relations with men. She was thirty-two, and the life she had led had taken most of the gloss off her beauty. At one time, and it seemed to her a long way back into the past, she had won the second prize for the Miss America competition of 1947, and if she had known what she knew now, she was sure that if she had played her cards right with two of the judges as the winner had done, she wouldn't have been second, but first. She had been given the inevitable screen test and had played bit parts in B pictures under the direction of Solly Lowenstien. Maybe she had been too free and easy with Solly. She had hoped he would have pushed her ahead in the movie business if she accommodated him, but it hadn't worked out that way. After a few months he had lost interest in her, and as if he had given the signal, the C.C.A. had lost interest in her too. After Hollywood, she had done a little modelling, then she had become a nightclub hostess. It was at the Eldorado club that she had met Ben Delaney.

The following fourteen months were the highspots of her life. She had travelled with Ben around Europe. She had gone to all the big parties with him in New York, swum with him in Miami's blue sea, had gone winter sporting with him in Switzerland. Their association had gone on for so long she had begun to think it was the real thing, but finally he had cooled, and

then the brush off had come swiftly.

She hadn't seen Ben for two years, but she often thought of him, following his career in the newspapers, and dreaming of hooking up with him again. There had been other men after Ben, but they were just shadowy figures who had left no impression on her memory. Then just when she was at her lowest ebb, when she had hocked most of the jewellery and furs Ben had given to her, Harry Griffin had come blustering into her life.

Harry, a crew captain, flying Moonbeams for the Californian Air Transport Corporation on the Los Angeles-San Francisco route, was four years younger than she was. He had a reckless, swashbuckling manner that made people look back over their shoulders after him: an infectious ifI-don't-give-a-damn-why-should-you? air that she found exciting and fascinating. He was tall and big and built like a heavyweight champion. His drinking and reckless extravagances, his good looks and his violent, short-lived temper were essential male qualities that appealed to her.

She had gone to a nightclub in the hope of getting a job, and they had met in the lobby after she had had a curt brush off from the nightclub manager. Thinking about it afterwards she had decided the nightclub lighting must have been pretty kind for she was sure she had looked as she had felt: washed up, tired and ready to flop.

Harry had stood squarely in her path, his handsome, dark face lit up with a grin and there was the hunting look in his eyes she hadn't expected to see again in any man's eyes.

"Keep me company," he had said. "You're just the kind of girl I have been looking for ever since I left college."

He had given her dinner and somehow she had managed to be gay and sparkling and cute. He had taken her back to her apartment and they had paused at the front door. She expected him to ask her if he could come in and suspected his, "Want to eat with me the night after next? I'll be in town then," as a polite good-bye. She was so anxious that he wouldn't go out of her life that she had said, "Aren't you coming in for a drink?" And he had grinned, shaking his head. "I wish I could, but I'm on duty tonight. Keep that date open the night after next. I'll take you up on it."

She hadn't expected to see him again, but he turned up around eight o'clock two nights later, and they had gone out to dinner. They had become lovers that night, and from then on, regularly on alternate nights, he had come to her

apartment to take her out or to sit before the fire and talk and make love: every other night for six months until this night when, the moment he walked into the room, she knew something was wrong.

Here it comes, she thought, as she hung up his topcoat. I knew it was too good to last. Well, at least he has the decency to come and tell me. She walked over to the table and took a cigarette from the box and lit it, noticing her hand was shaking.

"You're early, aren't you, Harry?" she asked and looked across at him as he lounged in the armchair, frowning at the fire, his heavy dark eyebrows drawn down and sweat beads making his face glisten.

"Yeah," he said, not looking at her.

She waited a moment, then she said quietly, "What's wrong?"

"Who said anything was wrong?" he said. "Give me a drink, will you? I'm going to get good and plastered tonight."

She went over to the cupboard where she kept a bottle of whisky. The bottle was three-quarters empty. After she had made two stiff drinks she found there was only an inch of liquor left in the bottle and she tipped it into her glass. She would need a bracer, she told herself, when he finally got around to breaking the news. She came back to the fire, handing him the glass.

"That's all there is. I'm right out of liquor," she said, sitting down. "I'm sorry."

"We'll go out. We'll do a bar crawl." He drank the whisky at one long swallow and set down the glass. "But you'll have to lend me some money, Glorie. I'm broke. I spent my last buck on a taxi getting here. Have you any?"

She reached for her handbag, opened it and took out her purse. Her hands were shaking so badly she could scarcely open the purse. She took out two dollars and a few cents and held them out to him.

"That's all I have."

He stared at her.

"You can cash a cheque, can't you? Won't someone around here cash it for you?"

"I haven't had a bank account for months," she said, forcing a smile. "You're not the only one who is broke, Harry."

He grimaced, then took out a pack of cigarettes, tapped out a cigarette and lit it.

“Well, don't look so tragic about it,” he said, suddenly grinning. “So we're both broke. So what?”

She looked quickly at him. If this was the beginning of a brush off it was a new technique in her experience.

“What is it, Harry? Why haven't you any money? Are you in some sort of trouble?”

“That's an understatement,” he said, his smile fading. “Come on. I'll hock my watch. I'm going to get tight tonight if it's the last thing I do.”

“Please tell me. I want to know. What's wrong?”

He hesitated, then shrugged his shoulders.

“I've lost my job. That's what's wrong. I've been slung out.

Okay, I admit I asked for it, but that doesn't make it any better. The trouble is its pay day tomorrow and I'm not getting paid.”

“You've lost your job?” she said, feeling a little chill crawl up her spine. “But, Harry . . .”

“Yeah, I know.” He ran his fingers through his hair. “I know; don't tell me. It's one of those things. How was I to know the old man was travelling on the kite? I've never met him; never even seen him before. No one knew. Imagine taking a sneak ride to check up on us. That shows you the kind of rat he is.”

“What old man?”

“The boss: the President of the Californian Air Transport Corporation,” he said impatiently. “How was I to know he'd sneak out the back just when I . . .” He broke off and looked thoughtfully at her. “Well, I guess you'd better know the sordid details, Glorie. You and I have got on pretty well these past months. If I can't tell you the truth, then I guess I can't tell anyone.”

“I hope you really mean that,” she said, wanting to cry.

He leaned forward and put one large hand over both of hers.

“Of course I mean it. I don't know what it is about you, Glorie, but you're a good scout. We've had fun; you've been good to me. I could kick myself for being such a dim-brain. I was a little high. You know how a guy feels when he's carrying a load. That's what I like about you. You've been around. You know how it is.”

Yes, she had been around, she thought bitterly, and she knew how a guy felt when he was carrying a load. Sometimes she wished she didn't.

“Well, Harry?”

“Yeah.” He patted her hands and drew back, frowning again.

“Well, the air hostess . . . she had been giving me the come-on these past three trips. She's a pretty kid; bright as a diamond. It suddenly occurred to me it might be an idea . . . well, I don't have to draw you a map. I was crazy enough to bring a pint on board with me and I'd been hitting it. I got Tom to handle the kite and I went back stage. Right at the psychological moment, the old buzzard appeared like Hamlet's ghost. Boy! I thought he'd blow his top. He could scarcely wait for the touch down before he booted me out.”

The airhostess . . . a pretty kid . . . as bright as a diamond.

Those were the only words she really heard.

Somehow she managed to force a sympathetic smile.

“That was bad luck. I'm sorry. I'm truly sorry.” She tried to stop herself from going on, but she had to know. “And the girl? She and you . . .”

Harry shook his head.

“For heaven's sake! She's just a kid. She means nothing to me.

I don't know what I was thinking of. It was just one of those things: the come-on and too much liquor . . . you know how it is.” He ran his fingers through his hair. “I could strangle her! If she hadn't made eyes at me, I wouldn't be out of a job now.”

Glorie drew in a long, slow breath. She suddenly felt light headed.

“Well, you can get another job, Harry. This isn't the end of the world.”

He got abruptly to his feet and began to move around the room, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets.

“It's the end of my world,” he said. “My world's in an aircraft. That's the only thing I care about: the only thing I'm any good at. The old man will see I don't get employment in the air again: he told me so. He has plenty of influence and he'll spread the good word. I can get some sort of job, but, let's face it, as a career man, I'm washed up for good and all.”

“Oh no, Harry. You'll get something good. You're smart. After all, being a crew captain was all right, but it wouldn't have led anywhere. You must know that. They don't want you when you get old.” Listen to who's talking about getting old, she thought bitterly.

“This may be a good thing for all you know. You're still young. You can start . . .”

Her voice died away as she saw him staring at her.

“Oh, skip it, Glorie. What do you know about it?” he said curtly.

She saw at once that she had made a mistake. She was intruding into part

of a world he considered entirely his own.

"You're right," she said. "I can't even look after my own life, let alone tell you how to look after yours. I'm sorry."

He stubbed out his cigarette and immediately lit another.

"Forget it." He came over to sit by her side on the settee. "I had it coming. I can't blame the old buzzard really. What else could he have done? I was nuts to have fallen for that dizzy blonde. But it's tough on you Glorie. There won't be any more dinners and movies for some time. I guess you'd better give me the gate. I'm not much use to you now."

Her heart contracted. Perhaps after all this was a subtle brush off. Perhaps this story of losing his job was a lie: his idea of letting her down lightly.

"Of course it's not tough on me," she said. "It's you I want: not your dinners and movies."

He laughed, but she could see he was pleased.

"When you look like that I'm almost ready to believe you."

"You must believe me." She got up and lit a cigarette in sudden panic that her feelings might betray her and scare him away. She had a sudden idea and without pausing to think, she went on, "They say two can live cheaper than one. Do you want to move in here, Harry?" She waited, her heart pounding, waiting for him to refuse, sure he would refuse.

"Move in here? Do you mean it?" he asked, looking blankly at her. "I was wondering where I was going to find a cheaper place. I can't afford to keep on my apartment now. Anyway, the rent's due at the end of the week and I haven't got it. You really mean I can move in here?"

"Of course. Why not?" She turned away so he couldn't see the tears that blinded her. Even without money, without a career, she wanted him more than she wanted anything else in the world.

"Well, I don't know," he said, rubbing his jaw. "People will think I'm living on you. Anyway, we'll probably get on each other's nerves. I'm pretty tough to live with. You're sure you're not kidding?"

"No."

He stared at her back, puzzled by the unsteadiness of her voice. Then he moved to her and turned her around and stared at her.

"Why, Glorie! You're crying. What's there to cry about?"

"I wish I knew," she said, pulled away from him and dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief. "I guess I just hate things going wrong for you,

Harry.” She pulled herself together and smiled at him. “Are you going to move in?”

“I'd like to. It's good of you, Glorie. I'll get a job. I'll get something to carry us over; any damn thing. Look, suppose I go back to the apartment and pack right now? Okay for me to move in tonight?”

“Of course.” She slid her arms around his neck. “I'm so glad, Harry. I'll come with you. I'm good at packing, and then let's hock something and celebrate. Shall we?”

“You bet,” he said, grinning. “I'm looking forward to living here with you. We're going to have fun, baby.”

II

A week later, a few minutes after eight o'clock, Glorie came from the bathroom into her bedroom where Harry lay sleeping. She moved quietly so as not to disturb him, and sitting before the triple mirrors on her dressing table, she began to brush her hair.

It was only when you lived with people that you really got to know them, she thought looking at Harry in the reflection of the mirrors. The experiment had worked out better than she had hoped, but she was worried about him.

He had said he would get work to carry them over, but he hadn't. It was she who had managed to get a job as a manicurist at the Star hotel, a couple of blocks from her apartment. She wasn't making more than fifteen to twenty dollars a week, but it was better than nothing.

She wished Harry would take job-hunting more seriously. He seldom got up before eleven, then he would spend the rest of the morning studying the situations vacant ads in the paper. He would mark two or three of them and then wander out in the afternoon to see what was being offered.

He would come back soon after six, depressed and surly tempered, saying that he wasn't going to work for thirty bucks a week.

"Take a job like that, Glorie," he told her, "and you're sunk. You get a thirty-buck mentality. I've got to stick out for something better."

But she knew this was an excuse to refuse the jobs he was offered. She realized now that his world was in the air, and he couldn't bring himself to accept a job that would kill for good any chance of getting back into the air.

The thing about him that really alarmed her was his methods of getting credit from the local shopkeepers. It was almost as if he were dishonest, she thought uneasily. Although he wasn't earning a cent, every Friday when she returned from the hotel, she found a sack of groceries on the kitchen table and enough meat to last the week, as well as two bottles of Scotch.

"But, Harry, you can't go on running up bills like this!" she had protested. "We'll have to pay some time."

He had laughed.

"Forget it! I may be a dud at finding a job but I've got a lot of talent for getting credit. If these suckers let me have the stuff why should we worry?"

They think I'm waiting for a rich uncle to die. I told them he's worth forty grand and I'm going to inherit the lot. If they're suckers enough to believe a yarn like that, why should I care? Besides, I'm not going to live on you. You pay the rent and I'll supply the food. That's the least I can do."

It worried her too that there were times when he was moody and sullen, and she was quick to realize these moods of depression coincided with the time when he used to be on duty, taking his aircraft off the runway on the flight to San Francisco. Although he didn't talk about it, she knew how much he missed his aircraft and the company of the men he used to fly with.

She tried to persuade him to go out to the airfield and see his old crew.

"Not likely," he said, flushing. "Those guys respected me. I bet they think I'm a four-letter man now. No; they wouldn't want to see me."

She put down her hairbrush, got up and took off her wrap. As she slid into her dress and began to close the fasteners, she became aware that Harry was awake and was watching her.

She smiled at him.

"Shall I get you your coffee? I have the time."

"No, thanks. I'll get it myself in a little while." He reached for a cigarette and sat up slowly. "You know, Glorie, I've been watching you while you were brushing your hair. Living with me seems to agree with you." He grinned. "You're looking prettier, younger and happier. It does me good to look at you."

She knew what he was saying was true. Living with him had made her feel younger and happier, but she would have been happier still if he had been contented in mind. This seemed to her to be the opportunity she had been waiting for to tackle him about himself.

"I wish I could say the same of you, Harry. You don't look happy. I'm worried about you."

He shifted his eyes.

"There's nothing to be worried about. I'll get a break soon. It's just one of those things."

She came over to the bed and sat by his side.

"I feel if you don't get a job soon, you'll get to hate the sight of me," she said.

"Don't talk nonsense. You're the last person I'd hate the sight of." He looked at her as if he were trying to make up his mind about something, then

he went on: "How would you like to come away with me to Paris and London and Rome?"

"Why, Harry, I'd love it," she said, bewildered. "It would be wonderful, but what has Paris, London and Rome to do with us for goodness sake?"

"How would you like to own a million bucks?" he went on, his fingers gripping her wrist.

"I'd like that too. How would you like to be President of the United States?" she said, forcing a laugh. There was a look in his eyes that was beginning to frighten her.

"I'm serious, Glorie," he said. "I wouldn't joke about a thing like that. I know where I can lay my hands on three million bucks. If I could find someone to handle the deal, I could clean up at least a million, probably more."

"But, darling . . ."

"I know. Okay, take it easy. Don't look so scared. Listen, Glorie, I'm fed up trying to find a job. I've had time recently to do some thinking. You are right when you said being a crew captain led nowhere. The world is made up of smart guys who get rich and suckers who stay poor. I've been a sucker too long: now, I'm going to be smart. I know where I can put my hands on three million bucks, so I'm going to take them."

She felt the blood drain out of her face.

"Take them? What do you mean?"

He lay back on the pillow and looked at her. The reckless, I-don't-give-a-damn expression in his eyes turned her cold.

"Let's get this straight, Glorie. You've been good to me. I owe you a lot. You're the only one I feel I can trust and rely on. If I pull this job off I want you to share in the profits. I'm not going to rush into it without being absolutely sure I can get away with it. I wouldn't touch it if I thought I'd slip up somewhere. I wouldn't want you to get into trouble; not after what you've done for me. I've got the set-up more or less worked out. There are two things I'll have to take care of. If I can find a way of taking care of them, then we'll be sitting pretty for the rest of our lives."

"Harry, darling," she said breathlessly, her heart beating wildly. "I don't know what you're talking about. I'm sorry if I'm being stupid, but I just don't know what this is all about."

"Of course you don't," he said, and patted her hand. "I'm going to tell you,

but before I do you've got to promise to keep it to yourself."

She suddenly felt as if she wanted to be sick.

"You're not thinking of doing anything that will get you into trouble with the police, are you?" she said.

His heavy brows came down in a scowling frown. The sulky, angry look she had seen so often came into his eyes.

"Okay, let's forget it," he said impatiently. "This isn't the time to talk about it, anyway. You'd better finish dressing or you'll be late." He swung out of bed, pushing her hand away. "I'm going to get some coffee," he went on, and walked into the kitchen.

For a long moment she sat on the bed motionless, her hands pressing her breasts. Then she stood up, went to the dressing table, quickly ran a comb through her hair, finished fastening her dress and walked into the kitchen where Harry was heating up some coffee.

"Please tell me what you are going to do, Harry," she said, trying to keep her voice steady. "I won't tell anyone."

"Maybe I'd better keep it to myself," he said, but she could see he was going to tell her. "Now look, I don't want you to start belly aching that I shouldn't do it. I've made up my mind to do it and no one's going to stop me, and that includes you. When I've got the money I'm going to London, then Paris and then Rome. I'm going to move around, have myself a good time, and then I'm going to buy myself into one of these small air-taxi businesses. I'll get me a partnership so I can develop the business and fly when I feel like it. That's the job I want, and that's the job I'm going to have."

"I see." Glorie said.

"When I get this money," he went on, "I'm either going to travel with you or without you. That's up to you. If you don't want to come with me, say so. If you want to come, well, that's fine, because I can't think of anyone I'd like more than you to travel Europe with." He filled a cup with coffee and sat on the kitchen table, looking at her. "You have time to make up your mind, and I'm sorry if I seem to be holding a pistol to your head. I don't mean to do that, but I'm going ahead with this idea. It's my only chance now to get back into the air. I've got to be my own boss, and that means I've got to have capital. There's a place at my side for you if you want it, otherwise I'll travel alone."

She tried to keep calm, but fear had hold of her; sick, cold fear that made her tremble.

“What do you plan to do, Harry?” she asked, going over to the kitchen stool and sitting on it.

“On the 25th of this month,” Harry said, “a consignment of diamonds is being flown in one of the Californian Air Transport kites to San Francisco for shipment to Tokyo. I know because I was going to fly the kite. The diamonds are worth three million bucks. I'm going to grab them.”

She felt as if a splinter of ice had been driven into her heart.

He must be crazy, she thought. Diamonds! Three million dollars' worth! He would be caught and he would go to prison for twenty years, probably longer. He would be nearly fifty when he came out and she ... she shuddered to think what would have become of her in twenty years' time.

“Don't look like that,” he said sharply. “I know what you're thinking. You think I'll get caught, don't you? Well, I'm not moving in unless I'm sure I have a fifty to one chance of getting away with it. I'm pretty sure now that I can get away with it, but in another week I'll know for sure.”

“But, Harry, is it worth the risk?” she said, trying to speak quietly. “How often does anyone get away with a big robbery? Wouldn't it be better . . . ?”

“You don't know the setup. This one's going to take everyone by surprise. It's never been done before.” His face was alight with excitement. She had never seen him look like this before. “I'm going to hijack the plane!”

She stared at him.

“What do you mean?”

“What I say,” he said impatiently. “This is the setup. The diamonds will be put on the usual passenger plane. No one's supposed to know about them, except the old man and the pilot. I will have booked a seat on the plane and will travel as a passenger. There will be two other guys travelling with me. Once we get clear of the airfield, we'll go into action. The two guys will take care of the passengers and the crew. I'll take over the kite and fly her into the desert. I'll bring her down where a car will be waiting, take the diamonds and beat it. There's an airfield not far away. I'll have my seat booked and I'll fix it to catch a plane from there to Mexico. Everything will depend on speed. The alarm won't be out until I'm halfway to Mexico, and by then it'll be too late. I can lose myself in Mexico until I get rid of the diamonds. That's something I've got to get down to. I've got to find someone to handle the diamonds.”

Listening to this dangerous and ridiculous plan, she could scarcely believe he could have any confidence in it.

“But surely that is the first thing you must do. You can't steal three million dollars' worth of diamonds unless you know for certain who will take them and how much he will pay you for them. Do you think anyone will take them, Harry? It's such a big amount, and the police will be looking for them. Who will take the risk of handling them?”

“Of course someone will take them if the price is right,” Harry said irritably.

“But you want a million for them. You said so.”

Harry scowled at her.

“You're not deliberately trying to put me off, are you?”

“But you don't seem to have thought of the difficulties.”

“I haven't stopped thinking of them,” he said angrily. “Of course there are difficulties. A job like this can't be plain sailing, but I'll fix the difficulties. There's bound to be someone in Mexico who'll handle the stuff.”

She began to breathe more easily now. It was such a stupid, badly thought-out plan that she felt sure she could persuade him to give it up if she handled him carefully.

“But will you find anyone?” she asked. “You can't walk around asking anyone if he'll buy three million . . .”

“I know! I know!” he said, his voice shooting up. “It's something I've got to work out.”

“And what about these two men who are going to help you? Who will they be?”

“I don't know yet. I've got to find them. I'm going downtown this morning and I'll have a look around.”

“But Harry! You can't find men to steal diamonds like you find something in a shop. If you approach the wrong one, he'll tell the police. Oh, Harry, darling, can't you see it won't work? You must see! You're not a crook. Don't you see you can't handle a job as big as this without an organization behind you? You can't do it!”

Harry looked at her, then a slow grin spread over his face.

“Well, don't get so worked up about it, Glorie,” he said. “That's sound sense. An organization would be swell, but at the same time I'd have to share my profits, wouldn't I? And how am I to find an organization?”

She had an unpleasant feeling that he was pulling her leg, and she looked sharply at him.

“But you will have these other two men to pay, and there will be the man in the car,” she said.

“Yeah, that's right. Well, okay, I'll have to think about it again, won't I? I'll have to put some more work in on it.” He looked over at the kitchen clock. “Hey! Isn't it time you went to work? We don't want to lose our one and only job, do we?”

“Yes, I must go.” Glorie started to her feet. “Listen, Harry, let's talk about this again tonight. Promise me you won't do anything until tonight. Don't go talking to anyone. Promise me, Harry. Let's work it out tonight when I get back.”

“Okay, baby. I'll wait until you get back.” He leaned forward and kissed her. “But you do think it's a good idea apart from the difficulties?”

She touched his face with her fingertips.

“There are lots of good ideas. It depends so much on whether they work out or not.”

“Yeah, I guess that's right. Well, you've given me something more to think about, baby. You get off or you'll be late.” He turned her, patted her and pushed her to the door. “See you tonight.”

When she had gone, he finished his coffee, poured himself another cup and carried it into the bedroom. He sat on the edge of the bed and ran his fingers through his hair while he stared down at his slippered feet. There was a half-sly, half-jeering smile on his face as he thought of what Glorie had said. His plan was working out the way he thought it would. She had absorbed the first shock. Tonight she would be ready to discuss the details and find more faults with the plan. He was pretty sure, now that he had given her the impression that the scheme was half-baked and that he had overlooked the main snags that he could talk her into doing what he wanted her to do.

When he had finished his coffee, he stood up and went over to the chest of drawers. He pulled open the lower drawer and took out a bundle of letters and photographs.

A couple of days ago he had wanted a fresh towel, and not knowing where she kept them, he had made a systematic search of all the drawers in her bedroom. He had come across this bundle of letters tucked away under a neatly folded pile of underwear.

Because he had nothing to do and was bored, he had taken the letters into the sitting room and had read them.

He had had no misgivings about reading Glorie's letters. He saw no wrong in that, and he wouldn't have cared if she had found some of his letters and had read them.

He had found them to be old love letters, dated three years back, and written by a man who signed himself *Ben*. They were fiery letters that slowly cooled as the dates on the letters progressed.

The final letter told Harry that the brush off was near, and he had shaken his head, feeling sorry for her. It wasn't until he had looked at the photographs that he suddenly became interested. Ben Delaney's photographs had appeared so often in the Press that Harry recognized him immediately.

He now took one of these photographs from the bundle and carried it over to the window and looked at it.

Delaney appeared to be a small, dapper man with cold, steady eyes, a closely clipped moustache and nondescript features.

Across the bottom of the photograph he had scrawled: *For Glorie, my wonderful girl, Ben.*

Harry flicked the photograph with his fingernail as he stared at it. Who would have imagined that at one time Glorie had been the girlfriend of one of the most powerful and dangerous racketeers in California? Unbelievable, but what a bit of luck!

Harry smiled as he slid the photograph into his wallet. He returned the bundle to its hiding place. Then, whistling softly, he went into the bathroom to take a shower.

III

The first hour or so at the Star hotel was usually slack, and as she sat in her small cubicle waiting for a client. Glorie had time to think about Harry's fantastic plan.

She went over in her mind everything he had said. Even if he didn't go ahead with this particular plan, it was a pointer to the way his mind was working, and an explanation as to why he hadn't got himself a job. She wouldn't have believed that he had a crooked streak in him. She knew he was reckless and that he drank too much, but this was something she hadn't bargained for.

It seemed to be her fate, she thought bitterly, to hook up with men who went off the rails. It had been a horrible shock to her when she had found out that Ben was a gangster. It was only when two hard-faced detectives had called on him one night when they had been together in his apartment that the truth had dawned on her, and from then on she had lived in dread of further police visits.

But as the months went by, and Ben had become more powerful, and was able to buy himself police protection, the visits became increasingly rare. But she had never forgotten the way the police had treated her, nor their insults and their brutal questioning. Even now she couldn't pass a patrolman without an inward shudder.

If Harry was crazy enough to go ahead with this scheme, she thought, he wouldn't be able to buy himself protection as Ben had done. He would be hunted, and sooner or later he would be caught and he would go to prison.

The thought of losing him turned her sick. Whatever happened, she told herself, whatever he decided to do, she would stick with him. Life without him now was unthinkable. Somehow she had to persuade him to give up this dangerous, half-baked scheme, and if she failed, then she would have to make absolutely certain he didn't rush into it without the most careful planning.

She told herself she was a fool. She should have left Ben when she found out he was a gangster, but she couldn't do it. She knew she should leave Harry now he was planning a robbery, and again she knew she couldn't do it.

The day seemed interminable, and when at last she left the hotel, she was

in such a state of nerves and worry that she ran most of the way back to the apartment, unaware that people in the street were staring after her, startled by her white, scared face.

She found Harry lounging in an armchair, listening to swing music on the radio, apparently without a care in the world.

"Hello," he said as she came breathlessly into the room. "You seem to be in a hurry. Where's the fire?"

"There's no fire," she said, trying to keep her voice steady.

She kissed him and then turned away as she took off her hat and coat.

"I'll take them," he said and she gave them to him.

She sat down before the fire while he went into the bedroom.

When he came back, he made two stiff highballs and gave her one.

"Want to eat now or later?" he asked.

"I'm not hungry." She drank some of the whisky, then she took a cigarette and looked at him.

He smiled at her.

"Been worrying, baby?"

She nodded.

"I guess so." She forced a smile. "I have every reason to worry, haven't I? This idea of yours is a bit of a shock."

"I want you to know, Glorie," he said, "how it is. I don't want to keep anything from you."

"You do realize, Harry, what this means if you do this job?" she said. "Right now you can pass a policeman without even seeing him, but if you take these diamonds, every policeman will be a threat to you, and that's an awful way to live."

"Sounds as if that came right from the heart," Harry said, smiling. "Don't tell me the police have been after you in your dark, murky past because I won't believe you."

"I'm not joking!" she said sharply. "Please listen to me, Harry. You won't get rid of those diamonds, even if you succeed in getting hold of them. You're an outsider. You haven't any connections. You won't be able to trust any fence, even if you succeed in finding one, and I can't see how you'll do even that. This idea of yours won't work, Harry."

Harry grimaced.

"You could be right," he said. "All the same, the idea is a cinch for a guy

who has a big organization and men he can rely on. It can't fail, but without an organization it's tough — probably too tough.”

She began to breathe again.

“That's just it. It's too tough. I'm so glad and relieved, darling, you realize it now. You will drop it, won't you?”

He lifted his heavy eyebrows.

“Of course I'm not going to drop it. No, the idea now is to find a big enough organization who could handle it and then sell the idea to them. I stand a chance of picking up fifty grand for the idea, and that will give me the start I want.”

She very nearly lost patience with him, but controlled herself in time.

“Darling, that's not a very sensible idea, is it? How can you possibly sell anyone such an idea. They wouldn't pay you until you told them what your idea is, and once they know they wouldn't have to pay you. You're dealing with crooks. You couldn't trust them to pay you.”

Harry grinned.

“You obviously don't think much of my brains,” he said. “I'm not that much of a sucker. This plan of mine relies on two things: the means of identifying the aircraft that will carry the diamonds, and where in the desert it is possible to make a safe landing. I happen to know both these things. Without them, the job can't be done, and unless I get the money, cash on the barrel-head, I don't part with the information.”

Glorie's heart sank.

“I see,” she said, trying to keep calm. “But, Harry, you have no connections. You wouldn't get to anyone big enough to handle the job. They would think it was a police trap. You just wouldn't get them to believe you.”

He drew in a long, deep breath. At last he had got her to the crucial point. She was saying exactly what he had planned and hoped she would say. It depended now on how far he could press her and the extent of her feelings towards him.

“That's right, Glorie,” he said, watching her. “I agree they wouldn't trust me, but they would trust you.”

She stared at him, not believing she had heard him correctly.

“Trust me?” she said blankly.

“Ben Delaney would take your word, Glorie, even if he wouldn't take mine.”

Her reaction to this startled him. She jumped to her feet, her eyes angry, her face a hard, white mask.

“What do you know about Ben Delaney?” she demanded.

“Take it easy. No need to jump down my throat. You and Delaney were friends once, weren't you?”

“How do you know that?”

His face hardened.

“Don't go shrill on me, Glorie. You're not making a secret of it, are you? I happened to pick up an old magazine and this fell out of it.”

He took Delaney's photograph from his wallet and tossed it on the table.

Glorie looked at it, her eyes glittering.

“You're lying!” she said. “You didn't find that in a magazine! You've been reading my letters.”

Harry began to lose patience.

“So what? If you didn't want me to read them why put them where I could find them?” he said. “Stop glaring at me! If you want to make a fight of this, say so, and I'll give you one!”

She was suddenly deflated by fear. A scene like this could be dangerous. He might lose his temper and walk out on her.

“All right, Harry,” she said, and sat down, looking away from him. “Never mind. I think it's pretty rotten of you to read my letters, but I'm not going to fight about it.”

“I'm sorry,” Harry said, not wishing to hurt her. “I just came on them. Let's get away from this, shall we? The point is Delaney could handle this deal. He has the organization and he has the men. You know him. I want you to put me in touch with him.”

Her hands went to her throat.

“Oh no, I won't do that. That's one thing I won't do.”

“Now look . . .”

“I'm sorry, Harry.”

He had expected trouble and was pretty sure how to handle it. He stared at her for a long moment, then shrugged.

“Okay, if you won't, you won't.”

He turned and began to walk towards the bedroom.

“Where are you going?” she asked, fear entering into her like the slow thrust of a knife.

"I'm getting out," he said, pausing at the bedroom door. "I told you: no one is going to stop me doing this job. I'm not kidding myself that I'll get to Delaney without your help, so I'll try to handle the job on my own. I'll get a couple of guys from somewhere to help me. If I get the diamonds, then I'll go to Delaney and offer them to him. He'll see me all right if I have the diamonds. I'm clearing out because this is something I'll do better on my own. It'll be tricky and dangerous and I don't want my nerve broken down by a lot of objections from you."

"But, darling, you can't leave here." Glorie said, cold with panic. "Where will you go? How will you live?"

He laughed.

"For heaven's sake! I'll take a thirty-buck job for a couple of weeks. What do you think I am? Soft or something?"

"No, I don't think that." She hesitated, then said, "Then you don't love me anymore, Harry?"

"What makes you say that? Of course I love you, and when I get the money, I'll take you to Europe with me. That's a promise."

"Do you really mean that?"

"Well, I can't prove it, but I might be able to convince you," he said, coming over to her. He pulled her to her feet. His mouth came down on hers, and he held her against him so tightly she could scarcely breathe. She didn't care. Her hands moved up his neck and into his hair. When he finally leaned away from her, he said, "I'm crazy about you, kid. I know I'm giving you a bad time right now, but it'll work out all right in the end. I've got to get my hands on some money, and this is the quickest way of doing it."

She tightened her grip on his shoulders.

"You're really determined to do this thing, Harry?" she said.

"There's nothing I can say or do to stop you?"

Looking down at her, Harry saw he had won, and he had to make an effort not to show his triumph.

"There is nothing anyone can do to stop me. I'm sold on it. It's my one chance and I'm going to take it. I'll tell you something, Glorie. This isn't just a sudden idea. When I heard about those diamonds as far back as three months ago, I planned to grab them. I've been living with this thing for three months, day and night, and every day I'm more convinced that I've got to do it."

She let go of him and walked over to the armchair and sat down.

“All right, Harry, if you've made up your mind then we'll do it together.” She didn't look at him. “There are a lot of things I've learned about this kind of business that you don't know. I didn't live with Ben for fourteen months for nothing. Will you give me until tomorrow morning to think about it? I'm not wasting time. It will need a lot of thought.” She hesitated, then went on, “I want you to know why I am going to help you. I know I am a fool to have anything to do with it, but I love you. You mean more to me than anything else in the world. I think you may have a chance of getting away with this if you will only listen to me and do what I tell you. If we have any luck at all, I think I'll be able to keep you out of prison. I'll introduce you to Ben. It won't be easy. I haven't seen or spoken to him for two years: but I'll try. So will you give me until tomorrow morning to get this thing straightened out in my mind?”

“Why sure,” Harry said, suddenly uncomfortable.

The despair he saw in her eyes turned his carefully planned triumph a little sour.

“Would you go to the movies or something?” she went on. “I would like to be alone for a while.”

“Sure.” Harry crossed the room for his topcoat. “I'll do that. See you around midnight.”

He started for the door, then remembered he hadn't any money. He wasn't going to ask her for any, and shrugging his shoulders, he opened the door and started down the passage.

“Oh, Harry . . .”

He turned.

She was standing in the doorway.

“You forgot your money.” She was holding out a five-dollar bill. “You must get something to eat. I'm sorry to be turning you out like this.”

Harry came back slowly and took the bill. Feeling ashamed of himself was a new experience, and he didn't like it.

“Thanks,” he said. “I'll owe it to you.”

He went down the passage and down the stairs without looking back.

IV

The following day was Sunday. Their usual practice was to stay in bed until noon, then have a late lunch, and if the weather was fine, they would go for a walk. But on this Sunday, they were both up and sitting in front of the fire soon after nine o'clock.

"Don't let's waste any time," Glorie said, as soon as she had poured out the coffee. "I've thought about this thing and now I know I can help you. I'm not going to be a bore and ask you again not to do it. If you're really determined to do it, then it's up to me to do everything I can to make it a success."

"I'm going ahead with it," Harry said, frowning. "I'm sorry if I'm upsetting you, Glorie, but . . ."

"All right," Glorie broke in, "let's take all that as read. There're no point in taking the diamonds if you're not sure of getting away with them, is there? I mean the most important part of your planning must be first to make sure the police won't catch you."

Harry moved impatiently.

"Don't worry your brains about that angle. I'll take care of that. The most important part of the setup is getting into touch with Delaney."

"You're wrong," Glorie said, her face white and set. "If you get the diamonds and if Ben pays you, you still want your freedom to spend the money, to travel, to buy your partnership, don't you?"

"Well, of course."

"So the most important part of your planning must be to make sure the police don't catch you."

Harry shrugged.

"Well, okay, I guess it is if you put it that way."

"Will there be anyone on the aircraft who will recognize you?"

Harry frowned.

"There could be. I'm certain to be recognized by some of the staff on the airfield if I'm not spotted in the kite. That's why I'm planning to skip into Mexico before they can come after me."

"But they can bring you back from Mexico."

"If they can find me. I'll fix up some sort of disguise as soon as I get to

Mexico. But that's something I can work out later. What is more important . . .”

“No,” Glorie said sharply. “Nothing is more important than getting away. Can't you see the danger you are putting yourself into? You will be recognized. The police will know who they are looking for and that will make their task easy. How long do you think you will remain free once the police know who you are? They can get a photograph of you from the Air Transport's records. Every newspaper in the country will carry it. Someone will recognize you sooner or later and give you away. The insurance companies will offer a reward for you. Once they know who you are, you're sunk, Harry.”

“For God's sake!” Harry said angrily. “That's a risk I've got to take. If we start worrying about that angle, we'll never get anywhere.”

“If they know who you are they will hunt you for the rest of your life. You will never have a moment's peace.”

“Well, so what? I can't stop them knowing who I am if I'm to handle the kite, can I? It's just one of those things.”

“Oh no, it isn't. You are going to change your appearance before you do the job. From tomorrow Harry Griffin is going to disappear. In his place, Harry Green will appear, and Harry Green will steal the diamonds. Then Harry Green will disappear and Harry Griffin will reappear. The police will be looking for Harry Green and not you.”

Harry stared blankly at her.

“I don't catch on. Let's go over that more slowly.”

“It's simple enough. Before you do the job, you will disguise yourself so no one can possibly recognize you. You will be a stranger who has no background and no friend to recognize him. When the job is done you will take off your disguise and no one will know you have done the job.”

Harry ran his fingers through his hair.

“It's a good idea, Glorie,” he said thoughtfully, “but it won't work. The success of the idea lies in disguising myself so no one will recognize me. That can't be done. Most of the guys on the airfield know me pretty well. They're certain to recognize me. I couldn't disguise myself well enough to get away with it. This is a pipe dream, Glorie.”

“Oh no, it isn't,” Glorie said. “I'll handle your make-up. I once knew a man who was one of the best make-up artists in Hollywood. I learned a lot of

tricks from him. I could change your appearance so no one would know you.”

“Honest?” He leaned forward, his eyes excited. “You're not kidding?”

“I don't kid about things like this. But it won't mean just changing your colouring and your looks. Your clothes, the way you talk, the sound of your voice, even your personality will have to be changed. A lot depends on you. How much time have we got?”

“Twenty days.”

Glorie nodded.

“We should be able to do it in that time. There's a lot to do. Tomorrow you must go to the airfield and meet your friends again. You will tell them you are going to New York to look for a job.”

Harry flushed.

“To hell with that for an idea. I don't want to See those guys again. Why should I tell them I'm going to New York?”

“You've got to! “ Glorie said sharply. “After the diamonds have been stolen, the police will begin an investigation. They will know right away it is an inside job. Sooner or later they will come across your name. They will find out you were to fly the aircraft and that you knew the diamonds were going to be on board. You will be one of their suspects. Your boss isn't going to speak well of you. That's why you must be out of town long before the robbery. You must go to New York and register at a hotel. You must be able to prove that you have been in New York, even though you drop out of sight later on. You must even get some kind of travelling job. We'll go into details later on. I want you to get the general picture of what you have to do.”

“For the love of mike, Glorie!” Harry said. “I can see the sense of this, but going to New York will cost money. It can't be done.”

“Never mind about the money just now,” Glorie said. “Just listen to me. You must make sure to make an impression on the staff of the hotel so if the police check the staff will remember you. You must then find a travelling job. It won't be difficult if you go after one of these commission-only jobs, but you've got to get it. By then I'll be in New York. You will join me there, taking care no one sees you arrive. I'll then change your appearance and you will become Harry Green. Before you leave New York, Harry, you will write three or four letters to any of your friends. We will get hotel addresses in Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Detroit and Minneapolis, and you will head each letter with one of the addresses we'll find. You will tell your friends you are

travelling and enjoying yourself. I'll take these letters to each town and post them. We've got to have proof that you have been travelling and the only proof we can offer are the post marks on the letters."

"But wait a minute . . . " Harry began.

"Let me finish," Glorie said. "That's your alibi taken care of.

Now you will come back here and meet Ben. Get yourself a room at some cheap hotel and show yourself. The more you show yourself and impress yourself on people the better. Whenever you get the chance brag about you being an ex-pilot and that you want a flying job. Act tough, that is the best way to be remembered. Go to one of these Photomat places and get photographed. Impress yourself on the photographer. Refuse to pay for the photographs; make a scene so he will remember you and so when he reads your description in the papers he'll give the police a copy of your photograph. Do you see what I'm getting at? If the police and the public are looking for Harry Green, they won't be looking for you."

Harry was gaping at her now.

"Well, who would have believed it? You're a knock-out, Glorie. This is terrific. I would never have thought of it. This way I can't fail to get away with it."

"Please don't say that. It is so easy to make a mistake. At least it will give you a chance."

"Of course it'll work. I'm sure of it. It's a terrific idea. But there's one point I don't agree about. I want to see Delaney before I go to New York. If he won't play, then I'll have to think of another angle and I won't have to go to New York."

"You must meet him as Harry Green," Glorie said, her voice low and tense. "You must never let him know who you are. I know Ben. He might double cross you. If the police thought that he was handling the diamonds and put pressure on him, he would give you away. You don't know him: I do. Once you get your money, you must disappear as Harry Green so that neither Ben nor the police will ever trace you. This is important. You must do what I say."

Harry shrugged.

"Well, okay. It makes sense. So I'll meet Delaney when I come back from New York, but how am I going to get to New York — walk?" He grinned at her. "Let's face it, baby. It'll cost at least a thousand: your fare and mine to

New York, and your fares to these other places, my hotel bills until I pull the job. We couldn't do it under a thousand. Where's that coming from?"

She got up and went into the bedroom, and after a few minutes she came back, carrying a small leather jewel case which she set on the table. She opened the case and took out a small diamond brooch and a gold bracelet set with sapphires. She tossed them into Harry's lap.

"We should be able to raise a couple of thousand on those," she said. "I've kept them for this kind of a rainy day."

Harry examined the two pieces of jewellery, then he looked at her.

"They're nice. Don't you want to keep them? Seems a pity to sell them."

"No, I don't want them," Glorie said woodenly. "What's the good of keeping stuff like that? When do I ever get the chance of wearing them?"

He got out of his chair and went to her.

"You hate parting with them, don't you?" he said, and took her in his arms. "Well, we need the dough now, but I'll get you something even better than these when the time comes. I promise you. Don't think I don't appreciate what you are doing for me. I love you for it, and thanks."

She leaned against him, struggling not to cry.

"Just think of us in London, Paris and Rome," he went on, stroking her silky, dark hair. "Think of us with all that money. Then when we're tired of travelling we'll come back here and I'll buy myself a partnership in an air taxi business, and we'll live happily ever after."

"Yes," she said, clinging to him. "We might even get married."

The words were out before she could stop them. She stiffened against him, angry with herself and scared.

"Why not?" Harry said. At that moment he was feeling grateful to her. Marriage seemed to him like a good idea. "Would you like that, Glorie? Would you like to marry me?"

She leaned back so she could look at him.

"Of course. I'd love to marry you," she said, thinking this was the first time any man had asked her to marry him.

"Okay, then we'll get married," Harry, said, smiling at her, "but we won't rush into it. We'll get this job behind us first, and then we'll take the plunge. What do you say?"

"Why not tomorrow, Harry?" she asked, trying to sound casual. "At least, we could apply for the licence . . ."

“No point in rushing it,” he said, and kissed her. “I don't want anything on my mind when I get married. I just want it to be a long, long honeymoon. We'll wait until this job's over.”

She nodded, feeling deflated.

“Yes,” she said. “We'll wait.”

chapter two

I

Ben Delaney had come up a long way since Glorie's time. Then he had been an ambitious gangster with an eye for the fast buck, who moved into any profitable field, milked it dry and moved on again in search of something else as easy and as profitable. If he had met with opposition, he had retaliated with gunfire. But now it was different. He regarded himself as a successful business man with innumerable irons in the fire. Some of these irons were actually legitimate, such as his two nightclubs, his taxi-hire service, his wire service to bookmakers, and his swank motel at Long Beach. These profitable sidelines had been financed by the proceeds of his less legitimate activities that included drug peddling, blackmail, organized vice and extortion. Another of his profitable sidelines was the distribution and marketing of stolen jewellery, and he had gained a reputation for himself as one of the best-paying fences on the coast.

He lived in a luxurious mansion that stood in a two-acre garden on Sunset Boulevard. The right wing of the twenty-bedroom house had been equipped as a suite of offices, and it was here that Ben ruled his little kingdom.

No longer did he have to carry a gun: he had enough money now to employ a small army of thugs to watch his interests and discourage any competition or anyone foolish enough to attempt to horn in on his territory. His annual pay-off to the police was considerable and gave him complete immunity from trouble. He lived well, entertained lavishly, and if it were not for the Press, he would have long ago been accepted as a worthy member of Los Angeles society. But certain sections of the Press refused to forget his gangster days, the fact that three times he had been tried on a homicide charge, although each time a clever attorney had blasted a hole in the evidence against him large enough for Ben to crawl through. Nor could they forget that he had been involved in the call-girl scandal of a year ago, although there had been no evidence offered against him. Every now and then, when news was slack, the editors of several newspapers wrote scathing leaders about Ben's past activities and hinted darkly that his present activities

should be investigated. There were also hints of police protection and the need for an administrative shake-up. This was something Ben could do nothing about. He had been tempted to silence the most hostile of the editors, but remembering the Jake Lingle episode, decided the risk was too great. He pretended to ignore the Press, but seethed with fury inwardly. Because of the Press he remained on the outer-fringe of Los Angeles society knowing that the people he entertained and who flocked to his parties were second raters, hangers-on, the indiscriminate who went anywhere so long as the drinks were free.

On this Monday morning, he sat at his big desk in a lavishly furnished room whose big bay windows overlooked the swimming pool and the sunken rose garden. He was examining the monthly balance sheet that had been prepared by a qualified accountant he kept on his pay roll.

The results of the examination displeased him. Profits were down: expenses were up. From the look of the figures some of his staff had been throwing money about like drunken sailors, and his fleshy, hard face looked bleak as he noted down the sum he had to play with after he had met his current expenses. The sum fell alarmingly short of what he had hoped it would be. Not that it wasn't impressive. At any other time, he would have been satisfied, but it so happened that this year he had decided to fulfill a life's ambition. The hallmark of a successful man, in his opinion, was to own a yacht: not one of those toy things with sails, but a five-thousand tonner with accommodation for twenty people, a ballroom and maybe a swimming bath. To own a yacht of that size seemed to Ben to be the ultimate peak of a successful career. He had been considerably taken aback when he had received estimates from the leading yacht builders: the amount the thieves wanted to build him a yacht to his specifications astounded him. Looking at the sum he had to spare after he had taken care of his living expenses, he reckoned that he would need at least an additional million dollars if he were to order the yacht this year, and where the hell was a lump of money like that coming from?

He was pondering the problem when the squawk box on his desk crackled into life.

"There's a Miss Dane asking for you, Mr. Delaney," his secretary said. "Miss Glorie Dane."

Ben didn't even look up from his calculations.

“I don't know her and I don't want to. Tell her I'm tied up.”

“Yes, sir.”

The squawk box went dead.

But as Ben flicked through his bank pass sheets, he repeated the name in his mind. Glorie . . . He reached out on an impulse and pressed down the switch on the squawk box.

“Did you say Glorie Dane?”

“Yes, Mr. Delaney. She says it's personal and urgent.”

Ben grimaced.

That sounded like a touch. He hesitated, then remembering the times he had had with Glorie, he decided to see her. They had been good times. Then he hadn't a care in the world. He hadn't had ulcers nor a kingdom that wanted watching every minute of the day and night.

“Okay, shoot her in. I'll give her ten minutes. Come in and break it up when I ring.”

“Yes, Mr. Delaney.”

He shoved aside the papers that littered his desk, lit a cigar, got up and walked over to the window. He stared down at the immaculately kept beds and the last roses in bloom, then he shifted his eyes to the swimming pool that, during the winter months, was completely glassed in with the water raised to a temperature of seventy-five degrees. He could see Fay standing on the diving board, adjusting her red bathing cap. He took in her beautifully proportioned body, her long sun-tanned legs and he nodded his approval. Maybe she was a dim-brain, he thought, but she had what it takes. She cost him plenty, but in bed she was not only enthusiastic, but extremely efficient, and besides, men envied him his possession, and Ben liked nothing better than to be envied.

He turned around as he heard the door open. His dark, good-looking secretary said, “Miss Dane,” in her most snooty manner and stood aside as Glorie came into the room.

Ben stared at her, immediately regretting his impulse to see her. Surely this tired-looking, pale-faced woman couldn't be Glorie?

Why, for the love of mike, she looked old enough to be Fay's mother! And her clothes! She had certainly come down in the world. This was certain to be a touch.

The many photographs she had seen of Ben in the Press had prepared

Glorie for the change in him, but even so she had a shock.

It wasn't so much that he was now pot-bellied, that his hair was thin and had white streaks in it. That was to be expected. He must be fifty-three or four now, but what shocked her was the expressionless face that when she knew him was always alert and lively and sun tanned, and which was now as white as cold mutton and a mask. His eyes scared her: they were granite hard and restless like the eyes of a vulture.

"What is it?" Ben said curtly, determined to cut this interview short. "I have a whale of a lot to do. I wouldn't have seen you only I didn't want to turn you away without having a word. What is it?"

Glorie felt herself go red, then white. He might at least have shown a little friendliness, asked her to sit down, asked her how she was.

She decided on shock tactics. She had to get his interest before he hustled her out of the room as she felt he was likely to "Would you be interested in a consignment of diamonds worth three million dollars?" she asked.

His face remained a set, white mask, but by the way he cocked his head on one side she knew she had caught his interest.

She hadn't studied his mannerisms for fourteen months for nothing.

"What are you talking about? What diamonds?"

"May I sit down or don't people sit in your presence, Ben?"

He suddenly grinned. That was the kind of treatment he liked.

He never had any time for people who fawned on him.

"Go ahead and sit down," he said, and walked over to his desk and sat down himself. "Look, Glorie, let's have it. I have things to do. What's all this about diamonds?"

But now she had his interest she was determined not to be hurried. She sat down, reached for the gold cigarette box on the desk, took a cigarette and looked at him.

Impatiently he pushed a desk lighter towards her.

When she had lit the cigarette, she said, "A man I know wants to talk to you. He thinks you might do a deal with him. I didn't want to get mixed up in this, but he did me a good turn once and he didn't think you would see him unless he had some sort of introduction, so . . . " She spread her hands, letting the sentence die.

"He will have three million dollars' worth of diamonds to get rid of. He thinks you are the only one who is big enough to handle the deal."

“Where's he getting them from?”

“I don't know. I don't want to know. I happen to owe him something, and that's why I said I'd come to you.”

“Who is he?”

“His name is Harry Green and he lives in Pittsburgh. He was a pilot during the war and hurt his leg. He's a bit of a cripple. He sells oil on commission and doesn't do very well out of it.”

Ben frowned.

“What's he doing with diamonds?”

“I don't know.”

“He sounds like a crackpot to me. Look, baby, you're wasting my time. Three million dollars' worth of diamonds — why, it's ridiculous!”

She looked at him.

“I told him you wouldn't believe it, but he was so sure. He insisted I should come to you. I'm sorry. All right, Ben, I won't take up any more of your time.”

She stood up.

As Ben reached for the bell that would tell his secretary he was free for the next caller, his eyes fell on the half-concealed balance sheet on the desk.

Three million dollars' worth of diamonds! If by some miracle this wasn't a crackpot's pipe dream, if by some miracle the diamonds did exist, then here could be the means of getting that yacht built this year.

“Don't rush away,” he said, leaning back in his chair. “Is this guy on the level, Glorie?”

“Of course. I wouldn't be here unless I was sure of that.”

“You really think he'll have the diamonds?”

“I suppose so. I don't know. All I know is he isn't a time waster and he's on the level. But if you're too busy to see him, then I guess he'll have to find someone else who'll handle the deal.”

Ben hesitated, then shrugged.

“Well, okay, it can't hurt me to see him. What did you say his name was again?”

“Harry Green.”

“Tell him to come and see me tomorrow. Tell him to call my secretary for a time.”

“He won't be in Los Angeles until the 16th,” Glorie said. “He doesn't want

to be seen coming here. Can he call you and make a date for you to meet him somewhere?"

"Look, baby, if this guy's wasting my time, he'll be sorry." The hard, white face was suddenly vicious. "Why the hell doesn't he want to come here?"

"That's something you'd better ask him," Glorie said, feeling a chill crawl up her spine at the sight of him.

Ben shrugged impatiently,

"Okay, tell him to call me. I'll talk to him." He got to his feet. "You're sure this guy's okay?"

"Yes. It may be hard to believe, Ben, but you can still trust me."

He laughed.

"Sure. Well, it's certainly a surprise to see you after all this time." He came around his desk to her. "You okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine. And you?"

Ben shrugged.

"I'm fine too. This guy Green your boyfriend, Glorie?"

"No. He pulled me out of a jam once. That's all."

"Haven't you got a boyfriend now?" His flat gangster eyes went over her face, inspected her figure: gangster, X-ray eyes.

"I find it less complicated not to have one. Boyfriends are so often unreliable."

"Oh, I don't know." He smiled. "Is that what you call it? After all a guy likes a change." He wandered over to the window. He couldn't resist showing off his new possession. "Here, take a look at that."

She joined him at the window. They looked down at the swimming pool, through the glass wall at Fay who lay on an air mattress, her red-gold hair around her shoulders, a towel draped across her, under the rays of a sunray lamp.

"Pretty nice, eh?" Ben looked out of the corner of his hard little eyes, contemptuous and proud. "Cute and pretty, huh? I like them young, Glorie: young and enthusiastic as you used to be."

Glorie felt herself turn white. The sneer hit her where she lived.

"Yes," she said. "Very nice, but she'll get old. We all do. Even you're not as handsome as you used to be, Ben. Good-bye."

She crossed the room, opened the door and went out.

Ben stared at the door, his eyes angry. Well, the bitch had had the last

word as she always did. He was well shot of her. Who would have believed she would have worn so badly? He had been smart to have dropped her when he did.

He crossed the room to his desk and picked up the telephone.

“Borg? There's a woman leaving here; she's on her way out now. She's tall, dark, wearing a black-and-white costume. Her name's Glorie Dane. Send Taggart after her. He's not to lose sight of her. I want to know where she hangs out, what she does, who her men friends are — the works.”

The voice at the other end of the line, a low, breathless voice, as if the owner suffered from asthma, said, “Okay, I'll take care of it.”

Ben replaced the receiver and stood frowning down at the blotter on his desk. Harry Green? Who was this guy? Where was he getting all these diamonds from? If she said there were three million dollars' worth of diamonds, then he was pretty sure there were three million dollars of diamonds. He had always been able to trust Glorie.

He wandered over to the window to look once more at Fay.

She'll get old. We all do. Even you're not as handsome as you used to be.

Damn her! To say a thing like that. It spoilt his morning.

II

Glorie was too preoccupied with her thoughts as she walked down the boulevard to notice a tall, slouching man, wearing a dark topcoat and a slouch hat, who sat in a Buick convertible on the far side of the road. His lean, hard face, his hooked nose and thin lips gave him the look of a hawk. He watched her through the windshield of the car, saw her pause at the bus stop, and when the bus arrived, get on board. He shifted the gear lever and drove after the bus.

As the bus took her towards her apartment, Glorie was thinking that the first important move in Harry's plan had been accomplished. The interview had been no worse than she had expected. She had guessed that Ben would have treated her as he had treated her. She felt slightly sick as she remembered the sneering way he had looked at her. She thought how much he had changed since they had been lovers. It seemed to her now to be impossible that they had ever been happy together: unbelievable.

She didn't envy the pretty doll she had seen under the sunray lamp. In fact she pitied her. She would earn everything Ben gave her, and she would probably not last long. But there was no doubt that she was pretty and attractive.

She had been a fool not to have smartened herself up a little before she had seen Ben. It would have saved her that insulting, contemptuous look Ben had given her: a look that had made a sharp dent in her already sagging ego.

She must warn Harry to be on his guard. Ben was certain to make every effort to dig into his background. She remembered he had once said that he never took anyone on trust. "If a guy acts cagey, he has something to hide," he had said. "If he has something to hide, I want to know what it is: it might give me a hold on him."

She suddenly stiffened as a thought dropped into her mind. It was more than likely that Ben had sent one of his men after her.

What a fool she was! Already the bus was slowing down for the stop a few yards from her apartment house. In another few seconds she might have taken one of Ben's men right to Harry.

She remained on the bus and let it go beyond her usual stop.

She looked quickly at the other passengers. There were only four of them: three women and an elderly clergyman. The danger, she told herself, wouldn't be on the bus. She would be followed by car. She looked back through the rear window at the slow-moving mass of traffic.

Any one of the cars behind the bus could be carrying Ben's man. She paid the additional fare and got off the bus, three stops higher up that put her in the heart of the shopping centre. She had first to make sure she was being followed, and if she was, then she had to shake the follower off. She made her way through the crowd and stepped quickly into the entrance of Ferrier's, one of the big stores. She paused to look back.

A Buick convertible forced its way across the double line of traffic and parked fifty yards or so further up the street. A tall, slouching figure of a man got out of the car and wandered towards her.

He looked the kind of man Ben would employ, and with her heart beating rapidly, she entered the store. She walked through the various departments to the escalator that would take her to the next floor. As she was carried upwards, she looked back into the well of the store.

The tall man, hands in pockets, a cigarette between his thin lips, was moving with long strides to the escalator, and she was now satisfied that she hadn't underestimated Ben. He had sent someone after her.

She went into the hosiery department and bought herself a pair of nylon stockings. The department was almost empty. The tall man wasn't in sight.

Then she went down the escalator again and crossed over to a row of telephone booths. The last one in the row was empty. A woman was in the one next to it. By the way she was arranging her parcels and making herself comfortable, Glorie guessed she would be there for some time. She stepped into the end booth and slid the door shut. Screening the dial with her body, she dialled her apartment number. While the bell was ringing, she glanced through the glass panel of the door.

The tall man was nearby, examining an electric razor he had picked up from a display of razors on a counter. She knew he wouldn't be able to overhear her and she waited impatiently for Harry to answer. He came on the line after a moment or so.

"Harry? This is Glorie."

"How did you get on?" he asked anxiously.

"It's all right. He'll see you. Now listen, Harry, he's sent one of his men

after me. I think he wants to find out who you are, and he thinks I'll lead him to you. I'm calling from Ferrier's, and his man is right outside. You've got to pack and leave at once. This man mustn't see you. I'll keep him busy until you have time to pack and get a taxi. Then I'll lose him." She looked at her watch. The time was twenty minutes to one o'clock. "I shall be at the corner of Western and Lennox at one-fifteen. There's a newsstand there. Stop the cab, get out and buy a paper. Don't look at me unless I speak to you. If I have shaken him off I'll join you in the cab. If he's still following me you must go to the station. The train leaves at two. If I can, I'll see you off, but if I can't, then we will meet in the lobby of the Astor in New York on Friday at eleven o'clock. Do you understand?"

"Sure." Harry's voice sounded excited. "Don't take any risks, baby. I'll be there at one-fifteen."

"Yes." Glorie felt a little pang. She hated being parted from him, and the thought of the next three lonely days dismayed her.

"And Harry, be careful as you leave the apartment. Ben may have checked the telephone book and found where I live. He may have sent someone down to watch the house. Make certain you're not followed, won't you?"

"I'll take care of that. He is going to see me?"

"Yes. I'll tell you what happened when we meet. One-fifteen, Harry, and be careful."

As Harry laid down the receiver, he heard the front-door bell ring.

His mind occupied with what Glorie had been telling him, he crossed the room and entered the small hall. His hand was reaching to open the front door, when he paused, his face suddenly tightening. Since he had been living with Glorie he couldn't remember anyone calling after ten o'clock.

Who could this be? He remembered Glorie's warning. It was possible the caller was one of Ben's men. He stepped silently to the door and gently slid home the bolt. Then he waited, tense and listening. The bell rang again, sharply and persistently. Still Harry waited. Several minutes dragged by. Then the key in the lock began to move. Harry watched it, his heart thumping. Someone had nipped the end of the key in a pair of long forceps and was turning the key from the outside. There was a soft click as the lock snapped back, then the door handle turned and the door creaked against the bolt.

Harry stepped away from the door. Moving silently he went into the

bedroom and pulled out his suitcase from under the bed.

The man outside would know there was someone in the apartment from the fact that the key was in the door. He would probably wait in the passage. He might wait there for the rest of the day.

Harry cursed under his breath. He looked at his wristwatch.

He had only twenty minutes before he met Glorie.

He packed hurriedly, taking only a change of underthings, a shirt, his best suit and another pair of shoes. He tiptoed into the bathroom for his shaving kit and sponge. Crossing to the bathroom window, he opened it and glanced out. The iron fire escape down to the back alley showed him his way out. He returned to the bedroom, finished packing, then he opened the top drawer of the chest, took from under a pile of shirts a Colt .45 automatic and a box of cartridges. He loaded the gun and slid it into his hip pocket, put the cartridges into the suitcase, closed the lid and snapped down the catches. Then he opened the wardrobe door, took out his topcoat and hat and put them on.

He went into the bathroom, pushed up the window and stepped out on to the iron platform of the escape.

A girl who worked at a drug store on the corner of the block and who was friendly with Glorie lived in the apartment below.

Harry knew she would be at work at this time and the apartment would be empty. He went down the iron steps to her bathroom window which was half open. He opened it fully, glanced down into the alley to make sure no one was watching him, then climbed into the bathroom, reached for his case and lowered the window. He walked through into the sitting room and into the hall. At the front door, he paused to turn up his coat collar and pull his hat further over his eyes. Then he opened the door and stepped into the passage.

The stairs leading to Gloria's apartment were at the end of the passage. A short, thickset man in a trench coat and black slouch hat lolled against the wall, a cigarette between his lips.

He gave Harry a casual, disinterested stare. Harry closed the door and picked up his suitcase. He was tense and his mouth was dry. This was a new experience to him, and it underlined the danger and the risks that lay ahead of him.

"Hey, bud," the man said as Harry started down the passage.

"Just a moment."

Harry half-turned. There was little light in the passage and he kept his head

turned so the short man couldn't get a good view of him.

"What is it?"

"Miss Dane in?"

"How do I know? Why don't you go up and find out?"

"I couldn't get an answer. Does she live alone, bud?"

"Yes." Harry began to move down the passage. "I've got a train to catch. You'd better talk to the janitor."

The man grunted and Harry went quickly to the front door, opened it and went down the steps. He walked the length of the street. At the corner, he paused to look back. Apart from an empty car that stood a hundred yards or so from the apartment house, the street was deserted.

A taxi cruised past and Harry waved his hand.

"Western and Lennox," he said, "and snap it up."

He sat, half turned, so he could look out of the rear window, but no car followed him. His watch showed exactly one-fifteen as the cab pulled up at the newsstand.

Glorie was waiting, and before Harry could get out of the cab, she had run across the sidewalk and got in beside him.

"Where to?" Harry asked.

"The station."

The driver looked at Harry for confirmation, then at his nod, he pulled out into the slow-moving traffic.

"All right?" Glorie asked softly.

"Yes."

They sat in silence while the cab fought its way through the heavy traffic. Glorie held Harry's hand, looking at him anxiously.

When they reached the station and Harry had paid off the cab, they walked together to the station buffet. Glorie went over to a vacant table in a corner while Harry bought two cups of coffee and carried them over.

"Your pal's turning on the heat," he said as he sat down. He went on to tell her what had happened. "I don't know how you're going to get into the apartment," he concluded. "The door's bolted on the inside. I guess you'll have to wait until Doris gets back and get in through the bathroom window."

Glorie shook her head.

"I'm not going back. It's not safe, Harry. I'm not kidding myself I'll be so lucky next time. If I go back, Ben will put more than one man on to follow

me, and I'll never shake them off. It was only luck that I got away from him this time. I went into the ladies' room at Ferrier's. There was a way out through the staff entrance. But I won't get away with it a second time. I'm coming with you to New York. We mustn't travel together. We'll meet as arranged at the Astor at eleven on Friday."

"But you haven't anything packed."

She shrugged.

"I can get all I want in New York." She leaned forward, her hands on the table. "You've got to be careful, Harry. Don't trust Ben. He's altered. I scarcely knew him. He's much more dangerous and more ruthless."

"What happened?"

Briefly she told him of the interview.

"That's pretty good. Don't worry about me. You've given me the opening I want. I'll take care of him."

"Don't trust him." Glorie's eyes were anxious. "Get the money before you do the job. Don't listen to any of his promises and don't let him scare you."

Harry grinned.

"He won't do that." He finished his coffee, then glanced at his strap watch. "Well, I guess we'd better get our tickets. You go first. See you at the Astor on Friday."

"Yes." She looked at him. "I shall miss you, Harry."

"It won't be for long."

She got up and touched his shoulder..

"Look after yourself, darling."

"You bet."

He watched her walk the length of the buffet. His eyes took in her straight back and her slim, shapely legs. He thought if she'd only smarten herself up she'd be quite a looker. He felt a little surge of affection for her. She had guts, and that was what few women had.

He lit a cigarette, dropping the match into the saucer of the cup.

Well, this was it he thought. This is the beginning of it. If he had any luck, in twenty days' time he would be worth fifty thousand dollars.

If he had any luck...

III

On the evening of 16th of January, a taxi pulled up outside Lamson's hotel on Sherbourne Boulevard West, and the driver reached out, turned the handle of the rear door and let the door swing open.

Storm clouds, driven by a blustery wind, had chased across the sky most of the day, and now the wind had lessened, and rain, that looked like thin steel rods in the yellow light of the street lamps, was falling steadily. It made swift-running rivulets in the gutters, dripped from the awning of a drug store, next to the hotel, and drummed on the roof of the cab.

The driver scowled across the black, glistening sidewalk at the entrance to the hotel. A dim, yellow light showed in the transom of the double swing doors leading into the hotel. Six worn, dirty steps led from the doors down to the street. It wasn't often that he brought a fare to Lamson's. He couldn't remember when he had brought the last one. The people who stayed there hadn't money to waste on cabs. They either walked or took a bus. It was the cheapest and the most sordid hotel in Los Angeles: a joint that was used chiefly by streetwalkers and crooks just out of jail in need of a roof until they planned their next petty theft.

The driver's fare got out of the cab, shoved a five-dollar bill into the driver's hand and said in an odd-sounding voice, "Keep the change. Buy yourself a new cab with it. You need one."

The driver was so astonished that he leaned out of his cab to stare at his fare. He hadn't expected a tip. He had been prepared for a wrangle about over-changing. Five bucks! The guy must be crazy!

His eyes took in the tall, bulky figure, wearing a shabby trench coat and a dark brown, shabby hat. Massively built he was at a guess around forty-five; a fat, tough-looking customer with a straggling blond moustache, a nasty-looking scar that ran from his right eye down to the corner of his mouth, puckering the skin and slightly pulling down his right eyelid, giving him a sinister appearance. In his left hand, he carried a shabby fibre suitcase, and in his right, a thick walking stick, tipped with rubber.

"This for me?" the driver said blankly, looking at the bill.

"There's only a buck twenty on the clock."

"If you don't want it," the fare said, "give it back to me and you can whistle for your goddamn fare."

His voice sounded as if he had something in his mouth, an odd, strangled sound. Maybe, the driver thought, he's one of those guys who hasn't a roof to his mouth. When he spoke, he showed gleaming white teeth, like the projecting teeth of a horse. They thrust his upper lip and his moustache forward, giving him an aggressive, hostile expression.

"Well, it's your money," the driver said and hurriedly put the bill in his pocket. "Thanks, mister." He hesitated, then went on, "Are you sure you want a dump like this? I know a place that's cleaner further down the road. It's not much more expensive. Here the bugs don't wait to come out at night. They're with you all the time and they've got teeth like a bear trap."

"If you don't want your snout pushed through the back of your head," the fare snarled, "keep it out of my business."

He moved across the sidewalk, limping badly, and leaning on his stick. He climbed the steps and disappeared into the hotel.

The driver stared after him, frowning. A nut, he concluded.

Five bucks and staying at a joint like Lamson's! He shook his head, thinking of the oddities he had driven in his cab; this was another for his memory book. He engaged gear and drove away into the rain.

The lobby of Lamson's hotel was even more dingy than its exterior. Three wicker chairs, a dusty palm in a tarnished brass pot, a strip of coconut matting with several holes in it, and a fly-blown mirror made up its furnishing. Over the whole dismal scene there brooded a smell of stale sweat, cabbage water and defective plumbing. To the right of the lobby, facing the main entrance, was the reception desk behind which sat Lamson, the owner of the hotel, a fat man, wearing a derby hat at the back of his head. He was in shirt sleeves which were rolled back to show hairy, tattooed arms.

Lamson eyed the limping man, not moving. His small, hard eyes took in the heavy, sun-tanned, scarred face, the straggling moustache and the limp.

"I want a room," the limping man said, setting down his suitcase. "Your best room. How much?"

Lamson glanced over his shoulder at the row of keys, made a mental calculation, decided it would be worth trying and said, "You can have No. 32. I wouldn't let anyone have it. It's the best. Cost you a buck and a half a night."

The limping man took out a wallet, selected a ten-dollar bill and dropped it on the desk.

"I'll t a k e it for four nights."

Careful not to show his surprise, Lamson took the bill, smoothed it flat while he examined it, then satisfied that it was genuine, he folded it carefully and tucked it away in his watch pocket. He produced four grimy dollar bills and laid them regretfully down on the counter.

"Put it towards breakfast," the limping man said, waving the bills aside. "I want service and I expect to pay for it."

"That's okay, mister. We'll take care of you," Lamson said. He hurriedly put the bills back into his pocket. "I can fix you a meal now if you want it."

"I don't. Coffee and toast tomorrow morning at nine."

"I'll fix it." Lamson produced a dog-eared notebook that served as a register. "Have to ask you to sign in, mister; police regulations."

The limping man wrote a name in the book with the stub of pencil that was attached to the book by a piece of string.

Lamson turned the book and squinted at what he had written.

In block letters the limping man had printed: *Harry Green, Pittsburgh.*

"Okay, Mr. Green," Lamson said. "Can I send anything up to your room? We got beer, whisky or gin." The man who called himself Harry Green shook his head.

"No. But I want to use the phone."

Lamson jerked his thumb towards the pay booth in the far corner.

"Go ahead. Help yourself."

The limping man shut himself in the pay booth. He dialled a number and waited. After a delay a woman's voice said, "Mr. Delaney's residence. Who is calling?"

"This is Harry Green. Mr. Delaney is expecting me to call. Put me through please."

"Hold a moment."

There was a long pause, then a click sounded over the line and a man said, "This is Delaney."

"Glorie Dane told me to call you, Mr. Delaney."

"Yeah, that's right. You want to see me, don't you? Come over here at eight o'clock tonight. I can give you ten minutes."

"Are you sure you want me to be seen at your place? Doesn't sound like a

good idea to me.”

There was a pause.

“Doesn't it?” Ben's voice was sharp. “Then what does seem a good idea to you?”

“You might not want anyone to know I've talked to you if what could happen, happens. We could talk in a car at West Pier where we wouldn't be seen.”

Again there was a pause.

“Look, Green, if you're wasting my time,” Ben said finally, his voice coldly vicious, “you'll be sorry. I don't like time wasters.”

“I don't either. I have a proposition. It's up to you to judge if listening to it is a waste of time or not.”

“Be at West Pier at half past ten tonight,” Ben snapped and slammed down the receiver.

For a long moment the man who called himself Harry Green leaned against the side of the pay booth, the receiver in his hand while he stared through the grimy glass panel of the door into space. He experienced a feeling of triumph, mixed with uneasiness.

One more step towards the big steal, he thought: one more milestone. In four days' time he would be on the airfield waiting for the night plane to San Francisco to take off. He replaced the receiver and limped over to where he had left his suitcase.

Lamson looked up from the paper he was reading.

“Your room's at the head of the stairs. Want me to carry your bag?”

“No.”

He climbed the stairs. Facing him was a door marked 32. He pushed the key into the lock, turned it and opened the door.

He walked into a large room. A double bed with iron rails at the head and the foot, ornamented with tarnished brass knobs, stood in a corner. The carpet was threadbare and dusty. Two armchairs stood either side of the empty fireplace. A picture of a fat woman, peeling an apple and looking through a window at a hill scene, done in strident poster colours, hung over the mantelpiece.

Facing the door was a full-length mirror and setting down his suitcase and shutting the door, Harry moved to the mirror and looked at himself.

The transformation was incredible, he thought. The man he saw in the

mirror had not the slightest resemblance to Harry Griffin.

Apart from the scarred, full face, his figure was that of a man over forty; thick in the middle with a distinct potbelly, whose muscular frame had turned to fat.

Harry took off his hat and trench coat, still standing before the mirror. The blond, thinning hair was a cunningly constructed hairlace wig, firmly fixed to Harry's scalp with spirit gum. The scar from his right eye to his mouth was fish skin covered with collodion.

The moustache had been built onto his upper lip, hair by hair. The shape of his face had been altered by rubber pads, fixed by suction against his gums. The projecting teeth were clipped over his own teeth. The potbelly and the heavy fat shoulders were created by aluminum devices he wore next to his skin. The limp came from wearing the right shoe built higher than the left.

Glorie had done a job. She had said he wouldn't be recognized, and Harry felt confident that even his best friend wouldn't know him.

Glorie had taught him how to re-fix the scar and the moustache. He would have to wear the disguise for four days and five nights. He would have to wash and shave, and the moustache and the scar would have to be taken off and put back on again. At first he had been against such an elaborate disguise, but she had insisted, and when he had seen the result he had realized she was right. He could risk being seen anywhere now. She had more than fulfilled her promise. Harry Griffin had ceased to exist. Harry Green was a live, believable person.

Everything now depended on Delaney. Glorie had warned Harry again and again not to trust Delaney. He had felt irritated that she had taken so much of the initiative from him. After all, he told himself, this was his plan. Admittedly her idea that he should disguise himself before the job was a brilliant one, but why couldn't she leave the rest of the business to him? Because she had been so successful in creating Harry Green he had been patient with her, but he was glad to be on his own now, to handle the job himself without her. Her repeated warnings, her anxiety and her fears made him uneasy.

At ten minutes past ten, he left the hotel and walked in the driving rain to the bus station. He boarded a bus for American Avenue, left it at the terminus and walked down to Ocean Boulevard.

West Pier, used to take gamblers out to the gambling ships that were

moored outside the City's limits, was dark and deserted.

On a night like this, there was little trade for the gambling ships and only two of the taxi-boats were at their stations.

Harry took shelter under the coverway to the turnstiles. The time was ten twenty-five. He lit a cigarette, aware of his tension and the steady thumping of his heart.

At twenty minutes to eleven, a mustard-coloured Cadillac, as big as a battleship, slid to a standstill outside the pier entrance, and he guessed this was Delaney's car. He limped across to it, seeing the dim outline of two men in the front and one at the back.

The non-driver in the front got out of the car: a tall, slouching figure that Harry recognized from Glorie's description to be the man who had followed her.

"You Green?" the man asked sharply.

"That's right."

"Okay, get in the back. We'll drive around while you talk to the boss."

He opened the rear door and Harry got into the car and sank down on to the heavily upholstered cushions. Ben Delaney, smoking a cigar, turned his head to look at him. The street lights were not bright enough for either of the men to see each other well, but Harry recognized Delaney by his trim moustache and by the way he held his head.

"Green?"

"Yes. You Mr. Delaney?"

"Who else do you imagine I'd be?" Ben snapped. "Drive slowly," he went on to the man at the wheel. "Keep going until I tell you to stop, and keep off the main streets." He turned slightly in his seat so he could look towards Harry who sat in the darkness looking towards him. "What's your proposition?" he demanded. "Snap it up. I have other things to do besides driving around in the rain."

"In four days' time," Harry said, speaking rapidly, "the Californian Air Transport Corporation are carrying a consignment of industrial diamonds worth three million dollars to San Francisco. I know which plane they will travel on and how to get hold of them. I want to sell the idea to you. This job can be handled by three men and a fourth with a car. I would be one of the men and I'd expect you to supply the other three. I would want fifty thousand dollars to do the job and no other share in the take. That's the proposition."

Delaney was staggered. He hadn't expected such a blunt proposal. Fifty thousand bucks! This guy wasn't afraid to open his mouth.

"You don't imagine I'd be crazy enough to handle a set-up like that, do you?" he said. "Those rocks will be as hot as hell."

"That's not my concern," Harry said. "My job is to get the diamonds. What happens to them afterwards isn't my business. If you don't want them, say so. I can always go elsewhere. My time's just as valuable to me as yours is to you."

Taggart, the tall, slouching man, half turned in his seat and looked at Harry. Although it was too dark to see his face, Harry could feel the threat there.

But Delaney didn't mind that kind of talk. He preferred it.

"Have you seen the diamonds?"

"No. There's nothing special about them. They are industrial diamonds: as good as cash. It just means holding them for a time, then releasing them slowly. If their distribution is handled properly there shouldn't be any risk."

Delaney knew that was true. He had plenty of markets for industrial diamonds, and he wouldn't have to hold on to them for long. If these diamonds were really worth what this guy said they were, he could get two million for them, even two and a half million.

But who was this guy, he wondered. He didn't like dealing with strangers. Although Glorie had introduced him, and he felt he could trust Glorie, he wondered about him. His mind shifted to the yacht he wanted. If this job came off, here would be the means to put the order in hand. They had promised delivery in twelve months. He felt a little tingle of excitement. Maybe it didn't matter who the guy was so long as he delivered.

"How are you going to get them?" he asked. "Hijack the van before it reaches the airfield?"

"Not a chance. They'll send them in an armoured car with a motorcycle escort. We'll never get near them. No. I'm going to hijack the plane."

Ben stiffened. He saw by the way Taggart straightened in his seat that he wasn't the only one who was startled.

"Hijack the plane? How do you do that, for God's sake?"

"It won't be difficult. That's why this job's a cinch. I have three seats booked on the plane that's to carry the diamonds. There will be about fifteen other passengers so your two men and myself won't attract attention until it is

too late. We take off after dark. The flight takes two hours. As soon as we have cleared the airfield, I'll go on to the flight deck, get the radio operator away from the radio, get the rest of the crew into the cabin for your two guys to look after. I'll handle the plane and land it in the desert. I want a fast car to be waiting to pick us up. I'll deliver the diamonds to wherever you want them to be delivered, and that will be that."

Ben sat back, his shrewd, cunning mind busy. As a plan, this was bold and ingenious. It could succeed, but everything depended on Green. If he lost his nerve, if he made one mistake, it would flop.

"Can you handle the plane?" he asked.

"Of course," Harry said impatiently. "I flew every kind of kite during the war."

"You'll have to bring it down in the dark. Thought of that?"

"Look, you don't have to worry about my end. I know my job. I'll get the kite down all right. With any luck there'll be a moon, but if there isn't, I'll still bring her down. Do you want to handle the stuff or don't you?"

Ben found he had let his cigar go out: something he rarely did.

He threw the cigar out of the window.

"What do you want out of this again?"

"You take the diamonds, pay your men and give me fifty thousand for the job."

"It's too much. I may have to keep the diamonds a couple of years before I get rid of them. I'll give you ten."

"It's fifty thousand or nothing. I'm taking the risk: you aren't. The police will have a description of me. I'll be on the run: you won't. Your cut from this should be around two million with no risk. If you don't think fifty grand is a fair figure, then tell your driver to stop the car and I'll get the hell out of here."

"Thirty?" Ben suggested, bargaining for the sake of bargaining. "I'll give you thirty, but not a nickel more."

Harry felt a surge of triumph run through him. He knew he had Ben on the hook now.

"Do I tell your driver to stop or do you?"

Ben allowed himself a thin smile in the darkness.

"Okay — fifty then: in cash when you deliver the diamonds."

"No. I want two certified cheques for twenty-five grand given to me on the

afternoon before the take-off. I've got to be convinced the money is safe before I get into the plane or I don't do the job."

Taggart could contain himself no longer.

"Do you want me to tap this punk, boss?" he growled, half turning round.

"Shut up!" Ben snarled. "Keep out of this!" He looked towards Harry. "You'll get the cash when the diamonds are delivered and not before!"

"No! Why should I trust you?" Harry's big hands turned into fists. "What's there to stop one of your thugs shooting me in the back when you've got the diamonds? The money's got to be in my bank before I do the job or I don't do it!"

"I could persuade you to do it," Ben said, his voice suddenly vicious. "I don't take orders from punks like you."

"Go ahead and persuade me." Harry felt sweat on his face, but he was determined to have his way. "Persuade me to bring the kite down in the dark and see how you get on. I don't threaten easily, Delaney, and I'm hard to persuade."

The driver slammed on his brakes, pulling to the kerb, while Taggart swung around, a gun in his hand. He was about to reach over and take a swipe at Harry when Ben said violently, "Hold it! Who told you to stop? Drive on! And keep out of it, Taggart!"

The driver lifted his shoulders and sent the car moving forward again. Taggart turned away with a grunt of disgust. Neither of the men had ever heard anyone talk to the boss like this and get away with it.

But Ben realized that Harry held the cards. The more he thought about this job the more he liked it. Two million profit! It was cheap at fifty grand.

"What's to stop you double crossing me if I give you the money?" he demanded.

"You'll stop me, won't you?" Harry said. "What are you worrying about? Your man will give me the two cheques. He'll come to the bank with me. He'll stay with me until the job's done. If you can't trust your man to see I don't double cross you, you'd better take care of me yourself."

Ben had already arranged in his mind to let Borg take care of Harry. There wouldn't be one man, but three, as well as Borg. He had no misgivings that Harry would have a chance to double cross him. But he didn't want Harry to think he was gaining an easy victory.

"Well, okay. When's the plane due to leave?"

“On the twentieth.”

“What time?”

“I'll tell you that when I have the money and not before.”

“You don't trust easy, do you?” Ben said and grinned. He was beginning to gain a little respect for this odd fat man who talked as if he had no roof to his mouth. “Okay, Green, it's a deal. At noon on the twentieth my man will give you two certified cheques for twenty-five grand each. He'll stick with you until you're on the plane. Understand?”

“Yes.”

“I'll get you two good men to go with you on the plane, and a third to handle the car.” Ben went on. “You can work out the details with my man Borg. I'll send him along to you tomorrow night. Where are you staying?”

“Lamson's.”

“Okay.” Ben leaned forward and tapped the driver on his shoulder. “Stop here.”

The driver pulled to the kerb and stopped.

“This is where you get out,” Ben said to Harry. “If the job fails, you'll return the money: understand? Plenty of guys have tried to double cross me in the past. They're all dead. Some of them took a long time to die. I have means of finding a guy no matter where he hides and I'll find you if you run off with the dough without delivering. No diamonds: no dough. Understand?”

Harry got out of the car.

“Yes.” He hunched his shoulders against the rain. “You'll get them all right. You don't have to worry about that.”

“I'm not worrying,” Ben said, a snarl in his voice. “You're the one who's going to do the worrying.”

Leaving Harry standing in the rain, the car drove rapidly down the street and disappeared into the darkness.

IV

On the afternoon of the nineteenth, Ben sent for Borg.

For the past two years Borg had been in charge of all Ben's illegal activities. Ben completely depended on him to carry out his instructions, handle the gang, take care of the rough stuff, organize a killing if a killing was necessary, and see there was no drop in the vast income that came to Ben from his vice and extortion rackets. ,

During those two years, Borg had never made a mistake and had never failed to carry out an order: no matter how difficult the order had been. Looking at him as he sat like a big fat toad in the chair opposite Ben's desk, Ben marvelled at the deceptiveness of Borg's appearance. He knew him to be a cold-blooded and utterly ruthless killer who thought no more of taking a life than he thought of killing a fly. He knew him to be as swift as a striking snake, incredibly fast with a gun and an expert shot. There was no other member of his organization who could handle a car as Borg could. He not only drove at fantastic speeds, but his sense of anticipation and judgment of distances were incredible. Ben had been with him when he had been ambushed by the Levinski mob. Two cars, spraying gunfire, had converged on them, and Borg had got away only by brilliant and unbelievable driving.

Unable to beat the other two cars for speed, he had swung off the side streets into the thick traffic of Figueroa Street and Ben had never forgotten that drive, and never would as long as he lived. Moving at sixty miles an hour, Borg cut through the traffic as if it didn't exist, leaving Levinski's cars standing. He had darted all over the road wherever there was an opening and shooting up on to the sidewalk when there wasn't. The ride had lasted three minutes. It had been the most shattering experience of Ben's life, but he knew Borg was saving him from certain death. No one got hurt, no car got smashed, and when Borg whipped the car again into the side streets, having shaken off Levinski's cars, he had been as placid and as unmoved as he always was.

It was difficult to guess Berg's age: he might have been thirty or even forty-five. He was a mountain of soft, white fat. His complexion was greenish-white like the belly of a toad. His eyes were hooded and black, as

expressionless and as hard as knobs of ebony, His black hair looked like a piece of astrakhan draped over his skull. He had a black moustache that drooped like a rat's tail either side of his mouth.

Although Ben paid him a thousand dollars a month, plus a percentage on his vice and extortion rackets, giving Borg a considerable income, he never looked as if he owned a nickel. His clothes were stained and shabby and invariably too tight for him.

His shirt was always grubby. His hands and nails were so dirty that Ben, who was fastidious, often complained.

Looking at him now as he sat slumped in the chair, his dirty hands folded across his gross belly, a cigarette drooping from his thick, almost negroid lips, ash on his vest, the buttons of which threatened to fly off under the strain of keeping the gross body controlled, Ben thought he had never seen a more unpleasant and disgusting object.

"Well?" he said. "Let's have it."

His ebony eyes staring up at the ceiling, Borg began to talk.

His voice was hoarse and breathless. All the time he talked he seemed to be struggling to breathe. From where he sat, Ben could smell his stale sweat and his dirty clothes. He fancied he could smell the threat of death in him.

"This guy's a phoney," Borg said, speaking hoarsely and softly. "He has no background. He doesn't exist as you and I exist. Suddenly, out of the blue, is Harry Green. There are no records of him. The Army Air Force don't know him. The cops don't know him. No one knows him. I haven't dug into any guy's background as I've dug into his and found so little. I've traced him from New York, though he says he comes from Pittsburgh. No one knows him in New York. As soon as he hits Los Angeles, he starts making an impression. He tips a taxi driver five bucks. He has his photograph taken and starts a fight with the photographer. He gets tough with Lamson. He goes to the same bar every night and talks big and tough. He brags about what a hot pilot he was and how he wants to get into the air again. He acts like a man who wants to be remembered. That stinks to me. A guy who is planning a three-million-buck steal doesn't act that way unless he's crazy or has a damn good reason for doing it."

Ben knocked the ash off his cigar while he stared at Borg.

"Think we can trust him?"

Borg lifted his massive shoulders.

"I guess so. He won't get the chance to double cross us. I'll take care of that. I think he can handle this job. But he isn't Harry Green. It's up to you whether you care who he is or not. If he delivers, it doesn't matter who he is. If he doesn't, then it does. He's being smart. He is taking care of himself. It's my bet when the job's been pulled, Harry Green will vanish because Harry Green doesn't exist."

Ben nodded.

"Yeah, that's the way I figured it. Maybe it'll be a good thing if he does vanish. If the cops catch him, he might squeal." He stared into space for a long moment. "I don't give a damn who he is so long as he delivers. Have you any dope on the diamonds?"

"They exist. The Far Eastern Trading Corporation is run by a guy called Takamori, who represents a big industrial group in Japan. He has bought three million dollars' worth of industrial diamonds. He has got government permission to release the diamonds and he is shipping them to Tokyo from San Francisco. This is the consignment Green is talking about. The diamonds are there all right. It depends on Green if you get them or not."

"What about the three guys who are to help him?"

"I've got them fixed, Joe Franks and Marty Lewin will ride with him. Sam Meeks will handle the car."

Ben frowned.

"Who are they? They're not our men, are they?"

Borg shook his head. Ben could almost hear the thick fat around Borg's neck creak as he moved his head.

"We don't want our guys on this job. These three will be seen by the crew and the passengers. They could be identified. We don't want to give the cops any trouble. I picked them from San Francisco. They go back as soon as the job is done. We don't want the cops to hook us to the job, do we?"

"That's right. They're okay?"

"They're okay."

"So you think we're going to get away with this job?"

Borg lifted his black, heavy eyebrows.

"It depends on Green. If he isn't a bluffer as well as a phoney, we will get away with it."

Ben nodded.

"He may be a phoney, but I'll stake my life he isn't a bluffer. He's just as

keen on this job as I am. I think he'll pull it off."

Berg's fat, puffy face remained expressionless, but there was an edge to his breathless voice as he said, "He'd better pull it off."

"You've been over his plan with him?"

"Sure. He's certainly got it figured out. The guy's smart. He's taken care of everything I can see. It depends if he can bring the plane down without a smash-up. He says he can, but if it's dark, he'll have a job. He's picked a good spot. I've been out there. The sand's hard and flat. It's about thirty miles from Sky Ranch airport. I'll meet him at the airport and collect the diamonds. Our three guys will fly from there to San Francisco. I've fixed for them to go in an air taxi. Green says he's arranged his own transport."

Ben grunted, brooded for a long moment, then asked, "Did you get anywhere with Glorie Dane?"

"She's skipped." Berg's eyebrows came down in a frown. "She never went back to her apartment after seeing you. Want me to take it further?"

Ben shook his head.

"No: to hell with her. I don't think she's hooked up in this. Forget it." He opened a drawer and took out two pink slips of paper and pushed them across the desk to Borg. "That's Green's pay-off. What's to stop him jumping the gun as soon as he's got the money?"

"I'll stop him," Borg said. "I've talked to Lewin and Franks. They know the setup. They'll watch him. If he looks like trying a double cross, they'll put a slug into him. I'll stick with him until he's on the aircraft. Lewin and Franks will take care of him until they get to Sky Ranch airport. They're good boys. He won't pull anything on them."

Ben nodded.

"Okay. Looks like I'm going to make me some money," he said and got to his feet.

Borg looked at him from out of his ebony, hooded eyes.

"That's what it looks like," he said.

chapter three

I

Fifty minutes before the scheduled take-off, they arrived at the airport in an old Roadmaster Buick. Borg was at the wheel; Harry sat beside him. Lewin and Franks were at the back.

“Over to your right,” Harry said, as Borg drove through the gates into the parking lot. “Far end. We’ll be able to see the aircraft from there.”

Borg drove down the tarmac, lined on either side by parked cars, and manoeuvred the car into a space by a white wooden fence that cut the parking lot off from the airfield.

Under a battery of lights, a hundred yards away, stood a twin-engined Moonbeam. Five men in white coveralls were checking the plane. A girl in the C.A.T.A. uniform was supervising the loading of a number of canisters from a four-wheel truck into the plane. Harry recognized the girl. Her name was Hetty Collins.

He had flown with her two or three times, and knew her to be a smart and efficient hostess. He wondered who the crew captain was going to be, and if he would be anyone he knew.

He was feeling cold, and there was a tight band across his chest that made breathing difficult. His hands sweated and his mouth was dry.

This was it, he kept telling himself. In another hour I’ll be at the controls, bringing her down in the desert. That is if the crew don’t act heroic and start a fight. His stomach tightened at the thought. The two sitting behind him were killers. If anyone started trouble they would shoot. He had no doubt about that.

Lewin was a small guy, around thirty. His face was thin, granite hard, his eyes restless. Franks was over fifty, tall, bulky, with a coarse, brutal face, small pig’s eyes and a disconcerting twitch that kept jerking his head.

But they were as nothing compared to Borg.

Borg unnerved Harry. He had never encountered anyone like him before. He felt the menace in him as one feels the menace in a sleeping tiger. He knew this man was deadly. Whereas Lewin and Franks were brainless thugs

who killed because they were paid to kill, Harry had a feeling that Borg would kill because it would please him to kill. It made him feel slightly sick to be sitting next to him, to listen to his short, wheezing breathing and to the disgusting bubbling sound he made with his thick lips from time to time.

"Is that it?" Borg asked, pointing a thick finger at the aircraft.

"That's her," Harry said. "When they have fuelled and checked her, they'll run her over to those sheds over there to the right. We have plenty of time."

Borg grunted, fumbled for a cigarette, lit it and slumped back in his seat.

While they waited, Harry thought back over the past four days. He had taken care of everything. By now Harry Green was a notorious character. He wasn't likely to be forgotten. When his description appeared in the newspapers, there would be at least a dozen people to come forward and claim that they knew him.

He thought of Glorie and wondered what she was doing at this moment. He had written to her, giving her his final arrangements. He had told her he was handing the diamonds to Borg at the Sky Ranch airport. As soon as Borg had gone, he intended to get rid of his disguise, and then take a bus to Lone Pine. He had asked her to rent a cabin at the motel there under the name Mrs. Harrison. She was to buy a second-hand car and wait for him. They would remain at the motel the whole of the next day.

When they were sure nothing had gone wrong and it was safe to move, they would drive to Carson City. They would stay there for a day and again see what progress the police were making.

If it seemed safe to go, they would sell the car and go to New York. From there they would go to England and begin their European trip.

Harry had made arrangements with the managers of the Los Angeles Bank and the Bank of California to transfer the two sums of twenty-five thousand dollars to the National Finance Bank of New York as soon as the cheques had been paid in. He had paid them in that afternoon, and he knew the money would be waiting for him when he reached New York.

He had spent the rest of the day in Berg's company, aware that two men had followed them to the banks, and had remained in a car outside Lamson's, and had followed them to the gates of the airport.

The sudden sound of motorcycle engines broke in on Harry's thoughts. He looked up sharply.

Out of the darkness, across the airfield, came four motorcycle cops,

escorting an armoured truck. The truck pulled up close to the aircraft and the cops dismounted.

"Here it is," Harry said softly and leaned forward to watch through the windshield.

The steel doors of the truck swung open and two men, in brown uniforms and peak caps, revolvers in holsters at their hips, jumped down. One of them was carrying a small square box.

While the four cops stood guard, the other two men crossed to the aircraft, spoke to the air hostess, and then the one with the box climbed the stairway into the plane, followed by the other. The other guard returned to the truck, slammed the doors, had a brief word with one of the policemen, then got into the truck and drove away.

Harry's heart skipped a beat.

"Looks like the other guy's going to travel with the rocks," Lewin said.

"So what?" Franks said. "He won't cause trouble."

Harry wasn't so sure. This was unexpected. He hadn't thought that a guard would fly with the diamonds.

"He's paid to cause trouble," he said uneasily.

Franks laughed.

"Okay, so he'll earn his dough."

The aircraft engines started up with a roar.

"They are going to bring her over," Harry said. "We'd better get moving. You two guys know what to do; no move until I give you the signal."

"Where will the guard be?" Lewin asked.

"He may travel in the cabin or he may keep in the luggage bay. If he travels in the cabin we'll handle him before we go to the flight deck," Harry said.

"Okay," Lewin opened the car door and stepped out.

Borg twisted his bulk around so he could look at Harry.

"You go with him. Franks will follow," he said. "And listen, Green, watch your step. There are a couple of guys waiting outside the airport should you change your mind about making this trip. No diamonds, no dough—get it?"

"Sure," Harry said and got out of the car.

"I'll be waiting at the Sky Ranch airport for you." Borg went on, his fat face peering out of the car window.

"We'll be there," Harry said and hoped they would be. He walked down the

tarmac with Lewin towards the reception hall.

They didn't say anything to each other. As they neared the entrance, Lewin dropped back.

"You go ahead," he said.

It seemed odd to Harry as he limped up the steps and into the luxuriously appointed reception hall to be entering this place.

Although he worked with C.A.T.C. for six years, he had never once been in the reception hall.

A dark, pretty girl, wearing the C.A.T.C. uniform, took his ticket and told him his name would be called in twenty minutes or so.

"The bar's to your right sir," she said. "When you hear your name called would you please go to Bay Six: over there," and she pointed. "I'll be waiting to take you to the aircraft."

Harry thanked her and went into the bar. There were a number of people grouped around the bar. He wondered if they would be travelling on his flight. He ordered a double Scotch and water, and, leaning against the bar, he examined them casually. They were of the same breed as those who used to travel on his aircraft when he had been crew captain. The rich, fat business men: the glamorous, mink-coated women: the hard-faced, sharp-eyed salesmen: all drinking and yakitting like magpies.

Lewin wandered into the bar and ordered a beer. He carried his drink to a table away from the group of people, lit a cigarette and stared around him, his hard eyes missing nothing. Franks didn't show up.

Harry was glad of the whisky. His nerves were jumpy, and he was sweating. He kept assuring himself nothing would go wrong, but the thought of the armed guard on the aircraft worried him.

If the fool tried to stop them, he'd get hurt. Harry shied away from the thought of violence. The guard might even get killed.

He took out his handkerchief and wiped his hands, and looked at the people at the bar. No one paid him any attention. He looked across at Lewin who stared back at him, his eyes expressionless.

Minutes ticked by, then a voice came over the loudspeaker announcing Flight Six. He heard his name called, and finishing his second drink, he limped to the door, followed by three men and two women in mink. Lewin strolled after them.

They, joined eight other passengers and Franks at Bay Six.

Hetty Collins appeared. She had the passenger list in her hand, and she quickly ticked off the names, smiling at each passenger.

"If you will please follow me?" she said, and took them down a passage into the open where the Moonbeam was waiting.

Harry felt a chill crawl up his spine as he saw the four policemen were still guarding the aircraft.

One of the women in mink said, "Look, Jack, they're giving you a police escort."

A thick-necked, red-faced man, smoking a cigar, grunted.

"This kite carries freight," he said. "I expect there's something valuable aboard."

"But surely nothing as valuable as you, darling," the woman said sarcastically.

"Oh, shut up!" the man returned, his face turning a deeper shade of red. He followed the woman up the stairway into the aircraft.

One of the policemen was standing nearby. He looked at each passenger as they mounted the stairway. He looked particularly hard at Franks who stared back at him, a twisted grin on his coarse, brutal face.

Harry was the last to limp up the gangway. He didn't look at the policeman, but he felt him looking at him.

Hetty Collins met him as he stepped into the cabin.

"Is there anything I can get you?" she asked, professionally interested. "Would you like a drink or some coffee later on?"

"No, thanks," Harry said.

"Your seat is right in front on the left aisle," she told him.

He nodded and made his way along the gangway. He had been lucky to get the outside seat, right by the door to the flight deck.

The inside seat was occupied by a tall, scraggy woman in a mink coat. She looked up as Harry paused by her. She took in his shabby trench coat, his scar and his limp, and she drew the skirts of her coat around her, scarcely suppressing a shudder of disapproval.

Harry sat down beside her, then turned in his seat to see where Franks and Lewin were.

Franks was at the rear of the cabin, by the door leading to the galley. Beyond the galley were the toilets and the luggage bay where the diamonds would be: the diamonds and the guard.

Lewin sat halfway up the cabin on Harry's right. Harry was satisfied they were all well seated. Both Lewin and Franks could see him and could see his signal when the time came to take over the aircraft.

Hetty Collins moved down the aisle, seeing that the safety belts were properly fastened. The woman seated on Harry's left was having trouble with hers.

"You put that through this," Harry said, showing her one end of the belt. "It'll clip automatically."

She glanced at him, gave him a wintery nod and fixed the belt.

"You might care to look at the evening paper," she said, pushing the paper at him as if she were glad to get rid of it. Then she half turned her shoulder as if dismissing him and looked out of the window.

Harry held the paper on his lap. He was fixing his belt when Hetty Collins came up.

"Oh, I see you have your belts fixed. Are they comfortable?" she asked.

The woman in mink ignored her. Harry said his was fine.

The girl smiled brightly at him, and he looked up, letting her have a good look at his face. She showed no sign of recognition and turned back to begin working down the right-hand gangway.

Harry glanced at the newspaper. His eyes scarcely took in the print. His heart was hammering so violently he wondered if the woman next to him could hear it.

Another fifteen minutes, he thought. He glanced over his shoulder and caught Lewin's eye. Lewin was poker-faced. He slouched in his seat, his collar turned up, his hat pulled low, his hands in his pockets. Harry looked beyond him at Franks who was smoking. His head was twitching and he scowled at Harry.

The no-smoking warning flashed up and Harry put out his cigarette. Then he glanced down at the front page of the paper he was clutching in his hands. A bye-line caught his attention, and he stiffened. As he began to read the short paragraph the engines of the aircraft roared into life.

TAKAMORI WINS DIAMOND FIGHT

After eighteen months of persistent negotiation with U.S. Consulate officials, Li Takamori, millionaire owner of the Far Eastern Trading Corporation, succeeded last week in his fight to supply Tokyo with industrial diamonds from this country.

Permission to export three million dollars' worth of diamonds has been granted, and the diamonds, under special guard, are being flown tonight to San Francisco to be shipped to Tokyo.

In an interview with our special correspondent, Mr. Takamori said that in spite of considerable opposition in certain quarters, he had at last succeeded in convincing the U.S. Consulate that industrial diamonds were essential to Japan's economic recovery.

It is believed that Mr. Takamori has financed the deal himself, and this has been the deciding factor in the protracted negotiations. When asked if he were guaranteeing payments, Mr. Takamori refused to comment.

Rumour has it that Mr. Takamori will be flying to Tokyo at the end of the month for an audience with the Emperor when he will be honoured for services rendered.

Harry folded the paper and dropped it under his seat. He remembered Borg's warning: no diamonds, no dough. This Takamori guy was going to get a shock. No diamonds, no honour.

The aircraft was moving now. He saw the lights of the parking lot flash by. The Roadmaster Buick had gone. Borg would be driving hell for leather to Sky Ranch airport.

Harry looked at his watch.

Ten minutes from now.

Hairy slid his hand inside his trench coat and his fingers touched the cold butt of his Colt .45. He wondered how the crew of the aircraft would react when they saw him come on to the flight deck. There was the crew captain, the co-pilot and navigator, the flight engineer and the radio operator. They would all be young and keen; their nerves steady. Suppose they acted heroic? Suppose they rushed him? He decided to fire a shot into the deck. That should bring them to their senses. He wasn't too worried about them, but he was worried about the guard. He was a professional, paid to handle trouble. Was he in the luggage bay or in the passage? Franks would have to take care of him.

Lewin would take care of the passengers. If he had known there was to be a guard with the diamonds, he would have asked Delaney for a fourth man.

He suddenly felt he had to know where the guard was, and he stood up and stepped into the gangway.

He saw Lewin's hand slide inside his coat and he shook his head. Lewin

scowled at him. He kept his hand inside his coat as he watched Harry limp past him.

Franks was leaning forward also watching Harry as he approached him. Again Harry shook his head. He opened the door and stopped into the galley.

Hetty Collins was mixing a batch of martinis. She glanced up and smiled at him.

“Second door on the right,” she said.

He nodded, but he wasn't looking at her now. He was looking down the passage that led to the luggage bay.

The guard was sitting on a tip-up seat outside the door to the luggage bay. He half turned when he saw Harry and his right hand dropped on to his gun butt. He wore a wash-leather glove on his gun hand. His movements and the glove scared Harry: they were the hallmarks of a professional.

The guard was youngish, about Harry's age. He had pale blue eyes and a square-shaped face with thin lips and a watchful, alert expression. He looked tough and quick, and Harry's heart sank. This guy was going to make trouble. He was suddenly sure of it.

He went into the toilet and shut the door. He stood for a long moment, his mind busy. The safest and easiest thing to do would be to seal the guard off, he thought. By locking the door between the cabin and the galley, the guard would be out of action until Harry could get the aircraft grounded. Then the three of them could tackle him. He thought of the narrow passage. They wouldn't be able to rush him. Only one man at a time could tackle him. If he showed fight, he could make a lot of trouble.

Harry felt a trickle of cold sweat run down his face. He glanced in the mirror above the toilet basin. He saw he was white and his eyes were frightened. He tried to force a grin, but his mouth seemed frozen.

He stepped out of the toilet, not looking at the guard.

Hetty Collins was carrying a tray of martinis into the cabin.

He pushed open the door for her, followed her into the cabin and closed the door.

He paused by Franks.

“He's sitting in the passage,” he said, leaning down, his mouth close to Franks' twitching head. “I'm going to seal him off. There's a bolt on this side of the door. We can tackle him when we're down.”

“No,” Franks said. “You take care of the crew. I'll handle the guard. As

soon as you get the crew in here, I'll go in and take him."

"He looks quick and tough. He's dangerous."

"Aw, shadup!" Franks snarled. "Do you think I can't handle a punk like him?"

Harry shrugged.

"Well, okay, it's your funeral, but watch out. I'll wait until the girl goes back to the galley, then I'm going on to the flight deck."

He returned to his seat.

The woman in the mink coat was sipping a martini and smoking. She gave him a look of disapproval as he sat down. He refused the martini Hetty Collins offered him, then, as she walked down the gangway back to the galley, he stood up, looked at Lewin and nodded, looked at Franks and nodded again.

Lewin slid out of his seat and came quickly up the gangway to join him at the door to the flight deck.

Two or three of the passengers were looking at them, puzzled.

Franks got out of his seat and leaned against the door to the galley.

"Listen, you punks," he bawled at the top of his voice. "This is a hold-up. If any of you move, you're going to get it! Sit still and keep your yaps shut and you'll be all right."

His .45 automatic was in his hand now. Lewin had also pulled his gun.

Harry didn't wait to see the passenger's reaction. He opened the flight-deck door, climbed the three steps on to the deck. He had his gun in his hand, his heart was hammering as he looked at the familiar scene.

The flight engineer, a guy he didn't know, was seated at a desk before his instrument board. The radio operator was watching the green screen of the radar with bored eyes. Close by was the co-pilot and navigator's desks; beyond that were the two pilots seats. He recognized Sandy McClure's back: a pilot he had been friendly with: a good guy and a good pilot. The second pilot he didn't know.

The flight engineer was staring at him with bulging eyes, and he half rose to his feet.

"Stay where you are," Harry snapped. "This is a hold-up! Get your hand away from that key!" he yelled as the radioman's hand dropped on to the tapping key. "Get into the cabin, you two."

"You're crazy!" the flight engineer said, his face red with anger. "You can't

get away with this!" He half turned towards the pilot. "Mac! Hey! Mac!"

Harry stepped up to him and hit him across the face with the barrel of his gun, knocking him off his seat. He backed away so he could cover the four men, sweat running down his face.

McClure turned and stared at him. The second pilot had got to his feet, his face white and his eyes scared.

"You three get into the cabin or I'll blast a hole in you!" Harry snarled. "Get your hands up!"

The radio operator moved slowly from his seat. He helped the flight engineer to his feet. Blood ran down the flight engineer's face. He looked dazed.

"Get in there!" Harry said.

They went down the steps into the cabin. A woman screamed when she saw the flight engineer.

Lewin shoved the three men past him and yelled at them to sit in the gangway. From the savage note in his voice, Harry guessed he was getting jittery. He wanted to look in the cabin to see if Franks had gone after the guard, but he didn't dare take his eyes off McClure.

"Shove her on automatic," he said to McClure, "and get into the cabin."

"Don't talk wet," McClure said. "I've got to look after this kite. I'm responsible for the passengers. I'm not quitting here. You're crazy. You can't get away with this."

"Shove her on automatic!" Harry said. He wiped the sweat out of his eyes with the back of his hand. "I'm taking her over. Come on, snap it up!"

"You?" McClure gaped at him. "I'm not letting you handle this kite."

"If you don't get out of that seat I'll shoot you!" Harry shouted.

McClure hesitated.

"Can you handle her?"

"Of course I can. Get out of that seat!"

McClure knocked in the automatic pilot. He got reluctantly out of the pilot's seat.

"Don't start anything," Harry said, backing away to give McClure room to pass him. "There's two more outside, and they're a damn sight more dangerous than I am."

"If you're after the diamonds," McClure said, "you'll never get away with them. There's an escort waiting for us to land at the airport."

“Get in there and shut up!”

McClure looked at Harry, his face set and determined. Harry had a feeling that McClure was going to jump him. He could see it in his eyes. He knew he couldn't bring himself to shoot McClure. He braced himself, waiting for McClure to come at him.

Then he heard the sound of a shot, followed immediately by another from a heavier gun.

McClure started, turned his head and stepped to the door leading into the cabin. Harry let his gun slide through his fingers until he had it by the barrel. He swung at the back of McClure's head. The butt slammed down on McClure's skull, driving him to his knees. Harry hit him again and McClure straightened out.

Stepping over him, Harry looked into the cabin.

The passengers were sitting like graven images; white faced and horrified.

Lewin stood in the gangway, gun in hand, his face pallid and shiny with sweat. The crew sat in the gangway, their hands on top of their heads.

Harry took in this scene with one quick glance. Then he saw Franks, who leaned against the door leading into the galley, clutching at his shoulder. Blood ran down the inside of his coat sleeve, and dripped off his fingers. As Harry watched him, his legs gave under him and he slid down on to the floor.

Harry said, “What's happening?”

Without looking round, Lewin said, “It's that guard! He's in there. He's got Ted. He's likely to come out shooting!”

Lewin's voice was high pitched. He sounded as if his nerve was cracking.

“He' won't do that,” Harry said. “He'll stay in there. I told the fool . . .”

“Come down and fix Ted's arm,” Lewin said. “He's bleeding to death.”

“I've got to handle the kite,” Harry said savagely. “Get one of the crew to do it.”

He bent down and catching hold of McClure's unconscious body he dragged him down the steps into the cabin.

The scraggy woman in the mink coat took one look at McClure, made a sound like the whinnying of a horse and heeled over in a faint. Another woman screamed. The flight engineer half rose to his feet, but Lewin yelled at him to sit down.

Harry went back to the flight deck. He knocked out the automatic pilot and took over the controls. He was shaking and his heart was hammering.

The sky had cleared now, and there was a brilliant moon. He altered course and headed towards the desert. Minutes ticked by.

He kept thinking that when he had brought the aircraft down, he and Lewin would have to tackle the guard. The thought turned his mouth sour with fear.

Damn Franks! He had warned him. Now the guard was alerted and would be ready for them. If he shut himself in the luggage bay, he could keep them off for hours. The chances were they wouldn't get the diamonds now.

He didn't envy Lewin. He wouldn't want to be out there, facing all those people and the crew with Franks bleeding and the guard waiting.

He thought of the fifty thousand dollars now in New York.

No diamonds; no dough. Somehow they had to get at the guard.

They might even have to kill him. The thought turned him cold.

He flew for ten minutes or so, then he began to pick up landmarks. Again he altered course. The desert stretched out below like a white crumpled bed sheet. He brought the aircraft down to fifteen hundred feet. He could see the sand dunes and the hills clearly. Somewhere to the east was a broad strip of flat land. He took the aircraft lower, leaning forward to look through the perspect, forgetting for the moment what was going on in the cabin.

Then he saw a light flashing. He could see the car and a tiny figure waving a powerful flashlight.

He hadn't thought much of Sam Meeks when he had met him.

He was a thin-faced, seedy-looking youth, not more than nineteen, with a dirty looking line of fuzz on his upper lip that served as a moustache. Lewin had said he was a good driver, but Harry couldn't see him tackling a guy like the guard.

He took the aircraft in in a wide circle. It didn't occur to him that he would have trouble in landing. He put on flaps and lowered the undercarriage. He came down, aiming the nose of the aircraft at the flashing light. He had shown Meeks exactly where he was to stand when he, Borg and Meeks had been out the previous day to survey the ground.

He felt the wheels touch, bounce, then touch again. A shudder ran through the aircraft, and, scared the undercarriage wouldn't take the strain, Harry hurriedly cut the engines. Sand flew either side of the perspect, then the aircraft responded to the brakes and came to a stop.

Harry swung himself out of his seat, snatched up his gun that he had laid on the floor beside him and walked quickly to the door and looked into the

cabin.

Franks sat huddled up on a seat near where Lewin stood.

Someone had cut the sleeve out of his coat and had bandaged his shoulder. His face glistened with sweat and he looked pretty bad. He was holding his .45 in his left hand.

The passengers sat motionless. They all looked at Harry as he stood in the doorway.

"Listen, you people," he said, "no one is going to get hurt unless they act smart. Do what you're told and you're going to be okay. We're in the desert. The nearest town is a hundred miles from here so it's no use running away. I want you all out of here. Get a couple of hundred yards from the plane and sit down and wait. When we're through, the radio operator will call for help and they'll come for you. You've got nothing to worry about so long as you obey orders." He came down to the gangway. "Open the exit door," he said to the flight engineer. "Snap it up!"

The flight engineer got the door open and jumped down on to the sand. The other two members of the crew lowered McClure, who was returning to consciousness, down to him.

"Come on! Come on!" Harry shouted. "Get out, all of you!"

Jostling and scared, the passengers clambered out of the aircraft.

"Where's the air hostess?" Harry asked Lewin.

"She's in with the guard."

Harry went down the gangway, stepped to one side and opened the door leading to the galley a few inches.

"Hey, girl! Come out here," he called. "There's a passenger who wants your help."

He half expected the guard would start shooting, but he didn't.

Hetty Collins came out. She looked at Harry, then at Lewin, her face pale, but Harry could see she was a lot less scared than he was.

"A woman's fainted up there. I'll give you a hand with her, he said. "I want her out of here."

He walked up the gangway and got hold of the woman in the mink coat and carried her to the exit door. He handed her down to two of the men passengers, then dropped on to the sand and helped Hetty down.

"Get clear of the aircraft," he said to the crew while Lewin stood above him in the doorway, covering them with his gun.

“Get the passengers away. When we're through you can come back and radio for help.”

The crew got the passengers organized and led them across the sand away from the aircraft. Two of the men passengers carried the woman in the mink coat; the crew helped McClure.

Sam Meeks ran up, gun in hand. His thin, rat-like face showed his excitement.

“Gee! I thought she was going to crack up when you landed her,” he said. “What's cooking?”

“Plenty,” Lewin snarled. “There's a trigger-happy guard in there with the diamonds. He's already plugged Ted.”

Meeks' mouth dropped open. Harry saw fear jump into his eyes. He had guessed right. Meeks wasn't going to be any use in tackling the guard.

II

Franks dragged himself out of his seat and came over to the doorway. He leaned his weight against the side of the door and looked down at Harry and Meeks.

"That punk's like a streak of lightning," he said. "I went in there with my rod in my hand and I shot at him. He got his gun out and he was firing before I got my sight on him. You're not going to take him in a hurry."

Lewin said viciously, "I'll take him! He's not going to stop me getting my hands on three million bucks worth of rocks."

Harry looked at Meeks.

"Stay here and watch that bunch over there. You got the ignition key of the car?"

"Yeah," Meeks said, backing away to watch them.

Harry swung himself up into the aircraft.

"We can't be long about this," he said to Lewin. "The radio operator is supposed to send out signals every so often. They'll start looking for us if they don't get a signal soon."

"I'll get the door open," Lewin said. "You keep out of the line of his fire. Ted, you'd better get out of here."

"I'm sticking," Ted snarled, his face twisted with pain. "If I get a sight of that sonofabitch I'll fix him."

Lewin made his way up the gangway. Harry followed him.

When they reached the door leading into the galley, they stepped between the seats on either side of the door.

Pushing his gun forward, Lewin took hold of the handle, turned it and let the door swing open. He fired a shot down the passage, then leaned forward, took a quick look and jerked back.

"He's not there."

Harry's heart sank. That meant the guard had gone through into the luggage bay, making it even more tricky to get at him.

"He's in the luggage bay," he said. "You stay here. I'll go to the loading door. It opens from outside. Give me two minutes to get the door open. I'll draw his fire while you rush the passage and get the luggage-bay door open."

Lewin nodded.

Harry went down to the exit door. As he passed Franks he saw he had slumped down in his seat, his head had fallen forward.

He was breathing heavily, but he still held on to his gun.

Harry dropped to the ground.

Meeks was standing nearby watching the group of passengers and crew who made a black puddle of shadows on the white sand some two hundred yards away.

His heart thumping, his mouth dry and sour, Harry ran along the side of the aircraft to the loading door. He reached up and caught hold of the lever that held the door shut. He pushed it up and ducked low as the heavy door swung open.

Cautiously he peered into the luggage bay. His hand was shaking so badly he could scarcely hold the gun.

The luggage bay was empty!

Even as he stared, even as he realized the guard was not hiding in the bay, the crash of gunfire within the aircraft startled him and he nearly dropped his gun.

He then knew what had happened. The guard had fooled them.

He had been either hiding in the galley or in the toilet.

Harry turned cold. Had the guard nailed Lewin? He swung around in time to see Meeks, his eyes bulging, his face ghastly in the moonlight, jerk up his gun. Another gun barked from the doorway of the aircraft, a yellow flash lit up the darkness.

Meeks was flung back as the slug caught him between his eyes, scattering his brains and smashing his skull.

Harry saw a shadowy figure in the doorway. He recognized the flat peak cap and he fired wildly. The guard fired back and Harry felt the slug fan past his face. He dropped on hands and knees and tried to take cover under the aircraft.

He could see the guard as he leaned out of the aircraft. The moonlight glittered on his gun. This is it, Harry thought. He's going to nail me. He shut his eyes, squeezing himself further down in the sand.

There came the choked bang of a gun from inside the aircraft.

Harry flinched. He opened his eyes in time to see the guard drop his gun and fall forward, landing on the sand with a thud.

For a long moment Harry stared stupidly at the body of the guard, then he slowly got to his feet. Franks appeared in the doorway of the aircraft. He leaned against the doorpost. Harry could hear his laboured breathing from where he crouched.

As Harry began to move forward, Franks fired again at the guard. .

“I got him!” he panted. “I said I would. The punk went right by me. He didn't see me.”

Harry went to the guard and turned him over with his foot.

The sight of the dead, set face made him feel sick.

“Get the rocks!” Franks gasped. “I can't hold on much longer. Hurry!”

Pulling himself together, Harry climbed into the aircraft.

“I want you out there to watch that bunch,” he said. “I'll give you a hand down.”

He helped Franks on to the sand and propped him up against the wheel of the aircraft. The effort was too much for Franks.

His head dropped on to his chest and his fingers let go of his gun.

Harry looked across at the passengers. One of them was standing up.

“Sit down!” he yelled, and, raising his gun, he fired a shot over the man's head. He hurriedly sat down.

Harry shook Franks.

“Hang on! Watch them!”

Franks grunted, took hold of his gun that Harry pressed into his hand and mumbled something.

Harry scrambled into the aircraft and ran down to the galley.

He found Lewin lying in the passage, shot through the back of his head. He didn't have to turn him to know he was dead. He opened the door into the luggage bay and stepped inside. It took him a few moments to find the small, square-shaped box. When he tried to open it, he found it was locked.

Holding it under his arm, he jumped down on to the sand.

Then he ran over to where Meeks lay. He went through his pockets until he found the key of the car.

Returning to Franks he found he was now lying face down on the sand. Harry bent over him and dragged him upright. Franks was breathing heavily. He was unconscious, his arm sodden with blood.

Leaving him, Harry ran to the car, put the steel box on the front seat, got in the car and started the engine. He drove over to the aircraft. Leaving the

engine running, he got out and went to Franks. He hauled him to his feet, tipped him over his shoulder and staggered with him to the car. He got him in the back, slammed the door and slid under the driving wheel.

He had a twenty-five mile drive to Sky Ranch airport: a good, straight road, flanked on either side by sandhills. The brilliant light of the moon made his headlights unnecessary. He slammed in the gear, let in the clutch and sent the car streaking across the sand to the road.

In twenty minutes, even less, aircraft would be up and looking for him. He should have put the radio out of action, he thought, and given himself more time. He had to get to Sky Ranch airport before he was spotted on the road.

With the gas pedal flat on the boards, he sent the car racing along the road at over eighty miles an hour.

The guard was dead, he thought, his hands gripping the driving wheel until his knuckles turned white. It was murder. If they caught him he'd go to the chair. If he had known this was going to happen he wouldn't have been so crazy as to risk his life for fifty thousand dollars. When he had planned the robbery he hadn't thought it possible that it would end in murder. He had been a fool not to have asked for two hundred thousand. Delaney would probably clear two million on the deal, and he was taking no risk.

He was sitting pretty. Two million dollars!

Harry reached out and put his hand on the steel box. If only he had Delaney's facilities for getting rid of the diamonds, he thought, he wouldn't part with them. Delaney could damn well whistle for them, but they were useless to him. He wouldn't dare try to sell them. He knew no one to whom he could go.

Well, at least he was getting something out of it. Borg's threat of no diamonds, no dough, didn't apply now. His mind shifted to the paragraph in the newspaper he had read. No diamonds, no honour.

He very nearly swerved off the road. He wrenched at the wheel, straightened the car and slowed down. What a dope he was! Of course, Takamori! He might do a deal with Takamori!

Takamori had been fighting for eighteen months to get the diamonds. He was to be received by the Emperor who was going to honour him. Money meant little to a guy like that, Harry thought, but the honour did. He might ask for a million and a half. Takamori would be a fool to pass up such an offer. He'd probably never be allowed to export more diamonds. It seemed to

Harry he had Takamori where he wanted him. The deal would be a tricky one, but it had a good chance of coming off. It would take nerve, but the risk was worth it. He would be gambling on Takamori wanting the diamonds so badly he would go behind the backs of the police and not give him away.

He heard Franks groan. The sound jerked him back to his present position. He was rushing towards Borg, and Borg was now the last person he wanted to run into. He slowed down and stopped the car. He hadn't much time to make a plan. In another ten minutes or so aircraft would be setting out to rescue the passengers and crew. The police would be alerted. Every road would be watched.

Dare he continue in the car? It had been standing in the shadows and none of the passengers nor the crew had gone within two hundred yards of it. They couldn't possibly give the police a description of it. He had to take the risk and keep it. Without it he was sunk.

There was Franks. . .

He turned and looked at the wounded man as he sat slumped in the back seat. Franks stared at him.

"What are you stopping for?" he mumbled. "What's the matter?"

Harry saw he still had his gun in his hand. Even though he was in a bad way, Franks could still be dangerous.

"We've got a flat," Harry said.

Franks grunted and shut his eyes. His head lolled forward.

Leaning over the back seat, Harry grabbed at his gun. He had expected Franks' grip on the gun to be light, but instead, he found his grip like a vice. As Harry jerked at the gun it went off.

The bang and the flash stunned Harry, but he somehow kept his grip on the gun and dragged it out of Franks' hand.

Franks heaved himself up, cursing. His fist struck Harry in the face, but there was no bite in the punch.

Sweeping aside his upraised arm, Harry hit Franks on the top of his head. Franks slumped back.

Dropping the gun, Harry scrambled out of the car, opened the rear door and lugged Franks on to the sand. He tore off his trench coat, then, taking out his pocket-knife, he levered off the extra sole he had nailed to his shoe to give him a limp. He then began to strip off his disguise. In a few minutes

Harry Green had disappeared and a somewhat wild-eyed Harry Griffin had

taken his place.

Rolling the disguise inside the trench coat, he carried the bundle over to a nearby sandhill. He dug feverishly with his hands until he had scooped out a hole large enough to take the bundle. When he had buried it, he stamped the sand flat, then he went back to the car. He put the steel box in the glove compartment, then slid under the driving wheel and drove away fast down the desert road.

III

Ten miles of furious driving brought Harry to a fork in the road. A finger post indicated to the right was Sky Ranch airport and to the left Lone Pine. Without slowing speed, he swung the car on to the left fork, and stormed up a climbing, twisting road that led over the foothills and away, from the desert.

A few miles further on, he slackened speed. Traffic was beginning to appear on the road. He didn't want to call attention to himself by driving too fast. He felt safer as he overtook the big oil trucks that were fighting their way up the steep incline. He was back in civilization, where the lone car was no longer suspect.

After he had driven another five miles, he saw ahead of him a long line of red tail-lights, and he braked, slowing to a crawl.

Ahead of him he could see at least eight cars and two trucks at a standstill. Crawling towards them, he leaned out of the car window. His heart skipped a beat when he saw there was a crash barrier across the road. A number of speed cops, lit up by the headlights of the cars, were standing behind the barrier.

He pulled up behind a truck, his mouth dry, his heart thumping. Reaching down, he groped on the floor of the car until he found Franks' gun. He wedged it between the two front seats.

Then he opened the car door and got out. He walked up to the truck in front of him. The driver, a squat, fat man, his cap pushed back off his forehead, was leaning out of his cab, staring down the road.

"What's cooking?" Harry asked.

The driver glanced at him and shrugged.

"Search me. I've been stuck like this for the past ten minutes. The bright boys are playing cops and robbers, I guess."

A cop was coming towards them, a flashlight in his hand.

"What's biting you, pal?" the truck driver shouted. "Lost something or are you just doing this for the hell of it?"

"Button up," the cop said. His voice sounded tough. "You'll get going in a minute."

Harry saw the cars ahead of him were on the move now, and he returned to

his car, but he didn't get in. He wanted freedom of movement if he needed it. His hand rested on the butt of his gun in his pocket. He tried to keep calm, but his nerves jangled and he felt sweat on his face. ,

The cop climbed up the side of the truck, flashed his torch into the interior, grunted and stepped down.

“Okay, get going,” he said to the truck driver.

Three more cars had pulled up behind Harry. The drivers were leaning out of their windows.

“What goes on?” one of them shouted.

“Take it easy,” the cop said. “Just wait, will you?”

He came up to Harry, swung the beam of his torch on his face.

Harry wanted to run, but he controlled the impulse. The cop flicked the light from Harry to the car. He satisfied himself there was no one in the car, then he said, “Seen two guys in a big six-seater coming this way?”

“I've seen plenty of cars,” Harry said, “but I don't remember any two guys.”

The cop grunted.

“No one remembers anything,” he said bitterly. “What beats me is why any of you've got eyes. Don't you ever use them? Okay, beat it.”

He went on to the next car.

Harry slid under the wheel, shifted into gear and drove slowly past the crash barrier. The other four cops ignored him. They stood in a group, talking.

Harry accelerated as soon as he was clear of the barrier. He sent his car shooting past the other cars, got ahead of them and on to the clear road.

He knew the cops had been looking for a fat-faced, middle-aged man with a scar on his face. He thought of Glorie: she was smart; there was no doubt about that. If she hadn't dreamed up that disguise, he would either be under arrest by now or lying by the side of the road, riddled by police bullets. He felt a wave of affection for her run through him. He would square his debt with her, he told himself. They would go to Europe and have the time of their lives. Money would be no object. She could have all the clothes she wanted—any damn thing she wanted. He would wait just long enough to make a deal with Takamori, then they'd go. If he got a million and a half out of Takamori, he could finance his own air-taxi service. He could run two kites at first, then later he'd get two more. He'd be his own boss, and that's what he

had always wanted. He knew it was largely due to Glorie and her bright idea that he was in the clear. It had been tough going, but he was now getting the breaks. He squeezed a little more speed out of the car. He grinned as he imagined Borg's face while he waited at the airport. By now the news would be on the air. The chances were Borg was listening to the story of the hijack right at this moment. As the minutes ticked by, Borg would realize he had been double-crossed.

Harry's grin widened. Borg, like the police, would hunt for Harry Green. Well, let them hunt. Harry Green was buried in the sand, thirty miles away, and he would stay buried.

Twenty minutes later, driving at a reduced speed, Harry drove down Lone Pine's main street.

Lone Pine was a small, nondescript town; the houses were of wood, and there were only a few shops. The clock on the dashboard showed ten minutes after eleven. Most of the houses were in darkness as he drove past. A big hoarding with an arrow painted on it showed him the way to the motel. Another five minutes brought him to the gates. He slowed down, drove through the gateway and up a dirt road until he came to the cabins. They were huddled together in a semi-circle; only three showed lights, the rest were in darkness. Five cars were parked under some trees.

The cabin furthest to the right of the others had an illuminated sign above its door that read: OFFICE.

Harry parked his car alongside a 1930 Ford, got out and walked over to the office. He pushed open the door and stepped into a small room, lighted by a naked electric light bulb that hung from the ceiling and cast sharp etched shadows.

A fat, elderly man, in shirtsleeves, stared at him as if he were someone from Mars.

"You want a cabin?" he said. "It's late."

"I'm Harrison. My wife booked in this afternoon. What's the number of her cabin?"

"Harrison?" The fat man heaved himself out of his chair. He wandered over to a board, propped up on the mantelpiece, and stared at it. "Yeah, that's right. Mrs. Harrison. She said she was expecting you. Cabin No. 20. That's the last one on the left."

"Thanks," Harry said and turned to go.

“Hear about this robbery?” the fat man asked. “Been listening to it on the radio. Jaysus! These bastards will try anything once.”

Harry paused. He had to make an effort to restrain his hand creeping into his pocket for his gun.

“I haven't heard anything.”

“You'll read about it in the paper tomorrow. It'll hit the headlines all right. Hijacked an aeroplane and got away with three million bucks worth of diamonds! Killed the guard and two of the punks got killed themselves. Did you ever hear of such a thing? Hijacked an aeroplane!”

“Is that a fact?” Harry said, backing towards the door.

“I guess that guard had guts. Fought it out with them. The police are looking for a fat guy with a scar on his face and another punk who was wounded. They reckon they're heading this way.”

Harry stiffened.

“This way?”

“Yeah. They took off in a car, coming this way. They didn't take the Sky Ranch road. There was a prowler cop out in that area and he reports no car passed him so they must be coming this way.”

“I'd better get over to my wife. She may be scared.”

The fat man nodded.

“They won't get far. One of them's badly wounded.

Harry went out into the dark night. He walked quickly over to the car, took the steel box from the glove compartment and fished out Franks' gun from between the seats. He shoved the gun into his hip pocket, then walked across the grass to the last cabin on the left. A light showed in the window. He knocked on the door.

Glorie said sharply, “Who is it?”

“Harry.”

He heard her run across the room, the door was flung open, then arms were around him, hugging him.

“Hey! Let me come in,” he said. He lifted her off her feet and carried her into the small room and kicked the door shut.

“Oh, Harry!” she said breathlessly. “I've been frantic. I heard what happened. It's on the radio. Are you hurt?”

“I'm fine.” He tossed the steel box on to the bed. “It was tough going, kid, but I got away with it.”

"They killed the guard."

"Yeah. It was our bad luck to have a brave fool in our hair. He killed . . ."

"Yes . . . I heard. I've been so worried." She was clenching and unclenching her hands. "If they catch you . . ."

"For God's sate, don't start that," Harry said sharply. "I know what they'd do to me if they caught me, but they're not going to catch me."

He looked at her white, frightened face, the dark smudges under her eyes, the dark untidy hair, the unsmart, travel-creased costume she had on, and a little of his affection for her died.

"I'm sorry, Harry. It—it was a shock. I hoped and prayed nothing like this would happen."

"I didn't kill the fool," Harry said, his voice hostile. "If Franks hadn't got him, he would have got me. He was gunning for me when Franks put the blast on him."

"They said you and another man got away. Where is he?"

Harry ran his tongue over his lips. This could be tricky, he told himself, and was suddenly irritated that he had to explain to her.

"Look, I could do with a drink. Got anything?"

"Yes. I brought some whisky. I thought . . ."

"Well, get it!"

She looked quickly at him, flinching at his tone, but she went into the inner room, came out a moment or so later with a bottle of Scotch, two glasses and a pitcher of water. Harry poured himself a four-finger shot, splashed a little water in the glass and drank half of it. He added more whisky and went over and sat on the bed. He lit a cigarette while he watched Glorie make herself a drink.

"I ditched Franks," he said. "I had to."

He saw her stiffen, then she turned slowly and stared at him.

He looked up, then looked away.

"You—you ditched him? He was wounded, wasn't he?"

"Yeah."

"Where did you ditch him?"

"For the love of mike, don't look at me like that!" he said violently. "I ditched him on the road. I had to. Not far from here, I ran into a roadblock. The cops were holding up all traffic and searching the cars. I'd have looked good, wouldn't I, if they had found Franks with me, bleeding all over the seat."

I had to ditch him!”

“I see.” She sat down abruptly as if her legs wouldn't support her. “What's that, Harry?” She pointed to the steel box on the bed.

He braced himself. He knew instinctively that he was going to have trouble with her.

“Now look, Glorie, let it lie. I'm tired. I've had a hell of a night . . .”

“What is it, Harry?”

“The diamonds! What the hell did you think it was?”

She put her hands to her face, her eyes opening wide.

“But why haven't you given them to Borg? You wrote and told me that was the arrangement.”

“I haven't given them to him because I've stopped being a dope. Why should your pal collect two million bucks while I take all the risks and pick up only fifty grand? I know who will give me a million and a half for the diamonds, and I'm going to do a trade with him. To hell with Delaney! And to hell with Borg!”

“No!” Glorie exclaimed, her voice shrill. She started to her feet. “You mustn't, Harry! You must give the diamonds to Ben. You must! He paid you the money. He trusted you! You can't do this!”

“Yeah, he trusted me. He trusted me like a fox. He had two thugs following me wherever I went. He slicked Borg on to me. Trusted me? That's funny. That rat wouldn't trust his mother not to put poison in his food. He gave me the money because he knew there was no other way he could get his claws on the diamonds. Okay, he's been smart too long. Now it's my turn. I'm trading the diamonds and he's going to whistle for them.”

Glorie struggled to control herself. She was shaking and cold and terrified.

“Look, darling, you don't understand,” she said, trying to speak slowly and quietly. “I can see how you feel about this. I can understand the temptation, but you mustn't do it. No one has ever double-crossed Ben and got away with it. No one. They've tried. I know. I've lived with him for fourteen months, and during that time dozens of men have tried to pull a fast one on him. They've never succeeded, and, darling, you won't either. Oh, Harry, do try to believe me. I'm telling you this because I love you. I don't want anything to happen to you. I want you alive, Harry, not dead. Don't you understand?”

“Relax Glorie,” Harry said. “What you don't seem to understand is that he will be looking for Harry Green. Thanks to you Harry Green doesn't exist

anymore. He is buried in the sandhills where no one will ever find him. This is the one time Delaney is going to be double-crossed, and there is nothing he can do about it He'll never find me. I don't exist. He can hunt for me as the police can hunt for me until he and they are blue in the face They'll never find me, thanks to you. They can hunt for a thousand years. Delaney can hunt for a thousand years. The guy they are looking for has ceased to exist. Don't you see that? Snap out of it, baby. We're sitting pretty. We have fifty grand in the bank waiting for us in New York. I've got three million tying there on the bed. What are you worrying about? This is fool proof. Can't you see that?"

Glorie put her hands to her face and began to cry.

IV

When the telephone bell rang, Ben Delaney got quickly to his feet, leaving Fay pouting and surprised on the settee, crossed the room and picked up the receiver.

He had listened to the broadcast about the robbery. He had been shaken out of his usual calm by the news of the slaughter.

If the diamonds were traced back to him, there would be trouble, he thought, as he had listened to the excited voice of the commentator. The guard dead and Lewin and Meeks killed! This was going to cause a sensation. If his name got hooked to the robbery, Chief of Police O'Harridan would have to move against him, and that was the last thing Ben wanted. He had been waiting for Borg to ring; cursing him for keeping him waiting. He had been waiting now for two hours, and the sound of the telephone galvanized him into life.

"Yeah?" he said into the mouthpiece. "Who's that?"

"Borg." The fat, breathless voice came over the line like treacle.

"It's a gyp. He hasn't shown."

Ben felt a hot wave of rage run through him.

"Keep talking!" he snarled.

"I've been waiting here for two hours and there's no sign of him," Borg said. "We had arranged to meet at nine-thirty. It's close on twelve now. He's run out on us."

"Maybe not," Ben said, sitting on the edge of his desk. "He may be in trouble. The radio said he and Franks went off in the car. Franks was wounded. The police may have got him."

"The police haven't got him, but they've found Franks. Green dumped him by the roadside; left him to bleed to death. When the cops picked him up, he'd been dead at least half an hour. No, Green's skipped all right; skipped with the diamonds."

Ben thought of the fifty thousand dollars he had paid Green.

He thought of the two million dollars he could have got for the diamonds. He thought of the yacht.

"If that punk thinks he can double cross me, and get away with it, he's got

another thing coming,” he said, his voice shrill with rage. “Get after him! Do you hear! Get after him!”

“He doesn't exist,” Borg said, unconsciously echoing Harry's words. “He never was Harry Green. By now he's got rid of his limp and that scar and he's someone else. I told you how it would be.”

Ben slid off the desk into his chair. His face was white and glistening. His eyes looked like river-washed pebbles.

“Do you know the number of the car?”

“LMX—999007. How's that help you?”

“Shut up asking questions!” Ben's hand gripped the telephone so tightly, he drove the blood out of his nails. “Listen, you're to find this guy. I don't care how long it takes or how much it costs. Find him! And listen, I don't want to set eyes on you again until you do find him. Understand? You've got no other job until you've found him, and if you don't find him you haven't got a job.”

“I'll find him,” Borg said placidly. “It'll take time, but I'll find him.”

“That Glorie Dane woman might know where he is. Get after her,” Ben said. “I don't have to tell you how to find him, just find him!”

He slammed down the receiver and sat for a long moment staring down at the desk blotter.

“What is it, honey?” Fay asked, raising her lovely head to stare blankly at him. “You sound angry.”

“Shut up!” Ben shouted. “Keep out of this.” He picked up the receiver, said, “Give me police headquarters.”

Fay made a futile face and sank back on to the settee. She reached for a chocolate from the box at her side and studied it with interest. It was a bore that Ben was cross, she thought.

She wanted him to take her to the movies tonight. Now, he would rant and rave until bedtime. She lifted her shoulders. Of course he would be sorry in the morning. He'd give her a present to make up for his rudeness, but it was a bore. She put the chocolate in her mouth and thought how good it tasted.

Ben said, “Give me O'Harridan.” He waited, then when the Chief of Police came on the line, he went on, “Pat? This is Ben. How are you? Swell. Yeah, I'm fine. Look, Pat, I've some inside dope you might be able to use. One of my boys tipped me off. The guy who pulled that aeroplane robbery is Harry Green. No, I don't know anything else about him except I heard he had his photograph taken at the Photomat on Essex Street. My man seems to think

the limp and the scar's a fake. His car is a Pontiac, number LMX—999007.” He listened, a fixed wolfish grin on his thin lips. “Why sure, Pat. You know I always do what I can. Yeah; hope you catch him. This type of hold-up is bad for trade.”

He laughed. “Let me know if you get him. Yeah. Be seeing you. So long for now.”

He hung up.

chapter four

I

Long after Harry had fallen asleep, Glorie lay awake beside him, staring up at the bars of light across the ceiling that came in through the blind from the illuminated office sign.

She was realizing that she was powerless to stop Harry from double crossing Ben. She was sure now that if she continued to beg and argue with him, he would lose patience and leave her.

She felt sick with fear as she thought of the consequences of Harry's planned treachery. She knew Ben. Double crossing him was as dangerous as handling a cobra. She told herself that she must give Harry up if this was the way he intended to behave.

She knew if Ben discovered that she and Harry had planned the robbery, and it was her idea that Harry should disguise himself, he would have no mercy on her.

But although she was terrified, although she knew the only sensible thing to do was to cut away from Harry, she knew too that she couldn't bring herself to do it. She felt that Harry was the last man in her life. If she lost him, there would be no others: she would be alone, and rather than face that, she decided to face the threat from Ben.

Perhaps after all, she argued with herself, she was frightening herself for nothing. Ben would be looking for Harry Green, and as Harry had said, Harry Green no longer existed. No one, not even Ben, for all his cunning and cleverness, would know that the man at her side had been the fat-faced, scarred, thickset Harry Green. She was sure of that. But would Ben suspect Harry if he found them together? There was the danger, and she shivered, suddenly realizing that for Harry's safety, she should leave him even if she refused to care about her own safety. It was only through her that Ben could possibly trace Harry. If he found them together and made enquiries about Harry and found out that he had once been a pilot for the C.A.T.C. he might easily put two and two together and guess Harry was the man he was after.

But that wouldn't happen if she broke away from Harry.

She couldn't do it, she told herself. They must go away: as far away from Ben as they could get. He couldn't search the whole of the States for them. After they had been to Europe, they must settle in Florida and not in California. That way they might be safe.

Then another thought dropped into her mind: suppose it occurred to Harry that Ben could find him through her? Suppose he realized that she was the only link between himself and Harry Green? What would he do? Leave her? Hate her? Her hands turned into fists. What would he do?

She turned her head to look at him. He was sleeping heavily, his handsome face relaxed, his mouth firm in sleep, and, watching him, she felt weak with love for him.

She couldn't give him up. She knew that. Even if it meant death for both of them.

A sudden sound outside the cabin made her stiffen. She raised her head to listen, her heart beginning to pound. Someone was moving about outside. She heard the scrape of a shoe; a board creaked on the verandah. She pushed back the bedclothes, so frightened, she had difficulty in breathing, caught up her wrap, slid into it and crept across to the window. She looked through a chink in the blind.

What she saw in the moonlight turned her cold and she throttled back a scream that rose in her throat. Turning, she ran over to the bed and catching hold of Harry's arm she shook him violently.

Harry sat up, throwing off her hand.

"What's the matter?" he said angrily. "Can't you let a guy sleep?"

"The police!" she said, her voice scarcely above a whisper. "There are ten of them out there."

Harry stiffened. She saw the blood drain out of his face, and stark, naked panic jump into his eyes. He reached under his pillow for his gun. She heard the safety catch snick back as he threw off the bedclothes and swung his feet to the floor.

"No, Harry!" she said in a fierce whisper. The sight of his fear drove her own away. She was now protective; her mind working swiftly to find a way to save him. "Put that gun down!"

"They won't get me alive!"

"But they don't know you. They'll never know you, Harry! What are you

thinking of? Put that gun down!”

He hesitated, then went over to the window and peered through the chink in the blind.

He could see a number of men in peak caps clustered around the Pontiac that he had left in the parking lot.

“It's the car,” he said. “I should have ditched it! But how could they have known it was here? How could they?”

She caught hold of his arm.

“Did anyone see you drive in?”

“I don't think so. I didn't see anyone myself.”

“Did you tell the manager you had a car?”

“No.”

“Then it's not yours. If they ask you, tell them you came by bus. The last bus would get you here about the same time as you arrived. Our car is at the head of the line: the Mercury. Tell them I came here by car and you followed by bus. We came from Carson City and we're going to Los Angeles.”

Harry nodded. That made sense to him. He was recovering now from the shock. He went to the window and looked out again.

Six of the policemen, flashlights and guns in their hands, were converging on the cabins.

“Where's the box?” Glorie whispered.

He had forgotten the box. He had forgotten he was holding his gun. He had forgotten he had left Franks' gun on the mantelpiece in the front room.

He ran in there, snatched up Franks' gun and put both guns up the chimney. He ran back to the bedroom, took the steel box from a drawer in the chest and looked around wildly for a safe hiding place.

A heavy knock sounded on the outer door.

Glorie snatched the box from him.

“I'll hide it. Answer the door!”

Harry hesitated, then, drawing in a deep breath, he walked into the living room, turned on the light and opened the door. His heart contracted as he found himself looking at the two policemen, guns in hands.

He remained motionless, staring at them while they stared at him.

“Who are you?” one of them barked.

“I'm Ted Harrison,” Harry said. “What's the idea?”

“What is it, darling?” Glorie said, joining him. She pretended to stifle a

scream at the sight of the policemen. Watching the two policemen's faces, Harry saw they had relaxed at the sight of Glorie.

"Nothing to get excited about," one of them said. "Is that your car outside? The Pontiac?"

"Why, no," Glorie said. "Ours is the Mercury."

"We're coming in," the policeman said. "We're looking for a guy. He may be hiding in here."

Harry stood aside.

"Come on in. There's no one here except my wife and myself."

One of the policemen entered and went into the bedroom. He came out almost immediately.

"No," he said to his companion. "I guess he's miles away from here by now. He ditched the car." He looked at Glorie. "You heard about the diamond robbery?"

"Yes. I heard it on the radio."

"That's the getaway car there. Did you see it arrive?"

"I think I heard it. I don't know what time it was: about an hour ago I guess."

"It would be longer than that. The car's cold. More like around half-past twelve."

"I didn't look at the time. Do you think they're hiding here?"

The policeman shook his head.

"He wouldn't stay here. He'll be on the move. I guess he had another car hidden somewhere. You didn't hear another car, did you?"

"I might have. I did think there was something, but I was only half awake."

"Well, okay; sorry to have pulled you out of bed."

Nodding, the two policemen left the cabin and joined the others who were going from cabin to cabin, talking to the occupants.

Glorie closed the door and leaned against it. Harry looked at her and drew in a slow, deep breath.

"You were pretty good," he said. "You've got a nerve, baby. I was ready to climb up a wall."

She went past him into the bedroom and sat on the bed. She was shaking and cold. It was starting, she thought; just like the days when Ben was a small-time gangster. The sudden alarms in the night, the hard-faced policemen with their guns and their questions, the smooth lies she used to tell

to cover Ben, She had hoped all that was finished with, but no, it was starting again, and it would go on. She was sure about that now, and the thought turned her sick.

Harry was standing at the window, watching the police through the chink in the blind. Three plain-clothes detectives had now arrived and were photographing the car and going over it for fingerprints, and, watching them, a sudden feeling of cold panic crept over him.

He hadn't thought of fingerprints. The feeling he had had of safety suddenly dropped from him. That was the way they could nail him! He must have left dozens of prints on the car. If they decided to fingerprint everyone staying here, they'd have him.

He spun around.

"Glorie! They'll find my prints on the car! That'll sink me. I hadn't thought of the prints."

She stared at him. She hadn't thought of them either.

"Maybe I could get away out the back," he went on, his face tight with fear. He ran across to where he had left his clothes.

"I stand a chance . . ."

"No! " Glorie jumped up and ran to him. "Don't be a fool! If they find you gone, they'll know it was you. You've got to keep your nerve. If you run now, you're done for. There's a chance they won't think of taking your prints, and if they don't, you've beaten them."

But if they do?" Harry said, hesitating.

"Then nothing you can do will be any good. You've got to take the chance. Once you're on the run, you're finished. You must see that"

His face glistening with sweat, Harry returned to the window and peered out.

"If I'd known it was going to be like this, I wouldn't have pulled the job," he muttered. "What a mug I was to have forgotten the prints! Even if I get away with this, I could be nailed any time. If I had a car accident in ten years' time and they take my prints, I'm sunk. What a damned fool I've been!"

Glorie sat motionless, feeling her heart thudding.

"Don't lose your nerve, Harry," she said. "It's done now."

"Oh, shut up!" Harry snarled. "You can talk. You aren't heading for the chair. That was a fine idea of yours, dreaming up Harry Green. If you're all that smart, why didn't you think of my prints? Harry Green doesn't exist! Like

hell he does! He's here —right here for any cop to find,” and he held out his hands towards her. “If you hadn't sold me on the idea of disguising myself I wouldn't have pulled the job!”

Glorie closed her eyes.

“How can you talk like that, Harry? You know I tried and tried to stop you. . .”

“Stop talking! That's all you can do—talk! You've never stopped talking since we've been together. How the hell am I going to get out of this jam?”

The sound of a car engine drew him back to the window. A breakdown truck had arrived. The police hooked the Pontiac to the crane and the truck took the Pontiac away.

The three detectives stood in a group, talking. Harry watched them, his breath whistling through his clenched teeth. After a while, the detectives walked over to their car, got in and drove away. The policemen hung around a little longer, then they too got in their cars and drove away.

Harry stepped back and moved slowly to the bed and sat on it. He put his face in his hands. He hadn't realized until this moment just how frightened he had been. The reaction knocked him off balance.

Glorie ran into the other room, poured a stiff whisky and came back with it.

“Drink this, darling.”

Harry gulped down the whisky, shuddered and put down the glass.

“I can't believe it,” he muttered. “To think those punks had me cold, and they didn't do anything about it. They had me! They had only to take my prints and I was sunk.”

“Why should they?” Glorie said. “They can't take everyone's prints. Why should they think you were Harry Green?”

“Yeah, that's right. He looked at her, then reached out and pulled her down beside him. “I didn't mean what I said just now, baby. You know that, don't you? I was scared. I didn't know what I was saying. I'm sorry, Glorie, honest, I'm sorry.”

“It's all right. I know how you felt. I was scared too. Oh, darling, let's stop this before it's too late. We can mail the diamonds to Ben and then we're free of them. Let's do it first thing in the morning. It's the only way. Please, Harry.”

He pulled away from her, got up and went over to the table and poured

himself another drink.

“No. I got away with it, didn't I? I'd be a mug to pass up a million and a half bucks: that's what I should get for them. Think of it! Think what we can do with that much money. I'm going ahead with this and no one's going to stop me.”

She made a little movement of despair, then shrugged her shoulders.

“Oh, all right, Harry: just as you say.”

II

The Far Eastern Trading Corporation had offices that spread over four floors of the National and Californian State Building on 27th Street.

The smartly-dressed, well-groomed girl at the reception desk looked at Harry with a kindly, patronizing smile that is usually reserved for simple-minded children when they have asked for the impossible.

"No, I'm sorry, Mr. Griffin, but Mr. Takamori never sees anyone except by appointment," she said. "Perhaps Mr. Ludwig could help you? I'll see if he is disengaged."

"I don't want Mr. Ludwig," Harry said. "I want Mr. Takamori."

"I'm sorry but that is quite impossible." The kindly smile began to fade. "Mr. Takamori . . ."

"I heard you the first time," Harry said, "but he'll see me."

He took a sealed envelope from his pocket and handed it to the girl. "Give him that. You'll be surprised how anxious he'll be to have me walk in."

She hesitated, then, lifting her shoulders, she touched a bell push. A small, boy in a fawn uniform with blue facings materialized from a nearby room and came to the desk.

"Give this note to Miss Schofield," the girl said. "It's for Mr. Takamori." As the boy went away, he went on to Harry, "Please sit down. Miss Schofield may be able to see you."

Harry sat down, took out a cigarette and lit it. He was hot and nervous and jittery, but he managed not to show it.

It was now five days since the robbery. He and Glorie had been living in a small hotel in New York. He had left her there while he had returned to Los Angeles for this all-important interview with Takamori.

He had racked his brains for a safe method of dealing with Takamori, but without success. It had slowly and reluctantly dawned on him that if he were to get his hands on a million and a half dollars, he had to approach Takamori as himself, and not to attempt to go to him under a false name or in disguise.

That amount of money couldn't be hidden. Even if he spread the amount over a dozen banks, he still couldn't hide it. He would get into trouble with the tax people, and then the police would get after him. He had no alternative

but to deal openly with Takamori. He had to gamble on Takamori wanting the diamonds so badly that he would be prepared to work with Harry and not with the police. If the gamble didn't come off, then Harry would be in trouble, but the way he was planning it, he wouldn't be in serious trouble and he felt the risk was worth it.

But Glorie had been horrified when Harry had outlined his plan to her. She had begged him not to go ahead with it. By now, Harry was getting tired of her opposition, and he had curtly told her not to interfere. Okay, he admitted it: it was a risk, but what did she expect if they were going to make that kind of money?

He sat in the deep armchair, his feet resting on the thick pile of the carpet and waited. There was a constant stream of men with brief cases coming to the desk. The girl handled them with the kindly, patronizing smile that made Harry itch to smack her.

She passed them on to various small boys who took them away down the corridor and out of Harry's sight. Still he sat there, smoking.

Thirty-five minutes and four cigarettes later, the boy who had taken his note came down the long corridor and went over to the girl at the reception desk. He said something to her, and Harry, who was watching her, saw her eyebrows shoot up.

"It's okay for you to see Mr. Takamori," she said and smiled.

The smile was no longer patronizing. She was friendly and startled.

"I told you, didn't I?" Harry said and went after the boy who took him to a small elevator, whisked him up three floors, then conducted him down a passage to a solid walnut door before which the boy paused. He seemed to be gathering his strength and courage before he knocked. When he had knocked, a faint sound came from beyond the door. The boy turned the handle and let the door swing open. He stood aside, and Harry walked into a vast, luxurious office, panelled with polished walnut. He felt the pile of the carpet tickling his ankles as he crossed the room to the big desk behind a huge window that looked out on the east side of Los Angeles.

At the desk sat a little yellow man in a black coat and black-and-white check trousers, his greying hair slicked down, his small, compact face as expressionless as a hole in a wall.

He looked at Harry and waved a small, perfectly groomed hand towards a chair by the desk. Harry sat down, put his hat on the floor beside him, and

blew a cloud of cigarette smoke towards the ceiling.

"It is Mr. Griffin—Harry Griffin?" the little man at the desk said, looking at Harry with bright, bird-like eyes.

"That's right," Harry said. "You are Mr. Takamori?"

The little man nodded, reached out his hand and picked up Harry's note.

"You say here that you want to talk to me about diamonds. He dropped the note on his desk and sat back, folding his hands on the snowy white blotter. "What do you know about diamonds, Mr. Griffin?"

"Nothing," Harry said. "I happened to see in the newspaper a few days ago that you had persuaded the U.S. Consulate to allow you to export three million dollars' worth of diamonds. The following morning I saw in the paper that the diamonds had been stolen. I thought you might be interested in getting them back."

Takamori looked thoughtfully at him.

"Yes, I should be interested," he said.

"I thought you would be." Harry paused to flick ash off his cigarette, then he went on. "A day after the robbery, I happened to be driving to Sky Ranch airport on business and about two miles from the scene of the robbery I got a flat. I fixed it. I had some sandwiches with me and I thought I might just as well have lunch as I had stopped as to wait until I reached the airport. I went over to a sandhill and sat down. Half hidden in the sand was a square-shaped steel box. I had a little trouble in opening it as it was locked, but I got it open after a while. It was full of diamonds. There was also an invoice in the box that told me the diamonds came from the Far Eastern Trading Corporation and I realized they were the stolen diamonds. From the way the box was lying, it seems likely the thieves lost their nerve and threw the box out of the car window. I was going to hand the diamonds to the police, but the idea came to me that you and I might do a deal."

Takamori leaned forward to stare at Harry.

"You actually have the diamonds?" he asked. His voice was as unexcited as if he were asking Harry the time of day.

"I actually have them," Harry said.

Takamori sat back. He rubbed the side of his small, yellow nose with the forefinger of his right hand.

"I see," he said, "and you thought you and I might do a deal. That is interesting. What kind of a deal had you in mind, Mr. Griffin?"

Harry stretched out his long legs. He stubbed out his cigarette in the crystal glass bowl on the occasional table at his side. He took another cigarette from his case and lit it. All the time he was doing this he stared into the dark, glittering eyes of Takamori.

“A business deal,” he said. “It seems to me—and correct me if I am wrong—that when someone has something that another party wants very badly, the someone would be a mug to hand it over for nothing.”

Takamori picked up a paper knife and examined it as if he had never seen it before.

“That is the basis of business, Mr. Griffin,” he said mildly, “but I understand in this country such a formula does not apply when dealing with stolen property. I understand it is not only the duty but the obligation of the finder to return what he has found and accept the reward. Is that not so?”

Harry smiled. He was feeling more at ease now, but he wasn't fooled by Takamori's mild manner.

“I guess that's right,” he said, “but I had another angle on this particular setup. I understand these diamonds are insured and that the brokers are covering you.”

“The brokers will cover me, Mr. Griffin, when they are quite sure the diamonds are not going to be recovered.”

“Yeah, that's the usual way the brokers work. They keep you waiting for your money, but that shouldn't bother you. From what I hear you have a lot of money, but what you haven't got is recognition and honours from your government. I've been digging into your background. It seems you've done quite a lot of good work for your country without much reward.”

Takamori laid down the paper knife “Should we keep to the point, Mr. Griffin?” he said, a slight rasp in his voice. “You were talking about finding the diamonds. I take it you propose to sell them to me.”

Harry leaned back in his chair.

“That's the idea.”

“And how much would you want for them?”

“It's not as easy as that,” Harry said. “Taking cash presents difficulties. I want you to finance an idea of mine. It would be less tricky for me to make an arrangement like that.”

Takamori went back to his inspection of the paper knife.

“What would the amount involve, Mr. Griffin, always supposing the

arrangement interested me?"

"It would run out at about a million and a half. The way I've planned it I couldn't take less."

"That is a lot of money," Takamori said, testing the point of the paper knife on the ball of his thumb. He seemed to find it sharp for he frowned and examined his thumb to see if he had drawn blood: he hadn't. "It has occurred to you, Mr. Griffin, that Chief of Police O'Harridan could not only persuade you to hand over the diamonds for nothing, but even arrange for you to remain in prison for some considerable time."

Harry shrugged.

"He wouldn't persuade me to hand over the diamonds. I have them in a place where they won't be found. I agree he might be able to put me in prison, but I doubt it. It would be your word against mine, wouldn't it?"

"Not entirely," Takamori said. "This conversation is being recorded on a tape machine. I have only to hand the tape to O'Harridan and he would have no difficulty in prosecuting you."

Glorie had warned Harry that the conversation might be recorded and he had laughed at her. Now he knew she was right, he still wasn't flustered.

"Okay," he said, leaning forward, "you have enough on your recorder to put me in prison. I admit it. Now suppose you turn it off so we can talk off the record. If my proposition doesn't suit you, send for the police, but at least listen to what I have to say. I'm not talking until you turn the recorder off."

Takamori laid down the paper knife, again scratched his nose with the forefinger of his right hand, then he leaned forward and pressed down a button on his desk.

"The recorder is now no longer working, Mr. Griffin. What is your proposal?"

"Mind if I convince myself that it isn't working?"

Takamori opened a drawer in his desk.

"By all means."

Harry got up, peered at the recorder, nodded and sat down again.

"Right. Now let's talk business. You have taken eighteen months to collect the diamonds and to get permission to export them. For this you are being received by your Emperor and he will honour you. I was in Japan, Mr. Takamori, during the war. I know a little of the background of your race, and I know you prize an audience with your Emperor pretty highly. You won't get

the audience if you don't produce the diamonds. Okay, you can sick the cops on to me, but if you do, you'll never get the diamonds. There are plenty of other guys who can handle the diamonds and will be glad to take them off me. I had nothing to do with the robbery. My crime is finding the diamonds and asking money for them: that'll rate about three years; maybe if I come up against a tough judge, I'll draw five. I'm twenty-eight. In five years' time I shall be thirty-three, still young enough to enjoy the money I shall get for the diamonds when I sell them. In five years' time you'll be around seventy-three: you won't have all that time to enjoy an honour your Emperor may or may not give you if you dig up another batch of diamonds if—repeat if—the authorities here let you export them which I can't see them doing.” He stubbed out his cigarette and lit another while he stared at the expressionless, yellow face. “Rather than disappoint your Emperor and lose face, rather than wait to see if you can dig up another batch of diamonds, I think you'd be smart to deal with me. The way I see it, you will not only have the diamonds and your honour, but you will also clean up a profit of a million and a half bucks, and that sounds a pretty sound proposition to me.”

Takamori leaned back in his chair, his black, glistening eyes resting on Harry's face.

“You have a persuasive manner, Mr. Griffin. How do you suggest I should make a profit on the deal?”

“It's obvious, isn't it? The diamonds are insured. The brokers eventually will pay up in full. You will get three million bucks within a year. You will have the diamonds. You don't have to tell the brokers you have got them back. You will finance my company for a million and a half and the other million and a half goes into your pocket. Simple, isn't it?”

“It would appear so,” Takamori said. “What is this company you suggest I finance?”

“I want to start an air-taxi service. I have all the dope here.”

Harry took out a bulky envelope from his pocket and put it on the desk. “I'll leave this with you. You will want to study it. You can have a ten percent share in the business if it interests you. I'll make it pay. You don't have to worry about that. All I want is the capital, and that's what you've got. I don't expect an immediate decision, but for your own sake, don't take too long to make up your mind.” He got to his feet. “It may occur to you that, if you go ahead with this deal, you will be making yourself a first-rate target for

blackmail. Maybe you are, but so am I. This is a partnership: if either member of the partnership tries to double cross the other, there is a blow back to the double crosser. It's not as if I'm going to disappear. If you finance me I'll have a business to look after, and you can always find me. To a certain extent we'll have to trust each other. I could go to jail for finding the diamonds; you could go to jail for twisting the insurance companies. Think it over. I'll be back at this time on Thursday. That'll give you forty-eight hours in which to decide. I'm taking a chance on you. For all I know the police will be waiting for me when I come back. I'm risking that. If they are here then you can kiss the diamonds good-bye."

Leaving Takamori fiddling with the paper knife, Harry crossed the room, opened the door and let himself out.

When he reached the main lobby, the girl at the reception desk came to meet him.

"Excuse me, Mr. Griffin, Mr. Takamori just phoned through. You haven't left him your address."

Harry hesitated. Was Takamori going to slick the cops on to him: have him arrested? If that was his intention he could do it when Harry called on him.

"I'm at the Ritz, room 257," Harry said.

"Thank you, Mr. Griffin. I'll tell Mr. Takamori."

III

Borg moved ponderously across the room and settled his vast bulk in the armchair facing Ben Delaney's desk. He pushed his black slouch hat to the back of his head, and taking out a dirty handkerchief, he wiped his forehead while he breathed asthmatically, his great chest heaving as he struggled to get more air into his lungs.

"Now look, Borg," Ben said, resting his hands on his blotter and leaning forward, "forget what I said on the telephone the other night. I was rattled. Okay, so I've been taken for a ride. I've lost fifty grand. Sooner or later anyone with dough gets taken: I don't care who it is. I've decided to write it off to experience. Even if I got the diamonds now, they'd be too hot to handle. O'Harridan is really working on this thing. I'd have to sit on those rocks for five or six years and even then I'd be sticking my neck out. Killing the guard fixed it, and to make matters worse, one of the passengers on the aircraft was a senator, and he's really riding O'Harridan ragged."

Borg thrust a long, dirty fingernail inside his right ear and began to work it around, his small, hard eyes cloudy. He didn't appear to be listening with much interest.

"So I'm writing off the loss and forgetting it," Ben said. "I want you back here, Borg. You've got the setup organized. I know I got pretty tough on the telephone, but I was rattled. Well, forget it. The boys haven't been the same without you to chase them. From the way they have been lying down on the job, I could lose a damn sight more than fifty grand wasting time trying to find this punk Green. He'll cut his own throat. Just let him try to put those rocks on the market and see how quick he'll get picked up."

Borg removed his fingernail from his ear and inspected the lump of wax he had pried loose. He wiped his finger on his dirty trench coat and drew in another long, laboured breath, but he didn't say anything.

Ben moved restlessly. He was worried. Without Borg at the helm, the organization had taken a knock. The boys weren't working and the takings had dropped. There had been a couple of fights, and some small-time punk had tried to hold up one of his nightclubs. All because Borg hadn't been there to watch his interests. Ben knew he was getting old. He didn't want to be

bothered with the administration of his organization. All he wanted now was the money and the time to spend it. He realized he had talked out of turn to Borg, and now he was getting as close as he had ever got to apologizing to anyone.

“So look Borg, just take over and forget Green. There's a lot of work for you to do. It keeps piling up. Mitski wants talking to. He pulled a knife on Little Joe last night. We can't have that sort of thing happening. See what you can do about it, will you?”

Borg felt inside his coat, took out a limp pack of cigarettes and fed a cigarette into his mouth. He lit it with a worn, brass lighter that had flared up like a bonfire, and he had trouble in putting it out.

“Not me,” he said, staring at Ben. “It's time I had a vacation. I've been working for you now for two years. All that time I've never had ten minutes to myself. I've got all the dough I want and I don't need work. I'm quitting for a while.”

Ben's face tightened.

“You can't do this to me. You can't get out of the racket, and you know it. Okay, so you can use a little more money. I'll raise your cut to twenty-five per cent of the gross. How's that?”

Borg shook his head.

“I told you: I've got all the dough I want. What I'm after now is a little excitement and looking for Green is going to provide it.” His fat face creased into what was supposed to be a smile, but its effect made a chill run up Ben's spine. “Before you turned into a businessman, Mr. Delaney, I had the work I liked. You told me to take care of a guy and I took care of him. Know what my idea of a good time is? I'll tell you. I like to sit in a car on a dark, wet night, waiting for a guy to come out of his home. That's what I like. I like the waiting with a rod in my hand knowing I can't miss, hearing the bang of the gun and seeing the guy take it, and then the quick getaway. That's what I like, but it doesn't happen anymore. We're acting like a lot of financiers. All we think about is making a fast, but safe buck. I'm fed up with it. Green double-crossed you, but you don't care. You've got too much money. Two years ago, you wouldn't have told me to find him, you'd have found him yourself. Okay, if that's the way you want it, that's the way you want it, but it isn't the way I want it.”

“Those days are over,” Ben said. “You should know that. Two years ago

you could get away with the rough stuff, but you can't now. You're nuts to think . . . “

“Yeah, maybe I'm nuts,” Borg said, “but I get a lot of fun out of it I'm going to look for Harry Green. I don't care how long it takes, but I'm going to find him. I'm going after him for the fun of it. He doesn't owe me anything. He didn't double cross me, but he's a smart punk who needs stopping. You can keep your women, your money, your soft bed and your big house. That's not my idea of fun. Give me a guy to hunt; someone who is as smart as I am, who'll turn when I've cornered him so I have to be quicker on the trigger than he is. That's my idea of spending a vacation, and that's what I'm going to do.”

Ben knew from experience it was no use arguing with Borg.

“Okay, I can't stop you,” he said. “When you've got this out of your system, will you come back here?”

“Sure,” Borg said. “This is a vacation. When I've found and killed him I'll be glad to come back, but I've got to find him first. His thick lips lifted off his teeth. “And I've got to kill him.”

“If the cops can't find him, how do you expect to find him?”

Borg lifted his black eyebrows.

“You said a smart thing, Mr. Delaney, when you told me to check on Glorie Dane,” he said. “I have an idea that where she is Harry Green will be. They have fifty grand of your money to spend. Maybe they won't get rid of the diamonds, but fifty grand is big enough money to make a noise when a couple like Green and Glorie Dane start throwing it around. I've got good ears. I'll find them.”

IV

There was nothing now to do but wait, and waiting made Harry nervous. To while away the time, he had gone to a movie, but although the film was a good one, his mind was too preoccupied to take any interest in it.

He had planted the seed, but whether it would germinate or not remained to be seen. Takamori had given nothing away.

Harry had had dealings with the Japs during the war and he knew they were tricky. But he was sure that his argument had been psychologically sound. Takamori wanted the diamonds more than he wanted anything else in the world, and a guy with all his money got the things he wanted. It wasn't likely that Takamori would turn him over to the police. Harry felt confident about The real danger would be when Harry handed over the diamonds. That's when Takamori might try a double cross It was after nine when he left the movie house. It was a dark wet night, and he walked along the street towards his hotel, his hands deep in his coat pockets, his hat pulled down low over his He didn't notice a long, black Cadillac that was parked a few yards from the entrance to the hotel and as he passed it, he heard his name called softly.

He stopped abruptly and looked towards the car A chauffeur in fawn uniform with blue facings sat at the wheel. He was Japanese. He looked stolidly in from of him motionless like a little yellow image Takamori sat at the back of the car he looked through the window at Harry and waved to him.

Harry crossed the sidewalk to the car.

"If you have the time, Mr. Griffin, perhaps we could have another talk?" Takamori said. "Will you get in?"

Harry grinned. He felt sure then that he had won. Takamori would never have come like this, he told himself, without a police escort, unless he was ready to play.

As Harry sank into the luxurious seat beside Takamori, he thought with a surge of excitement that before very long he would own a car like this. A million and a half bucks! That was a lot of money. Even after buying two kites, he would still have plenty to throw around.

"I thought it would be more convenient to talk in the car, Takamori said,

“than to talk in my office where we might be overheard. My chauffeur speaks only Japanese, so you need have no fear of being overheard by him.”

“That's okay,” Harry said. “Did you read the papers I left you?”

“I looked at them,” Takamori said. “I can't say I read them as aeroplanes don't interest me. I admit they are a means of transport and a sign of progress, but I am prejudiced in favour of ships. As a trader, Mr. Griffin, you can appreciate that ships are more useful to me.” He took the envelope that Harry had given him from his pocket and dropped it into Harry's lap. “As an investment, Mr. Griffin, I doubt if it would interest me. No, I'm afraid your suggestion that I should finance such a company has fallen on stony ground—that I believe is the phrase?”

Harry looked sharply at him. This was unexpected and it jarred him.

“Well, okay,” he said and slipped the envelope into his pocket.

“If you're not interested in having ten per cent, then you're not. That won't stop me going ahead. I'm sold on this idea. I know I can make a go of it if I get the capital. You're willing to put the capital up, aren't you?”

“I don't think so,” Takamori said. He played with the tassel on the hand-grip hanging near his head. “I only finance companies if I have a controlling interest in them, and this idea of yours doesn't appeal to me.”

Harry felt a hot surge of rage run through him.

“Are you telling me you don't want the diamonds?” he demanded.

“Of course I want them,” Takamori said and smiled, “but as they are my property I have no intention of paying for them.”

“Yeah?” Harry said, his face red and his eyes gleaming. “Okay, then you can whistle for them. I'll find someone else who'll take them. Stop the car and let me out.”

“I would be obliged if you would listen to me for a few moments,” Takamori said politely. “When you called on me, you had the advantage of—what was the phrase you used?—diggin into my background I believe it was. You came to me as I complete stranger, and I was forced to listen to your proposal at a considerable disadvantage. You assumed that I was a dishonest man. That, Mr. Griffin, was a grave mistake to make of anyone you don't know intimately. You suggested that I should swindle the insurance companies for one and a half million dollars. If I had agreed to do that, you would have felt in a safe position because you would then have been in the position to blackmail me if I didn't make good my promise to you concerning

this air-taxi business of yours. But I have never allowed myself to be placed in a position to be blackmailed, and I would most certainly not do so late in life. But—and here you were right, Mr. Griffin—I do need the diamonds. I need them very badly.”

“Well, I'm not stopping you having them. The price is one and a half million dollars,” Harry said. “No money, no diamonds.”

“I felt you might take that attitude,” Takamori said mildly. “Tell me, Mr. Griffin, if you had the choice between that sum of money and death, which would you choose?”

“Look,” Harry said, twisting around in his seat to glare at the little man, “let's cut this out. Do you want the diamonds or don't you?”

“Certainly I do. My question is do you wish to go on living?”

Harry stiffened.

“What the hell do you mean?”

“What I say. Let me continue, Mr. Griffin, and then you will understand your position as it is now and not as it was this morning. You had the advantage of making enquiries about my background. Since this morning, I have had enquiries made about yours. I have learned that you were employed by the Californian Air Transport Corporation four weeks ago. That made interesting news. I hear you were to fly the aircraft that carried the diamonds had you not been discharged for drunkenness and for molesting one of the air hostesses. You knew about the consignment. The man who planned the robbery called himself Harry Green. He was a larger man than you, older, with a scar, and he was going bald. Anyone clever enough could disguise himself to look older and larger, and it would be simple to fake a scar. Harry Green knew where he could land the aircraft safely in the desert and that suggests to me he had flown over the route a number of times and had familiarized himself with the terrain as you must have done, Mr. Griffin. It seems to me that Harry Green and Harry Griffin are one and the same, and I believe that Harry Green is wanted for murder.” He paused, then went on, “That's why I asked you if you wished to go on living. As far as I can see your chances of survival are slight. What do you think?”

Listening to the soft voice, Harry felt a cold knot of fear tightening inside him. His hand slid inside his coat and his fingers closed around the butt of his gun.

“You're crazy!” he said huskily. “I told you! I found those diamonds! I had

nothing to do with the robbery.”

“I see.” Takamori lifted his shoulders. “Well, I admit I could be mistaken, but it is easy enough to prove. The police have Harry Green's fingerprints if one is to believe the newspapers. Shall we drive to police headquarters and let the police compare your prints with those of Green's?”

“Listen, you yellow snake,” Harry snarled, jerking out his gun and ramming it into Takamori's side, “you don't scare me. If you give me away to the police, you'll never see the diamonds. I promise you that.”

Takamori looked down at the gun.

“There's no need for violence, Mr. Griffin,” he said. “Please put that gun away. Reckless as you are, I can't imagine you should shoot me in a crowded street like this.”

Harry hesitated, then shoved the gun back into its holster.

He realized the jam he was in. The gamble had failed to come off. He was out in the open. He had thrown away the cover Glorie had given him. He had only one card to play now. He had the diamonds.

“Well, okay,” he said, “I admit you've got the edge of the bargain. I'll cut my price. Give me five hundred thousand and you can have the diamonds.”

Takamori shook his head.

“I told you, Mr. Griffin, I never pay for something that belongs to me. I will exchange your life for the diamonds. That is to say if you hand over the diamonds, I won't tell the police what I have found out about you.”

Harry glared at him. His dream of owning a million and a half dollars was fading so rapidly that the disappointment and the frustration turned him sick.

“Do you think I'd be crazy enough to trust you?” he said furiously. “If I gave you the diamonds you could still give me way to the police. I don't trust you.”

“And yet you have no reason not to,” Takamori said quietly.

“I am not interested in you nor in helping your police. This isn't my country and I have no duties as a citizen. All I am interested in is getting the diamonds back. This is what you must do. Pack the diamonds and send them to me by mail so that they reach me without fail the day after tomorrow. If they do not arrive by that time I shall tell the police what I have found out about you. It won't take them long to pick you up. If, however, the diamonds arrive by first post the day after tomorrow, then I give you my word to say nothing to anyone about you. That is the only deal I will make with you. I

don't expect you to decide now. Think it over.” He leaned forward and tapped on the glass partition. His chauffeur touched his cap, slowed down and pulled up by the kerb. Takamori opened the car door.

“I must ask you to get out, Mr. Griffin,” he said. “Think about what I have said. I am sure you will see on reflection that my suggestion is the only one open to you.”

Harry got out of the car. He was stunned by the way the talk had gone.

“Good night, Mr. Griffin,” Takamori said, and as the big Cadillac pulled away, he raised his hand in a courteous salute.

V

Borg paused below the fire escape that ran up to the bathroom window of Glorie's old apartment. He had been told by his man that the door to Glorie's apartment was bolted on the inside, and the escape was the only way by which he could get in. The alley at the back of the building was deserted and Borg hooked down the escape and climbed it. As he passed one of the lower windows he heard a radio blaring in the apartment. He was careful not to let his shadow fall across the window. He finally reached the bathroom window and he stopped beside it, wheezing noisily as he listened for any sound coming from the room. He heard nothing, nor did he expect to hear anything. He pushed up the window and squeezed his bulk into the bathroom.

He searched the three rooms, methodically and carefully, looking through the drawers and cupboards. He found the apartment just as Glorie had left it ten days ago. Even the dirty dishes still lay in the sink and the bed was unmade.

He was interested to find a man's suit in the wardrobe, and a man's hat with the initials H.G. in the sweat band. In one of the drawers of the chest there were five white shirts, also with the initials H.G. on the collar bands, and he scratched the back of his thick, fat neck while he brooded over the discovery. H.G.—Harry Green? He remembered Delaney had told him that Glorie had said she didn't know much about Harry Green, but that didn't mean anything. He returned the shirts to the drawer and took out his limp pack of cigarettes. He lit a cigarette before renewing his search. He found a railway timetable in the trash basket. It opened easily at the New York section. A midday train to New York had been ticked in pencil. He remembered Taggart had lost Glorie somewhere in the vicinity of the station. It was possible she had spotted Taggart and had taken fright. New York was a likely bolthole.

He remained in the apartment for more than an hour, but he didn't discover anything else of interest, and finally he let himself out, re-locked the door and plodded down to the next floor.

Borg was enjoying himself. This was a nice, easy and interesting job: a lot better than driving around for Delaney or sitting at a desk listening to the dreary lies from Delaney's collectors.

He paused outside the door to the apartment on the next floor, and read the card on the door: *Miss Joan Goldman*. He pushed his black, greasy hat to the back of his head and dug his thumb into the bell push. .

The door was opened by a tall, moon-faced girl in a soiled housecoat. Borg thought she looked the kind of girl who would live alone with a cat for company, and be glad of the cat.

"Miss Goldman?" Borg asked in his wheezy, husky voice.

"That's right. What is it?"

"I'm looking for Miss Dane. She doesn't appear to be in."

"She isn't. I think she's away."

"Is that right? I was hoping to see her. I understand she's friendly with Harry Green."

Joan Goldman's face showed her interest.

"Green? You mean Griffin, don't you?"

"Do I?" Borg groped inside his coat and produced a soiled, much-thumbed notebook. "Yeah, that's right," he went on after pretending to consult a blank page. "Harry Griffin: that's the guy. Do you know him?"

"What is this?" the girl asked sharply. "Who are you?"

Borg took a card from the notebook and pushed it at her.

"Alert Enquiry Agency," he said. "The name's Borg. B for butter, O for orange, R for ravioli and G for goulash: Borg."

There were moments when Borg prided himself on his sense of humour that amused no one but himself, and this was one of them.

The girl looked startled.

"You mean you're a detective?"

"Private investigator," Borg said. "Can I come in or do you like this draught that's blowing me into a lung hospital?"

"Why, yes, come in." She stood aside and let him in.

Borg took up his position with his back to the fireplace. He was enjoying himself. Harry Griffin, he thought. He would rather have heard the guy's name was Harry Green, but, never mind, something might come of it.

"Is Mr. Griffin in trouble?" the girl asked and Borg could see she was burning up with curiosity.

"He could be," Borg said. "Miss Dane a friend of yours?"

"I don't know that she's a friend. We're neighbours. I pass the time of day with her, but I couldn't say we were friends. Is she in trouble?"

"I don't know. This guy Griffin has a way with women. Miss Dane got any money?"

"Not that I know of. She's been out of a job for some time. At one time She worked at the Daffodil club. That was about eighteen months ago, but she hadn't done anything since. No, I wouldn't say she had any money."

"That's her good luck. Griffin specializes in getting money out of women."

The girl looked shocked.

"I wouldn't have thought it. Are you sure you're not confusing him with someone else?"

Borg's eyes went sleepy.

"I guess not. What's this guy like, you know?"

"Why, he's tall and handsome. Dark hair, around twenty-eight. When he came to see Glorie in his uniform I thought he looked a little like Gregory Peck."

"What uniform?" Borg asked casually.

"He was a pilot for the C.A.T.C. I did hear he had left them. Glorie said something about him looking for another job. That's when he moved into her apartment." She sniffed. "They weren't married, of course, but that's their business. You can't live other people's lives, can you?"

"I guess that's right. When did he leave the C.A.T.C.?"

"About three or four weeks ago."

Borg produced a photograph of Harry Green he had taken the trouble to buy from the Photomat shop in Essex Street.

"Is that the guy?"

The girl examined the photograph and handed it back.

"Why, no. It's not a bit like him. Mr. Griffin was young and he didn't have a scar. Is that the man you're looking for?"

Borg nodded. He put the photograph back into his notebook and the notebook back into his pocket.

"The trouble with my job" he said as he heaved himself towards the door, "is there are too many punks ready to give me a bum steer. I thought I was on to the right guy for a change. You don't know where I can find Miss Dane?"

"No, I don't." The girl was looking bewildered. The janitor might know."

"Never mind," Borg said. "I don't suppose it matters."

He thudded down the stairs, holding on to the banister rail.

He paused in the hall and brooded, then he went down the passage to the

janitor's office. The janitor was a skinny little man with a prominent Adam's apple that bobbed up and down in his throat like a yo-yo on a string. Borg loomed over him, staring down at him, his eyes bleak and unfriendly.

"You the janitor?" he demanded, and poked at the little man with a finger as thick as a sausage.

"That's right," the janitor said, backing away.

"I'm looking for Glorie Dane. Where is she?"

"What do you want her for?" the janitor asked, backing further away as Borg edged his gross body against him.

"I want her. She's in trouble. Where is she?"

The janitor licked his lips. His Adam's apple flopped up and down.

"She told me not to give her address to anyone," he said feebly. "What sort of trouble, mister?"

"I got a summons for her. If you want me to call a cop to talk to you, say so," Borg snarled.

"Well, she asked me to forward her mail to the Maddox hotel, New York."

Borg stared at him.

"I hope that's right," he said. "If it isn't I'll be back and you'll be sorry."

He walked away down the passage to the front door, leaving the janitor staring after him. He was whistling softly under his breath as he struggled into his car and set it moving.

He drove four blocks, turned left and pulled up outside the dingy entrance to the Daffodil club. Leaving his car, he walked down the stairs to the small, shabby foyer. At this hour in the afternoon the manager of the club, a thin, sharp-featured Mexican, was taking it easy, his feet on his desk, his eyes closed, his hands folded over the beginning of a paunch.

His office door stood open, and he looked up as he heard Borg's heavy breathing. When he saw who it was, he reacted as if he had seen a cobra.

Slowly and with exaggerated care, he removed his feet from the desk and sat up. He placed his hands on the desk.

"Hello, Sydney," Borg said, propping himself up against the doorpost. "Long time no see."

"Yeah," the Mexican said. "That's right. Anything I can do for you, Mr. Borg?"

"I'm looking for Glorie Dane. Remember her?"

"Why, sure. I haven't seen her for months."

"I didn't think you had. Got a photograph of her, Sydney?"

The Mexican's black eyes opened wide.

"Is she in trouble?"

"No. I just want to talk to her."

The Mexican pulled open a drawer in his desk, took out a bundle of half-plate, glossy photographs, skimmed through them, took one from the pack and dropped it on the desk.

"That's her."

Borg's dirty fingers closed on the photograph. He stared at it for some seconds.

"Not bad. I've seen worse. This like her?"

"It was taken two years ago. She's a little worn at the edges now, I guess. But you'd know it was her if you saw her."

Borg nodded, put the photograph between the pages of his notebook and the notebook back into his pocket. He turned and plodded out of the office.

"You're sure she's not in trouble?" the Mexican asked. "She was a nice girl. I never had any bother with her when she was here. I wouldn't . . ."

He stopped short as he found himself talking to the air.

By then Borg had dragged his bulk up the stairs and had got into his car.

He was coming along, he told himself as he started the engine.

Could this Griffin guy be Harry Green? Everything pointed to it. He'd been a pilot, and it was obvious that Harry Green had also been a pilot. Griffin had worked for the C.A.T.C., and he had had the means of knowing about the diamonds. Borg thought that he was on the right track. He revved the engine and sent the car away fast.

Forty minutes later, he was being shown into the Personnel Manager's office of the C.A.T.C. The Personnel Manager, a thickset, friendly looking man with rimless glasses, regarded Borg unfavourably. On the desk was a small wooden plaque bearing the name: *Herbert Henry*.

Borg removed his hat and sank his bulk into a chair by Henry's desk.

"What can I do for you?" Henry asked. He looked at the card

Borg had sent in, frowned at it and laid it down.

"You had a guy working for you some weeks ago," Borg said. "Harry Griffin. Remember him?"

Henry's face clouded.

"Yes, of course. What about him?"

"I'm trying to find him."

"I can't help you. I haven't seen him since he left the company."

"He's left town," Borg said. "I hear he's somewhere in New York."

"Why this enquiry? Is he in trouble?"

"No. I've been hired by Gregson and Lawson, the attorneys, to find him. He's come into some money and they want to deliver."

Henry's face relaxed and his suspicions went away.

"I'm glad to hear that. Is it much?"

Borg lifted his heavy shoulders.

"Well, no, but it's worth having. Something like two thousand dollars, but if I don't find him fast, it'll all go in my expenses. I don't even know what the guy looks like. You wouldn't have a photograph of him, would you?"

"I guess so," Henry said and pressed on a buzzer. When a girl came in he told her to get Griffin's file.

She came back after five minutes or so and handed the file to Henry.

"I'm glad he's had this bit of luck," Henry said, as he flicked through the pages of the file. "He was a good pilot, and I was sorry he left."

"I heard he was run out," Borg said, making a guess.

Henry frowned.

"There was some trouble. It was his hard luck more than anything else." He flicked a half-plate photograph across the desk.

"I can let you have that if it's any use to you."

Borg gathered up the photograph, glanced at it, nodded and straggled to his feet.

"I guess I'll find him with this," he said. "I'll tell him you gave me the photo. Maybe he'll buy you a drink."

He plodded to the door, opened it and went out to his car.

When he had put several miles between himself and the airport, he pulled up and took out the photograph Henry had given him and studied it. He studied it for a long time, then he took a pencil from his pocket and very lightly sketched in a moustache, a scar and filled out the lean, hard face that looked at him from the glossy surface of the photograph.

He stared at it for a few seconds, held it out at arm's length and stared at it again. Then a sly, cruel smile lit up his fat face.

"Yeah. I think I know who you are, you sonofabitch," he said softly. "I think you're the boy I'm hunting for."

chapter five

I

Joe Dodge, the hotel detective at the Maddox hotel, New York, crouched over a racing sheet, an intent, worried expression on his lean, foxy face. For the past week he had consistently backed a series of losers, and his financial future now depended on his selection from the list of the afternoon's runners.

If he made a mistake, he would be in trouble, and the thought made him sweat.

He sat in his small office which was off the reception hall of the hotel. The room was cloudy with cigarette smoke and the ashtray on his desk was crammed with butts: proof of his nervous concentration. He was so preoccupied with his task that he didn't hear Borg enter the room, and it was only when Borg cleared his throat noisily that he became aware that he wasn't alone. He looked up, frowning. When he saw Borg, his frown deepened.

"What do you want?" he said curtly. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Yeah, I'm not blind," Borg said and pulled up a straight-backed chair to the desk. He lowered his bulk on to it. "If you're looking for a winner try Red Admiral. At forty-four to one he'll be at the winning post before the rest get halfway."

Dodge's eyes narrowed. This was the kind of tip he was looking for.

"Who says so?"

"I do," Borg said, taking a cigarette from his limp pack and lighting it. "I saw that horse run at San Diego a couple of months ago. The jock was holding him in so hard he nearly bust the reins, and even at that, he came in second. If you don't want to make some dough, don't listen to me. Why should I care?"

Dodge pushed back his chair.

"I've had ten losers in a row. I can't afford to risk another one."

"That horse can't lose even if two of its legs fall off," Borg said, "but if you're scared of losing your own money, I might even be able to do something for you in that line."

Dodge pushed aside the racing sheet.

"Who are you and what do you want?" he demanded, his hard, mean little eyes searching Berg's face.

Borg took out one of his phony agency cards and flicked it across the desk. Dodge picked it up and stared at it.

"Alert Enquiry Agency?" he said, frowning. "That's a new one on me."

"We operate in Los Angeles," Borg said glibly. "I'm working on a nice case where money's no object. I've got an expense sheet that's yearning to be milked. I want a little information from you and I've got authority to pay for it."

Dodge leaned forward.

"What information?"

"I'm looking for a couple who could be registered here under the name of Griffin."

Dodge thought for a moment, then shook his head.

"No one staying here under that name."

Borg produced the photographs of Glorie and Harry he had acquired. He laid them on the desk.

"Those are the two. Know them?"

Dodge examined the photographs.

"Maybe. What's it worth?"

"It doesn't end there. You're in line for twenty-five bucks if you can earn it."

Dodge considered this. Twenty-five dollars would be a considerable help at this moment.

"I know them. They booked in three days ago. They registered as Mr. and Mrs. Harrison."

"Here now?"

"She is; he isn't. He left the day after they arrived. Said he would be back: some business trip."

"But she is?"

"That's right."

"Is she in now?"

Dodge got up.

"I'll find out."

Through the office doorway, Borg watched Dodge cross to the reception

desk, look at the key rack and then come back.

"No, she's out," he said, as he closed the office door and made his way around the desk to sit down again.

"I want to look at her room," Borg said.

"Can't be done. That's strictly against the rules of the hotel."

Borg suppressed a yawn.

"Well, okay, if that's the way you feel about it. I guess I won't waste any more of your time or mine either."

He made a show of heaving himself to his feet.

"Wait a minute," Dodge said. "You owe me some dough."

"That's right." Borg' rolled out a thick roll of bills. He opened the roll, pawed through the bills until he found a five-dollar bill which he tossed over to Dodge. "That's all I rate your information at up to now."

Dodge scowled.

"You said twenty-five. Look, mister, don't let's have any trouble. I want twenty-five."

"What you want and what you get depends on the service you give me," Borg said. "I'll pay a hundred bucks if you get me a room near hers and the pass key to her room for an hour. I'll want you to watch for her and when she comes back, to tip me."

He took two fifties from his roll and held them up for Dodge to see.

Dodge licked his lips.

"Cash on the barrel head?"

"Sure."

"Wait here." Dodge went out, shutting the office door behind him. He was away five minutes. When he returned, he put on the desk two keys.

"That's your room key. No. 334. She's right opposite at 335. That's the pass key. I'll call her room as soon as she shows."

Borg slid the two fifties across the desk. He picked up the keys as Dodge grabbed the bills. He got to his feet and, crossing the lobby, he took the elevator to the third floor and let himself into Room 334. He took off his hat and coat, opened his suitcase and took from it a coil of insulated wire, a set of tools in a leather wrapper and a small cardboard carton. He crossed the corridor and, using the pass key, he opened the door to No. 335.

He took a quick look around the room, then he closed the door and put his tools and wire on the bed. He opened the carton and took from it a small

microphone. This he laid in the transom above the door and screwed it into place. He attached two wires to it, threaded the wires through the transom and out into the corridor. He worked quickly and neatly, running the wire under the carpet that covered the corridor and across to his room.

Leaving the coil of wire on his bed, he returned to the opposite room and collected his tools. He looked around. Apart from two suitcases that hadn't been unpacked and a nightdress and silk wrap hanging on the back of the door, the room was unlivd in.

When he looked into the cupboards and drawers he found them empty. He decided Glorie didn't intend to stay at the hotel for long, and he reckoned he had arrived just in time. As he was about to leave the room, the telephone bell rang. He lifted the receiver.

"She's on her way up," Dodge told him.

Borg grunted and replaced the receiver. He left the room, locked the door and went across to his own room. He pushed the door nearly shut and waited.

After a few minutes, he heard the elevator doors clang back, then he heard someone coming quickly down the corridor. He peered through the crack between the doorpost and the door.

He didn't recognize Glorie. He had seen her once or twice when she had been around with Delaney but he had scarcely bothered to look at her. Women had never interested him. He considered them not only a gross waste of money, but an overrated pastime.

He watched the tall, slim girl, dressed in a black-and-white costume, grope in her bag for her key. She looked older than her photograph, Borg thought, tired and worried, but she was a looker in spite of the dark smudges under her eyes and her white, too-thin face.

She went into the room and shut the door.

Borg took from his suitcase a small amplifier and wired the microphone wires to it. He put on a pair of headphones, plugged the amplifier leads to the mains and switched on.

The microphone he had hidden in Glorie's room was exceptionally sensitive. He could hear her moving about, and when he listened carefully, he could hear her breathing. He lit a cigarette, settled down in his chair and waited.

Glorie had reason to look worried. She had been horrified when Harry had told her of his plan to contact Takamori, and when they had parted at the

airport, she was sure she wouldn't see him again. He had promised he would telephone her at four o'clock this afternoon. She had got back at twenty minutes to four, and now she sat down in the only armchair in the room to wait his call.

She was practically certain the call wouldn't come through. She had visions of him being in prison or even dead, and she waited, smoking cigarette after cigarette, trying to still the fear in her mind, and trying not to dwell on the possibilities of what could have happened to him.

But as the minute hand of her watch moved on to the hour, the telephone bell rang. She jumped up, knocking the ashtray off the arm of the chair, and snatched up the receiver.

"Glorie?" Harry's voice sounded far away over the crackling line.

"Oh yes, Harry. I've been so worried about you." The relief of hearing his voice made her feel faint.

"Listen!" He sounded curt and angry. "It didn't work. I can't talk over the phone. I'm catching a plane to Oklahoma City. I want you to meet me there. There's a six-ten plane out you can catch. It'll get you there in time to meet me. I'll arrive just after ten. Wait at the airport for me."

"Yes, darling. Wouldn't he take them?"

"He took them all right, but there's no dough," Harry said, his voice savage. "I'll tell you when we meet."

"Yes, Harry. Are you in trouble?"

"I don't think so. Don't talk now."

"All right, darling. I'll meet the ten o'clock plane at the Oklahoma City airport. Is that right?"

"That's right. I'll be seeing you," Harry said and hung up.

Listening in in the other room, Borg fished out another cigarette and lit it. He thought for a long moment, then he took off the headphones and dismantled the amplifier. He put the headphones and the amplifier in his suitcase, slipped on his coat, picked up his hat and let himself out of the room. He walked to the elevator and rode down to the reception hall.

Dodge came over.

"Okay?" he asked.

"Yeah," Borg said. "Who can tell me the next plane out to Oklahoma City?"

"I'll fix it," Dodge said and went over to the hall porter. After a brief

consultation he came back.

"There's a five o'clock and a six-ten," he told Borg.

Borg grunted, looked at his watch and decided he could make the five o'clock. He started towards the exit.

"Hey!" Dodge said. "You going?"

Borg didn't stop. He passed through the revolving doors, waved to a taxi, and said, "Airport, fast."

Dodge watched the taxi drive away, then frowning, he went to his office and sat down. He had laid Borg's money on Red Admiral, and now the race was about to start, he felt uneasy.

For the next twenty minutes, he sat watching the telephone, sweat beading his face. When his informant came through and told him Red Admiral had finished sixth, he slammed down the receiver and sat cursing. He was in trouble. He had to raise some money somehow and raise it quickly. Getting to his feet he opened his office door with the intentions of seeing if he could raise a loan from the hall porter, when he paused. Glorie was at the desk, paying her account. He saw her take from her purse a thick roll of bills, and his eyes narrowed. He waited until she had moved away from the reception desk, he crossed over to her.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Harrison," he said, "but I'd like a word with you in my office."

He saw alarm and fear jump into Glorie's eyes. This was going to be easier than he had thought. From experience he knew when they were scared, when they were soft.

"What is it?" Glorie asked, her voice unsteady.

"It won't take long," Dodge said. "Just come with me."

They walked together across the hall and into Dodge's office.

He shut the door and waved her to a chair.

"Sit down, Mrs. Harrison," he said.

Glorie sat down.

"I—I'm in a hurry. What is it, please?"

"I have some information you might like to buy," Dodge said, watching her closely.

Glorie stiffened.

"I might like to buy?" she repeated. "I don't understand what you mean."

"It's simple enough," Dodge said, with a foxy smile. "A guy has been here

making enquiries about you and your husband. If you want details it'll cost you two hundred bucks."

Glorie turned cold. She looked at her watch. Time was running out if she was to catch the six-ten plane.

"Who was it?" she asked huskily.

"A big, fat, dirty-looking punk with a long, black moustache," Dodge said. "He said he was working for the Alert Enquiry Agency."

Glorie went so white Dodge thought she was going to faint.

Borg! Ben's paid killer! she thought, her mind crawling with panic. That could only mean that Ben was after them!

Dodge continued to watch her, his hard little eyes glistening.

"If you want any more of the dope you'll have to buy it," he said.

With unsteady hands, Glorie opened her bag, took out four fifty-dollar bills and put them on the desk.

Dodge picked them up, examined them and slid them into his hip pocket.

"This guy had photographs of you and your husband," he said. "He said your name was Griffin. He showed me the photographs and I identified you and Mr. Harrison." When he saw how Glorie blanched, he began to wonder if he shouldn't have asked for a lot more than two hundred dollars. "He took a room opposite yours," he went on. "One of the bell hops reported to me he had seen this guy in your room. He was fixing a microphone so you can bet he listened in to anything you said if you used the telephone."

Glorie felt as if a splinter of ice had been driven into her heart. A microphone! Then Borg had heard her arrange to meet Harry at the Oklahoma City airport!

"He left about half an hour ago," Dodge went on. "He asked me what time the next plane to Oklahoma City left. He's catching the five o'clock plane if that's of any interest to you."

Glorie turned even colder. That must mean Borg would be at the airport when Harry arrived, she thought. She had heard tales about Borg from Delaney. He was one of the finest marksmen in the country. He would have no trouble in picking Harry off as he came from the aircraft. He had an hour's start. He would have time to find a hiding place and then all he had to do was to wait until Harry's aircraft landed and then shoot him as he made his way to the reception hall. How could she warn Harry?

She clenched her fists as she tried to think of some way to save him.

“I guess that's all,” Dodge went on. “You want to watch that fat guy. I didn't like the look of him.”

Glorie got to her feet. Without a word, she went out of Dodge's office, walked quickly across to where the bellhop waited with her suitcases.

“Get me a taxi to the airport,” she said, “and hurry!”

Dodge watched her, then, as the taxi took her away, he shrugged his shoulders and moved to his desk. He sat down and picked up the racing sheet. He began to concentrate on the next afternoon's runners.

II

Below him, Harry could see the lights of Oklahoma City airport as the aircraft came around in a wide circle before making its run in to land.

Harry was feeling a little high. While he had waited at the Los Angeles airport he had had four double whiskies, and he still felt their effect. As he sat waiting for the aircraft to land, he thought back on what had happened since Takamori had defeated him.

He had realized his only chance was to return the diamonds: his gamble had failed. He had returned to his hotel, taken the diamonds from the safe deposit, packed them and sent them to Takamori. It depended now on if he could trust Takamori to keep his side of the bargain. He thought he could. As Takamori had said, his only interest was to get the diamonds back. He didn't care what happened to Harry.

But Harry had thought it safer to get out of Los Angeles. He had decided that Oklahoma City was far enough away to be safe anyway until he knew what Takamori was going to do. From Oklahoma City he was in a position to go north or south, according to the situation as he would find it the next day.

During the flight from Los Angeles, he had considered his position. Instead of having a million and a half dollars, he now had only fifty thousand. Fifty thousand dollars was more money than he had ever owned in his life, but in comparison with what he had hoped to have, it was now to him a mere nothing.

There was now no possibility of going to Europe. Fifty thousand dollars represented his working capital, and he didn't intend to waste a cent of it. He could still buy himself a partnership in some air-taxi business, but as he had made up his mind to finance his own company, he was reluctant to give up the idea.

It would be tight going if he bought an aircraft with the amount of capital he had now. It could be done, but it would mean a long, dreary slog before he showed any profit, and he was reluctant to face up to that kind of hard work.

He was still turning the problem over in his mind as the aircraft touched down and taxied towards the battery of lights that lit up the end of the runway. He could see a group of people waiting and he looked for Glorie, but

couldn't see her.

As the engines died and the airhostess pushed open the door, Harry got to his feet and stepped out into the gangway. The plane was full, and it took him some minutes before he could walk down the gangway and out into the warm, night air. Then he saw Glorie and he waved. She ran over to him.

"Hello, there," he said. "Let's go somewhere where we can talk," Glorie said and, taking his arm, she manoeuvred him into the group of people who were moving towards the reception hall.

"Let them go ahead," he said, pulling back. "We're in no hurry."

"No, Harry, keep with them," Glorie said, and the note in her voice made him look sharply at her. Her white, strained face and the look of fear in her eyes jolted him. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"It's Borg," Glorie said, holding tightly on to his arm and keeping him moving so that he remained in the group that surged towards the reception hall. "He knows you're here. He's hiding somewhere. He's after us, Harry!"

Harry's heart skipped a beat. He lengthened his stride so that he could keep pace with the people around him, "Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"You mean he is actually here—where?"

"I don't know. I've looked for him, but I can't see him. He may be out there in the dark. He may be anywhere."

"He knows you: he doesn't know me," Harry said, a snarl in his voice. "Why the hell did you meet me? You've given me away!"

"I haven't." Glorie's voice shook. "He's got a photograph of us—you as well as me."

"A photograph of me? You mean of Harry Green, don't you?"

"No. I don't know how he got it, but he's got a photograph of you."

By now they had reached the reception hall and they walked into the buffet. The curtains were drawn across the windows and the big room was full of people waiting for their flights or waiting for their cars to take them away from the airport. The room gave Harry a feeling of safety.

"Sit where we can watch the door," he said.

They made their way across the room to an empty table and sat down. Harry slid his hand inside his coat and pulled out his gun. He held it in his lap. It was hidden by the table, but he could swing it into instant action by kicking the table away.

A waiter came over and Harry ordered two double whiskies.

He and Glorie sat side by side, not speaking until the waiter had served them. Then, when he had gone away, Harry said, "Let's get this straight. Do you mean he's got a photograph of me and not Harry Green?"

"Yes, the hotel detective said he recognized you from the photograph Borg showed him."

Harry began to sweat.

"Then he knows who I am? How the hell did he find out?" He turned to glare at Glorie. "Your smart idea's a damn washout, isn't it? What hotel detective? Tell me what's been happening."

Briefly Glorie told him about Dodge.

"I warned you, darling," she said. "I knew Ben would come after us. That awful man is dangerous. I've heard tales about him."

Harry knew Borg was dangerous without being told. He drank half his whisky, then lit a cigarette, his eyes never leaving the door across the room.

"You should have kept clear of me," he said. "The chances were he wouldn't have recognized me in the dark. But he couldn't have failed to spot you in that costume you're wearing. What the hell were you thinking of to wear a black-and-white thing like that? A blind man could spot you."

"I hadn't any time to change," Glorie said, "I only just caught the plane. I didn't know what to do. I had to warn you."

"We can't stay here all night," Harry said. "Did you fix a hotel?"

"No, darling. I've only been here half an hour, and I've been trying to find Borg."

"You seem to have made a complete mess of this," Harry said angrily. "So now we've nowhere to go?"

Glorie held on to herself with an Effort. She knew he was frightened and he was taking it out on her only because he was too scared to think what to do. She realized it would depend on her to get them out of this mess if they were going to get out of it.

"What happened to you, Harry? You didn't get the money?"

"No. That yellow snake guessed I'd pulled the robbery. I had to give him the diamonds for nothing."

Glorie went white.

"Is he telling the police?"

"He says not. I don't think he will. But to hell with him! We've got to do

something about Borg.”

“Look, Harry, will you stay here? He wouldn't dare do anything here. I'll get a car. I'll find a hotel. Stay here and wait for me.”

Harry scowled, but she could see the relief in his eyes.

“Well, I don't know. I suppose it's all right. He's not likely to do anything to you. Okay, I'll hang on here. See if you can get a car—but hurry!”

She got up and willed herself to walk across the room and into the reception hall.

He's not likely to do anything to you. Glorie wished she could believe that. If Ben had sent Borg after them, he would have told him to go for her as well as Harry. She knew Ben. He wouldn't let her get away with double crossing him.

She went to the exit and paused in the doorway looking out into the shadowy darkness. A line of taxis was drawn up across the way, but she wanted a private hire car. As she stood, looking to right and left, she heard a girl's voice saying, “For heaven's sake! Do you mean you haven't a pilot who can help me?”

Glorie looked over her shoulder.

A girl stood near her: she was slight and very blonde; her silky, straw-coloured hair lay on her shoulders in thick, heavy waves. She was wearing blue jeans and a well-worn suede windbreaker. Glorie thought she was around twenty-two or three, and, looking at her, she admired her hair and the straight way she held herself. She was talking to one of the airport officials.

“I'm sorry, Miss Graynor, but we can't help you,” he was saying. “All our pilots are working.”

“But look, my man is ill. He can't fly. I've got to get home tonight. You must do something.”

Glorie paused to listen.

The official shook his head, smiling apologetically.

“I really am sorry, but we haven't anyone. I wish I could help you. I can fix something for you first thing tomorrow morning if that'd be any use.”

“I can't wait until the morning. You don't know anyone who could fly me down—anyone.”

“I'm afraid not. Why don't you take the passenger service, Miss Graynor? Your man could bring the plane down When he's fit.”

The girl hesitated, then shrugged.

“Oh, well, yes, I guess I'd better do that.”

She turned away and almost cannoned into Glorie.

“Excuse me,” she said and sidestepped Glorie. .

“I couldn't help overhearing what you were saying,” Glorie said. “I might be able to help you.”

The girl stopped and looked at her. She was beautiful, Glorie thought enviously; young, clear-skinned, alive, with big, grey eyes.

“Help me? I don't think you can. I want a pilot.”

“My—my husband's a pilot,” Glorie said. “He's in the buffet now. Perhaps . . .”

The girl's eyes lit up.

“That'd be too good to be true,” she said. “But I'm going to Miami. He wouldn't want to go there, would he?”

“We don't mind where we go. We—we're on vacation. Were just in from Los Angeles, and we were only saying just now we didn't know where we should stop off next,” Glorie said, improvising hastily. “Will you come and meet him? I'm sure he would be willing to help you.”

“I think it's marvellous of you,” the girl said. “I suppose he has a licence?”

“Oh yes. He was a crew captain for the C.A.T.C. until recently.”

“That's wonderful. I'm Joan Graynor. I can't thank you enough, Mrs. . . ?”

“Griffin. I'm Glorie Griffin. My husband's Harry Griffin.”

“Well, let's go and talk to him.”

Together they crossed the reception hall and entered the buffet.

Harry stared at them as they came towards him. He hurriedly slid the gun into his trench-coat pocket and got up as Glorie moved ahead of Joan Graynor.

“Harry, this is Miss Graynor,” Glorie said. “She wants a pilot to fly her to Miami. I told her how we were on vacation and had nowhere in particular to go, and I said you might fly her down.”

Harry looked beyond Glorie at the blonde girl who was staring at him, a half-smile on her lovely mouth. Their eyes met, and Harry felt as if he had received an electric shock. There was that thing in her that seemed to reach out and hit him. Instinctively he knew he had made as much impact on her as she had on him.

What a beauty! he thought. What a pippin of a girl!

He smiled, and, watching him, Glorie felt her heart contract.

She hadn't seen that smile for a long time. It was the same kind of smile he had given her when they had first met in the nightclub lobby seven months ago: the smile of the hunter. She looked quickly at Joan to see how she was reacting, but she learned nothing there. Joan's face was interested and friendly, but that was all.

"Fly you down?" Harry said. "Why sure, I'd be glad to. But where's the kite? Who owns it?"

"Oh, I do," Joan said. "It's on the runway now. My pilot is ill. I had some business here and I flew up yesterday. Now he can't take me back and I've just got to be home some time tonight."

"How about clearance and briefing instructions?"

"That's all fixed. I've got the Met. report. We can get off right away. They're waiting for me to clear now."

Harry looked at Glorie, suddenly remembering that somewhere out in the darkness Borg was waiting. The sight of the girl had driven Borg out of his mind and that startled him.

"Just exactly where is the kite?" he asked.

"Over at the hangars. I have a car waiting. We can drive over. Will you really fly me?"

"Sure. We'll be glad of the trip."

"I can't thank you enough." Her smile was the most exciting thing Harry had ever seen. "May we meet at the south exit in the reception hall? I've just got to call my pilot and tell him what I'm doing."

"Sure, we'll meet you there."

She smiled again and walked away.

Glorie watched Harry stare after the blonde girl. Harry was watching the swing of Joan's hips, her square shoulders and her silky hair. He felt a tightness in his chest as he looked after her.

What a pippin of a girl! he thought again.

"Harry . . ."

He started, turned and looked at Glorie. He had completely forgotten her, and now for the first time he became sharply aware how white and drawn and unglamorous she looked and he frowned at her.

"That was a bit of luck," he said, forcing himself to smile.

"But how do we get to the kite? Borg may be waiting right outside."

"She said she has a car..."

“Yeah, and as I climb in, I’ll get shot in the back.”

Harry took out his handkerchief and wiped his face. All his old fears came surging back. “Look, Glorie, he won't touch you. Will you cover me? I’ll go first, behind her, and you keep close behind me. Will you do that?”

Even at that her love for him didn’t falter.

“Yes, of course, Harry.”

“It's not as if he'd do anything to you,” Harry said, feeling blood rise into his face at her quiet acquiescence. He knew he was acting like a heel and he wished she had the guts to round on him. “You're not scared, are you? He won't shoot if you’re in the way.”

“I'm not scared.”

“Well, okay, then let's go.”

He slid his hand inside his coat pocket and his fingers closed over the butt of his gun.

He walked first, Glorie followed him. They had to wait a few minutes in the reception hall before Joan appeared.

“All ready,” she said. “We can get off.”

“Go on ahead,” Harry said, opening the door. He looked out into the dark night. His eyes searched the shadows, his flesh creeping.

Near the entrance was a big Lincoln, a chauffeur at the wheel.

Joan ran across the black top and got in the back of the car.

Harry was right on her heels and Glorie followed him.

Not forty yards away in the dark shadows, Borg watched the Lincoln drive away to the distant hangers. He had seen Harry arrive, had watched him and Glorie go into the reception hall, but he had made no attempt on Harry's life. He could have picked him off easily enough, but he wasn't sure this was the man he was after. It was hard to believe this young, good-looking guy could have been the fat, heavy Harry Green. Borg had been certain he would have recognized some mannerism, the walk, the way he held himself or something that would have given him the clue that this man was Harry Green. But he hadn’t spotted the clue and reluctantly he had held his fire.

He watched the three leave the car at the far end of one of the runways and climb aboard the aircraft that stood outside a hangar. He listened to the engine roar into life and saw the aircraft taxi out on to the runway.

One of the airport staff passed by and Borg reached out a fat hand and stopped him.

“Who was the blonde who has just taken off in that aircraft?” he asked.

The man looked in the direction Borg was pointing.

“I guess that'd be Miss Graynor.”

“Where's she going?”

“Home, I guess. She lives in Miami.”

Borg grunted and walked to the reception desk. Even if this guy wasn't Harry Green, he didn't intend to lose sight of Glorie.

Maybe there were three of them: Green, Glorie and this guy, Griffin. Maybe Green would show up later on.

He went into the ticket office. The clerk told him the next plane to Miami left in twenty minutes time.

Borg took out his well-filled wallet.

“Gimme a ticket,” he said.

III

Harry opened his eyes and stared around the small, but luxuriously furnished bedroom. For a few seconds he didn't know where he was, then he recalled the happenings of the previous night and relaxed back on his pillow. In the twin bed near his, Glorie still slept. He looked across at her, frowning. He could see how nervy she was even in sleep; her body twitched and her hands were restless. Her drawn, tired face and her twitching displeased him, and he looked away, reaching for a cigarette.

He glanced at his wristwatch. The time was just after seven o'clock. Now wide awake, he switched on the automatic coffee maker that stood on the bedside table. Again he looked around the room. This was pretty good, he thought. It was costly, but it was the most luxurious motel he had ever stayed at. To have a room as good as this, you had to expect to pay top prices.

Joan had found them the accommodation. She had driven them to the motel in a grey-and-blue six-cylinder Bentley which had been waiting at the airport when they had touched down. During the flight, she had sat in the co-pilot's seat next to Harry and they had talked. Glorie had sat behind them. She had been silent, and, he had felt, disapproving.

He had told Joan that he was looking for an opening in an air-taxi company as he wanted to continue his flying. He had asked her if she thought Miami would offer any opportunities.

"Of course," she had said. "There's a constant demand for air-taxis in Miami, but it's no good doing it in a small way. You'd want to form your own company. I know where you can get the land to build an airfield."

"I wasn't planning to go in for it that big," he had said. "I thought a couple of kites to start with. I could rent space on one of the commercial airfields."

"Oh, you can't do that," Joan had said emphatically. "You want at least a dozen aircraft—twenty-five would be better and you must have your own airfield. There are too many lone operators on the job now. To do any good, you'd have to squeeze them out and get a monopoly here." Her enthusiasm excited him. "You must form a company. It won't be difficult. I think my father might be persuaded to put up some money."

He had learned then with a sense of shock that her father was Howard

Graynor, the steel and oil magnate: one of the richest men in the country.

"I think it's a wonderful idea," she had gone on. "I've always been crazy about flying although Daddy won't let me take my pilot's certificate. He thinks I'll kill myself. If you really intend to form a company I will talk to him about it."

They had argued and discussed the pros and cons, completely forgetting Glorie who sat silently listening. This was something she didn't understand, and it frightened her to see how animated Harry was. She had never seen him like this before.

When they had arrived at the motel, Joan had said they must meet the next day and continue the discussion.

"I'd love to run an air-taxi business," she had said. "I've a mind to open up in competition with you."

Harry had grinned.

"Why not be my partner?" he had said jokingly. "That way we wouldn't cut each other's throats."

"I might at that," she had returned. "Anyway, you must see the land I was telling you about. I'll pick you up around noon. How's that?"

Harry said he would be waiting. She had nodded to Glorie and had driven away fast, leaving Harry staring after her, entranced not only by her, but by her ideas.

He hadn't noticed Glorie's silence when they had undressed and had got into bed, and when Glorie had said suddenly, "I thought we were going to Europe, Harry," he had stared at her as if aware of her for the first time.

"Let's go to sleep," he said curtly and switched off the light.

"I'm about all in even if you're not."

The bell on the coffee maker rang to tell him the coffee was ready. As he filled his cup, Glorie sat up, ran her fingers through her dark hair and looked around the room.

"You know, Harry, this is going to cost an awful lot."

"Oh, don't crab!" he said. He wasn't in the mood to talk. He had a lot on his mind, and he wished that he could be alone for the next hour. He wanted to drink his coffee, lie in this comfortable bed and think. The last thing he wanted was to have to listen to a lot of chatter from Glorie. "Help yourself to coffee if you want it. If it's all ready."

Glorie was aware of a cold feeling around her heart. This was the

beginning, she told herself. She recognized the signs. All the men she had known had behaved like this before the brush off came. The frowning, bored look in their eyes. The help-yourself-if-you-want-it attitude that was the same way of saying I-can't-be-bothered-to-do-it-for-you. What a fool she had been to have asked that blonde to help them. She was sure Harry was thinking of her at this moment and Harry was. He was wondering what he would do if she did offer to put some money up for the taxi service. He would have to be careful to keep his independence.

He didn't intend to have a board of directors telling him what to do. She had been right, of course. A two-kite setup would be all hard work and little profit. It would be fun to work alongside a girl like her. Talk about a ball of fire! But had she been serious?

She seemed to know what she was talking about. Suppose she did get her old man interested? He had millions....

“Harry . . .”

He started. Glorie's voice was like the flick of a whip.

“What is it?”

“We must talk about what we are going to do,” she said. “We can't stay here.”

He half raised himself to stare at her.

“Why not? Of course we can. What are you talking about?”

“It's not safe. Borg will find us.”

Harry had completely forgotten Borg. He felt a vicious spurt of fury run through him.

“He can't search the whole country for us. We're as safe here as anywhere. We've shaken him off, haven't we? He didn't see us. How can he even guess we're here?”

“We may not have seen him, but I'm sure he saw us. I know him, Harry. He wouldn't have gone to Oklahoma City unless he was after us. He knew I was meeting you at the airport. I'm sure he saw us leave in Miss Graynor's aircraft.”

“What if he did? That doesn't mean anything. He's lost us now.”

“But, Harry, she's a well-known personality. Anyone on the airfield could tell him who she is. He'll know we are here. That's why we must move today.”

“Move today?” Harry said, his voice shooting up. Are you crazy? Didn't

you hear what Joan said? We're meeting this morning. Don't you realize what this could mean to me if she got her old man to put up some money to finance me? He's worth millions. Think of it! Twenty-five aircraft! It's just the kind of setup I've always hoped for."

"But, Harry, please be sensible. She's not likely to persuade her father. Why, he wouldn't take her seriously. She's only a kid."

"That's where you are wrong. She may look a kid, but she's smart. She's got a heap of brains. I wouldn't be surprised if her old man didn't put up some money. I have an idea once she gets started she could persuade a bronze statue to part with money."

His infatuated expression sparked Glorie's anger into life.

"Is it likely he would finance you?" she said tartly. "He's bound to make enquiries about you. How do you think he'll react when he finds out why you lost your job?"

The moment she said it she was sorry.

Harry's face tightened. He looked at her, and she saw the angry dislike naked in his eyes.

"You're a goddamn wet blanket, aren't you?" he said. "If you can't be a bit more constructive, for the love of Mike, shut up!"

Glorie was instantly terrified. Suppose he walked out on her?

He might do it if she provoked him too much. She had no money; Borg was after her, and she would be alone. The prospect chilled her.

"I'm sorry, darling, but we must be sensible," she said, loosing anxiously at him. "I'm only trying to be helpful. He's bound to make enquiries about you if he is interested in such a proposition. You have to be very careful what you tell him."

Harry frowned. His angry expression changed to uneasiness.

"I guess you're right. Yeah, a guy like Graynor would put me under a microscope before he'd let me handle any of his dough."

"Don't you think it would be safer for us to do what we originally planned? Don't you think we should go to London, away from Borg? He wouldn't follow us to London."

"To hell with Borg!" Harry said, and got out of bed. "He won't come here, so stop yapping about him. We're not going to London. I've better things to do with my money. Right now I'm going for a walk. I've things to think about. And look, Glorie, I'd better see Joan on my own this morning. This is

business. You'd only be in the way. Why don't you get some more sleep? You look washed out. I'll be back for lunch."

He snatched up his clothes and went out of the room, slamming the door behind him. A few seconds later, she heard him singing under the shower.

You'd only be in the way. You look washed out. Why didn't he say what he meant? I'm bored with you. I've found someone who doesn't look old, worn out and second hand.

Why didn't he say it? That's what he meant and that's how she felt.

It was only when she tasted salt in her mouth that she realized she was crying.

IV

A few minutes after twelve noon, Harry saw the big blue-and-grey Bentley coming along the beach road. He got up from the shade of a palm tree under which he had been sitting and waved.

When he had left the motel, he had taken the bus into town and had had a walk around. He had had an expensive breakfast at one of the smart eating joints on the sea front, then he had bought himself a pair of swimming trunks and had spent an hour in the sea. Later, after an hour or so sun bathing, he had visited two or three of the smart bars in town to kill further time, then at half-past eleven he telephoned Glorie.

"I may be hung up," he said. "Don't wait lunch for me. You'll be all right, won't you?"

She said she would be all right in a quiet, flat voice that irritated him and he said good-bye and hung up.

He took the bus to the top of the beach road and sat down under a palm where he could watch for the Bentley.

He had thought a lot since he had left the motel. Glorie had been right. If Joan really meant business, he would have to be careful what he told her of his background: in fact the less he could tell her, the better. Her father would certainly make enquiries about him, and if Graynor found out why he had been sacked from the C.A.T.C. he would be sunk.

Then there was the problem of Glorie. Joan was calling her Mrs. Griffin, and that meant the dim-brain had told Joan she was married to him. Or was she being all that stupid? Glorie was smart. There was no doubt about that. Probably she took one look at Joan's beauty and had decided the competition wasn't a fair one and had come out with the Mrs. Griffin line as a form of defence—He's mine, hands off! Well, that wouldn't get her anywhere. He wasn't too bothered about Glorie. He could handle her. He had decided, not without a little qualm, that they must part. He refused to admit that Joan had anything to do with the decision. For all he knew, he told himself, Joan wouldn't show up. He might never see her again. It would be better for Glorie and him to part mainly because if Borg was after them it would be safer for both of them to split up. Anyway, she couldn't expect their association to go

on forever. After all, she was five or six years older than he was. He told himself she couldn't object. He would put his cards on the table and tell her the truth. They had had fun, but now it would be safer and better for them to part. She must see that. He'd give her some dough to carry her over until she found something to do: five thousand should hold her. Five thousand? He frowned. Perhaps that was being a bit too generous. Five thousand would make a hole in his capital and if Joan did mean business he would need every nickel to put in the partnership. Perhaps two thousand would hold her.

Anyway, he would talk to her and explain the position. She would understand. She always had understood. That was the big thing about Glorie: you could talk to her. He felt she was the least of his difficulties. The C.A.T.C. was the biggest snag, and then there was Borg.

He didn't know quite what to do about Borg. He could only hope the fat thug had lost him. If he picked up his trail and came after him, he might have to stop running and fight.

The thought made Harry grimace. It was all very well to think like that now when Borg was a thousand miles away, but it wouldn't be quite so simple when Borg was within gun shot.

Harry remembered his fear when he thought Borg was hiding somewhere on the airfield. Borg was a professional killer. Harry didn't fancy his chances against him. But something had to be done about him. He wasn't going to stop Harry's plans. Maybe once he got his hands on some big money he would be able to afford a bodyguard who would take care of Borg. Harry brightened at the thought. That was an idea! Some tough, quick-shooting thug who'd handle Borg.

Then he saw the Bentley coming and he jumped to his feet.

So she had come! Did that mean she meant business? He approached the car, giving her his best and widest smile.

"You look a peach," he said. "I apologize for being so personal, but I've got to say it. You really look good enough to eat."

And she did too.

She was wearing a blue-and-white terylene frock with short sleeves. Her straw-coloured hair was caught back by a strip of blue ribbon. She looked as immaculate as if she had just stepped out of cellophane wrapping, and her big eyes were as alive and as bright as quicksilver.

"I'm glad you approve. But where is Mrs. Griffin?"

Harry opened the car door.

“May I get in?”

“Of course.”

He got in beside her and closed the door.

“Isn't your wife coming?”

Harry half turned so he could look directly into her eyes.

This was something that had to be explained and explained quickly.

“I hope I'm not going to shock you,” he said, “but she isn't my wife. It was stupid of her to say she was. The truth is I picked her up in Los Angeles. She was in trouble. She had no money and was on the verge of suicide. I was sorry for her. For the moment I'm landed with her, but not for long. I want her to find her feet, get well again and then we're parting.”

Joan looked at him. Her searching gaze disconcerted him.

“I see,” she said.

“I was at a loose end,” he went on, speaking hurriedly. “I wanted a vacation. I thought I'd take her along with me. There's nothing between us. She doesn't mean a thing to me.”

Joan lifted her eyebrows. A jeering expression came into her eyes.

“You're like a big, protecting brother to her, is that it?”

Harry flushed.

“Well, maybe it's hard to believe, but that's more or less how it is.”

“More or less. I was under the impression she doted on you.”

Harry took out his pack of cigarettes and offered it.

“Well, you're wrong. Of course she's grateful, but I tell you there's nothing more to it than that.”

“If I had known that I wouldn't have taken you to that motel. They only have one-room cabins and they are strictly for married couples,” Joan said and laughed.

Harry grinned uneasily.

“Look, could we skip this? I wanted you to know I'm not married. The rest is my affair, isn't it?”

“Of course. I think it is very kind of you to let me know you're not married.”

He looked sharply at her.

“Do you have to rib me?” he said irritably. “All right, if you want the truth she and I used to live together, but we're washed up and we're parting.”

“Thank you,” she said, smiling. “I always prefer the truth.”

There was a pause while Harry lit their cigarettes, then he said, “How about looking at that land you were talking about last night—where an airfield could be built.”

“Yes. Let's go and look at it.”

She started the engine, slipped into gear, reversed the car and began to drive back the way she had come.

“I liked the way you handled my aircraft,” she said after a long silence. “You're much, much better than my pilot. Your wife—I mean your friend—told me you once were a pilot at the C.A.T.C.”

Harry went hot with rage.

Was there no end of the damage Glorie had done? He had planned to conceal the fact from Joan that he had worked for the C.A.T.C., and now the damned pea-brain had given it away.

“Yeah, that's right,” he said, not looking at her.

“Mr. Godfrey, the President, is a great friend of Daddy's. You've met him, of course?”

“Yes, I've met him.”

If Glorie had been within reach, Harry would have strangled her. He was sunk now. If Graynor knew Godfrey he was certain to check on him, and Harry could guess what Godfrey would have to say about him.

They drove for the next half-mile in silence, then Joan suddenly began to laugh. She had to slow the car and finally stop, and for several seconds she continued to giggle while Harry glared through the windshield, not looking at her. , “I'm sorry,” she said at last, but she didn't sound sorry. “Don't look so livid. I'm not going to tell Daddy you've worked for the C.A.T.C. It'll be all right.” I Harry stiffened. He turned to stare at her.

“What is all this? What do you mean?”

She patted his hand. The touch of her fingers made his skin tingle. . .

“I called Mr. Herbert this morning and had a talk with him about you.”

“Herbert? The Personnel Manager?”

“Yes. I wanted to find out if you had a good or bad character.”

Harry was suddenly aware that his heart was thumping.

“Why?”

“Isn't it usual to find out about one's future partner? Joan said, smiling at him.

I believe she really means to go ahead with it, Harry thought.

But what had Herbert told her? He and Herbert had been good friends. He wouldn't have given him too black a character, but he would have hinted that he wasn't entirely a white-headed boy.

"Were you serious last night when you said you were interested in this idea of mine?" he said quietly. "You must see how important it would be to me if you were serious. It's nothing I can laugh about."

She was instantly contrite.

"I'm sorry. I have a horrid sense of humour. Of course I was serious. I thought about it half the night. I've been looking for something to do for months. I'm bored to death being idle. I think your air-taxi idea is just what I would like to work at."

"Maybe your father . . ."

"He's keen I should do something. He thinks everyone should have a job. I know he'll back me."

"What did Herbert say about me?"

She smiled.

"He said exactly what I thought he would say. He said you were the best pilot they have ever had, that you knew your job inside out, you had a flair for organization and you got on well with your men and people liked you. He thought you would make a success of anything that really interested you."

Harry drew in a long, slow breath.

"That was pretty decent of him. What else did he say?"

She laughed.

"You have a guilty conscience, haven't you? And so you should. He told me you were inclined to be reckless, you often drank too much and you had a fatal weakness for women. He said you were sacked because you were tight when in charge of an aircraft and for assaulting an air hostess." She tried to suppress a giggle, but failed. "What did you do to the air hostess?"

"The usual things," Harry said, grinning. "If Godfrey hadn't been on the kite and caught us at it, there would have been no blow back. She claimed assault to save her own skin."

Joan nodded.

"That's what Herbert said. Have you a weakness for women?"

"Some women," Harry said, looking straight at her. "Young straw blondes always make a big impression on me."

She studied him.

“Even if they haven't a rich father?”

Harry's face tightened.

“That's a rotten thing to say, isn't it?”

“Perhaps, but it's a sensible question to ask.”

“It would depend on the blonde,” Harry returned. He glanced up and down the long, deserted road, then leaned closer. “If she had grey eyes like yours and a mouth as lovely as yours money wouldn't matter.”

She didn't draw back. Their faces were only inches apart.

“I wonder if I can believe you,” she said.

He reached for her and his mouth covered hers.

For a long moment they remained like that. He could feel her breath against the back of his throat and her tongue against his teeth. The fire that was in that kiss sent his heart hammering. Then she pulled away, her hands moving to his chest to push him back.

“The moment I saw you,” she said unsteadily, “I knew this had to happen.” She was trembling and there was a lost look in her eyes. “I do hope we're not going to land ourselves in a mess. Why do you have to be so attractive? I've only known you three hours and look at me.”

Harry put his hand on hers.

“That's the way it is,” he said. “It happens like that when it's the real thing. I'm crazy about you, Joan. We could have fun together.”

She smiled at him. . . .

“Do you want me to help you in this air-taxi business or would you rather work it out on your own?”

Harry hesitated. .

“I'd like to give it a trial first, Joan, before we sink a lot of money in it. I've got about fifty thousand dollars. If I could buy two kites and get this land you're talking about and give it a try out, then if it clicks we could dig up capital and go to town.”

“Yes that's right,” she said. “But fifty thousand isn't enough, Harry I've got money of my own. I'll put fifty thousand into the kitty as well. Then if it comes off, we'll ask Daddy to help us form a company. We should know how we go in six months, shouldn't we?”

“Yes.” He put his arm round her. “Would you marry me, Joan, in six months' time?”

"I'd marry you today," she said. "Why wait six months?"

"No." Harry was tempted, but he saw the danger. "We've got to think of your father. I've got to prove to him I can handle the business. If we marry now he'll think I'm after his money."

"All right" She patted his hand. "What about Glorie, Harry."

"Forget her, will you? I'll take care of her. She'll be all right. I told you, we mean nothing to each other now."

"You really mean that, Harry? I'm sure she loves you."

"She doesn't anymore. We've just got bored with each other. We were only talking last night that we'd better split up. She's got a brother in Mexico she wants to visit," Harry lied. "I'll give her some money and that will be that."

She leaned forward to kiss him, her arms going around his neck, her mouth opening against his.

He held her to him, her heart pounding again.

After a while, she said, "Let's go and look at the future airfield, shall we?"

"We have all day to look at that," he said, his voice unsteady. "See those palms over there? Let's go there and get to know each other better."

She opened the car door and slid out on to the road. He joined her and they walked across the sand to the clump of palm trees that were only a few yards from the sea.

Later, when Harry lay beside her, staring up at the blue sky, he realized that for the first time in his life he was in love.

chapter six

I

It was dusk by the time Harry returned to the motel. At his request Joan had dropped him off at the top of the beach road.

"Are you sure it will be all right?" she asked him as he got out of the Bentley. "I have a guilty conscience about Glorie. I don't think you should have left her alone like this all day. You should have got back before now, Harry."

"That's good coming from you," Harry said, smiling. "I haven't had a chance to get away from you. Now look, don't worry about Glorie. I told her I'd be late. Forget her. When I've told her about us, she'll understand. She'll be gone by tomorrow. You don't know her the way I do. I'll give her some money and she'll go to her brother's place. Just get her out of your mind."

Joan didn't seem convinced.

"Don't you think I should come with you? I have an idea she is going to be difficult."

"Glorie?" Harry forced a laugh. "Of course she isn't. She knows how it is with me and her. She isn't kidding herself. I'll handle her. I'll meet you right here tomorrow morning at eleven. We'll go and talk to the agent about the land. Okay?"

"I'll be here at eleven. You're sure it's going to be all right?"

"Of course I'm sure." He leaned forward and kissed her. "I love you, Joan. This has been a wonderful day. You're the first woman who has ever meant anything to me."

She touched his face.

"You're the first man who's ever meant anything to me," she said. "We're going to have fun, Harry."

He stepped back and watched her reverse the big car, then, as she drove away, he waved.

He stood in the middle of the road watching the car until it was out of sight, then he took out his pack of cigarettes and lit one.

He had had a wonderful day. He couldn't remember ever having had a better one. They had gone to look at the future airport and he had seen at once her choice was right. The ground could be inexpensively converted into an airfield, and it was only four miles from the centre of the town. She told him he could get it cheap. It had been earmarked as a building site, but the company that was going to develop the land had gone smash and no one else seemed to want it.

They had had lunch together at a smart restaurant on Bay Shore Drive. During the meal they had gone into facts and figures. He had been impressed by her level business head. She had plans for an advertising scheme. She knew where he could buy two good-looking secondhand cars cheaply. He would have to have these cars, she pointed out, to pick up clients from their hotels and drive them to the airport. She said her father was the president of an aircraft factory that would supply Harry with the kind of aircraft he would need at a reduced price. She knew a company in which her father had a controlling interest who would lay the runways.

"Your job will be to organize the flights, look after the staff and the aircraft," she had said. "The rest you can leave to me. I'll get the passengers. I know everyone here, and I know the managers of all the hotels. We'll get a monopoly on this business in time, Harry, and that's the only way to handle it."

They had talked and talked. When they had left the restaurant, they had sat in the car and talked. It wasn't until the sun was sinking below the horizon that Joan had remembered her father was entertaining that evening and she was expected to act as hostess.

When she had driven away and Harry had started to walk down the beach towards the motel he began to have doubts. He had been glib enough when talking to Joan about Glorie, but he realized he had now to handle her, and not talk about handling her, and she might not be all that easy.

She must understand, he kept telling himself. This was his chance. There was no place for her. She must see that. He would have to be careful not to let her suspect that Joan and he were lovers. There was no need to rub her nose in it, he thought, slowing his pace. He would explain that this was a business deal.

There was nothing in it for her. It would be safer for her to clear out because of Borg. He must stress Borg. She was sensible. She would

understand it would be safer not only for herself but also for him if they parted.

As he walked up the drive that led to the cabins, he saw with relief that his cabin was in darkness. She must have gone out somewhere, he thought. Well, it would give him more time to get the whole thing clear in his mind. He wasn't too sure how he was going to tackle her.

He reached the cabin, turned the door handle and opened the door. He stepped into semi-darkness, shut the door and groped for the light switch.

"Please don't turn the light on," Glorie said from out of the darkness.

He saw her then, sitting in the armchair facing the window.

He could just make out the shape of her head against the white wall. The tone of her voice gave him a creepy feeling. It didn't sound like Glorie's voice. It might have been a stranger speaking "What do you think you're doing—sitting in the dark?" he said. He turned down the switch and kicked the door shut. If she was going to make a scene, he'd meet her halfway, he told himself. The one who got in the first punch won the battle.

The lamp above the mantelpiece sprang alight. Harry looked at her. In spite of his rising anger, the sight of her shocked him. She was as white as a fresh fall of snow. Her eyes had sunk into her head so that, against the light, he couldn't see them. Her skin seemed to have shrunk, giving her a scraped, bony look.

He was about to ask her what was the matter, but checked himself. It would be fatal to give her the opportunity to start a row, he told himself.

"I'm sorry I didn't get back sooner," he said, "but I got held up." He lit a cigarette and flicked the match into the fireplace. "I've had a lot to do."

She didn't say anything.

He suddenly wished the room wasn't so small, and that he wasn't so on top of her. He had to edge around her to get to the other armchair. He sat down and yawned elaborately. He realized this wasn't the moment to break the news to her that they were going to part. He had never seen her looking like this before. It worried him. He swore in his mind. The best thing to do now was to be nice to her, to soften her up a little. He could break the news to her after dinner.

"We'd better get something to eat," he said. "What have you been doing with yourself all day? Did you go for a swim?"

She turned her head and her eyes met his. Again he felt a creepy sensation

run through him. She had never looked like this at him before. The love he had always seen in her eyes wasn't there. It was as if a stranger were looking at him.

"No, I didn't go for a swim," she said in a cold, hard voice.

"You should have. It would have done you good. Let's go and eat. I'm hungry. Aren't you?"

She looked steadily at him.

"How was she, Harry?" she asked quietly. "Was she up to expectations?"

He stiffened, a hot surge of rage running through him.

"What do you mean?"

"Did she make love to your satisfaction? Did she please you?"

Harry started to his feet.

"Shut up!" he snarled. "I'm not listening to that kind of talk."

"Why not? You've always prided yourself on your so-called love making, haven't you? Why shouldn't I ask if she pleased you?"

"I'm telling you to shut up, so shut up!"

"Don't tell me you have fallen in love with her," Glorie said. "That's something I'll find hard to believe. I should have thought the only person you'll ever love is yourself. She's just someone new and fresh and young, isn't she, Harry? Someone who makes a change from me. A cheap, willing little whore who's caught your attention for the moment. Isn't that it?"

Harry's open hand struck her on the side of her face, rocking her head back. She didn't move, but sat huddled up, staring at him, her face like a death mask.

"I told you to shut up," he said, standing over her. "You asked for it and you've got it. Now listen, I was going to let you down lightly, but after this, I don't give a damn. We're through. You can pack and get the hell out of here. I'm through with you for good. I mean it. I'm giving you a thousand dollars, and you're getting out of here. Do you understand?"

She looked at him, her eyes glittering.

"I'm not going, Harry," she said, her voice no more than a whisper.

"Yes, you are," he said. "You've got to face up to it. You and I are washed up. There's no point in you staying here any longer. Besides, it'll be safer for you to leave. If Borg is after us, you're better away from me and I'm better away from you. If you'd rather stay here tonight, that's okay with me. I'll get another cabin, but tomorrow you leave Miami. I don't care where you go, but

you're going. Some other guy will come along and look after you. You'll have a thousand bucks to hold you until he does take care of you."

The muscles in her face tightened.

"You're not going to get rid of me," Glorie said in a low fierce whisper. "I'm not going."

He stared down at her. The hard glitter in her eyes made him uneasy.

"Don't be a fool. You wouldn't want to stay here when you know you're not wanted, would you?"

She didn't say anything.

"Listen, can't you see I'm through with you, you fool?" he said, raising his voice.

"You're not through with me, Harry."

He could see the red marks of his fingers slowly appearing on the side of her face. It made him feel ashamed to look at her.

"I am," he said. "What's the matter with you? Don't you understand English?"

"You may think you are, but you're not!"

"Now look, I don't want to lose my temper with you. This is the finish. I'll leave you here for tonight. First thing tomorrow morning you're to clear out. I've got my life to think of now. You've no place in it."

"I did have a place in it, didn't I?"

"Don't start that!" he said impatiently. "The past is past. Don't pull that slop on me, Glorie. I gave you a good time; you gave me a good time. Now we're quits. Why make an agony of it? This isn't the first time you've had the brush off, is it? Your pal Delaney got fed up with you. There've been others, haven't there? This isn't a new experience for you, and you know it. You're through, so accept it and shut up!"

She surprised him by saying, "May I please have a cigarette? I've smoked all mine while I was waiting for you."

He tossed his pack into her lap.

"I'm getting out of here," he said and turned to the wardrobe, opened the door and took out his two suits.

"I shouldn't do that," she said. "You'll only have to put them back again. You're not leaving here tonight."

He paused, puzzled.

"You mean you want to go?"

“No, I'm not going either. We're going to stay here. We're going to get married, Harry.”

He felt the blood drain out of his face. He was so angry he could have struck her. He just managed to hold on to himself.

“What are you talking about? Have you gone crazy?”

“We're not only going to get married, but we're going to be partners in this air-taxi business of yours. For the first time in your selfish life you're going to do what you're told!”

He stood motionless.

“You must be nuts to talk to me like this,” he said, his voice husky. “We're through. I never want to see you again!”

She smiled, and the smile sent a chill crawling up his spine.

“You don't seem to understand, Harry. You have no choice. Unless you do what I say I'll call the police and tell them where they can find Harry Green.”

II

Glorie's voice came clearly to Borg who leaned against the cabin wall in the shadows and by the open window that was screened by a thin curtain.

Unless you do what I say I'll phone the police and tell them where they can find Harry Green.

So he had been right, he thought, shifting his bulk to a more comfortable position. He hadn't come all the way to Miami for nothing. This tall, good-looking punk was Harry Green. He would never have guessed it, although he had been watching him all day. His fat, cruel face twisted into a wolfish smile.

This, he thought, was a most satisfactory ending to a long and exacting day. Early that morning he had left his hotel near the airport and had hired a car. From the telephone book he had found out where the Graynor girl lived. He had driven over to the Graynor's residence on Franklin Roosevelt Boulevard and had parked near the gates. He had a long wait. The blue-and-grey Bentley didn't appear until twenty minutes to twelve. He had had no trouble in following it. He had watched the meeting between Harry and Joan, had followed them at a safe distance, had observed their love-making through a pair of powerful field glasses and had stayed near them all day. When they had eventually parted, Harry had led him to the motel and to the cabin.

He had listened to every word that had been said. He wished he could have pushed aside the curtain and seen Harry's face when Glorie had turned on him. It was a sight, he thought, that would be worth seeing.

For a long moment Harry was paralysed, his mind stunned by what Glorie had said. Then very slowly he returned the two suits to the wardrobe and closed the doors. He sat down on the bed as if his legs hadn't the strength to support him. He stared at Glorie, his eyes burning, sweat on his face.

She didn't look at him. She was shaking and her face was taut and white. She had trouble in lighting a cigarette she took from the pack he had tossed into her lap.

"For years now," she said in an unsteady, quiet voice, "I have behaved like a weak-kneed fool. I've tried to find happiness by giving my love to a number of men. I did everything I could think of to keep their love, but sooner or later

they got bored with me and left me. It must have been my fault. I suppose it was because I never considered myself. I did everything possible to make them happy, to put them first, to put myself last. I see now it was a fatal thing to do. They didn't appreciate me. They thought I was a weak fool to be picked up and dropped when they felt like it. When I met you, I couldn't believe it would last. I waited for you to throw me over as the others had done. Then when you told me about your plans for this robbery and you let me help you, I began to think that you were sincere and that you meant to stick with me. I thought after what I did for you, after going to Ben and facing his insults, after helping you to turn yourself into Harry Green, I deserved some consideration. When you told me you were wanted for murder I didn't hesitate to stay with you. You were mine and I was yours. That's the way I looked at it. No matter what you had done, I'd stick with you. Then that blonde came along. The moment I saw you grinning at her I knew you didn't really give a damn about me. You had taken everything I had to give, and now you were ready to walk out. You left me here all day without giving me a thought. For all I knew you might have gone for good. I guess I got a little worked up, and when one gets worked up one sees things differently. It suddenly occurred to me, Harry, that for the first time in my life I was in the position to dictate to a man. I realized you were the first man who could not walk out on me and there was nothing you could do about it. It was a pretty exciting feeling. You're on the hook, and no matter how hard you wriggle, you can't get off. That's something that has happened to me for the past ten years. Now you're on it, and it gives me a lot of pleasure to sit back and watch you wriggle. You promised to marry me. I would like that. I know it won't be much of a marriage, but it will give me security, which is something I have never had before, and it's something I want very badly. You swindled Ben out of fifty thousand dollars. Well, as I am going to be your partner, I want twenty-five thousand of those dollars. I could ask for more, and you couldn't refuse me, but I don't want to be unfair. I want half and I intend to have it. That's the position. If you had been decent to me this wouldn't have happened. We could have been happy together. We could have gone to London and Paris and Rome as you promised. Now we will work together on this air-taxi business as equal partners. You will tell the Graynor girl you have decided you and your wife have enough money to start in a small way and you don't want her help nor her love nor her father's influence. I think I

can still make something of you, Harry. You are selfish, unkind and rather stupid, but I think I can change all that. You're going to be told what to do, and you'll do it. If you don't I'll turn you over to the police. That's not a threat—it's a promise."

For the first few seconds while she was talking, Harry's fury nearly suffocated him. But he made an effort and fought down his rage. By the time she had finished, he was thinking again, and he was cold and alert. Okay, he told himself, so you're on the hook. What a fool he had been to think it could have worked out otherwise! He had been so used to Glorie doing just what he had wanted her to do, it had never crossed his mind that she would blackmail him.

"You can't do this to me, Glorie," he said desperately. "It just won't work. I'd hate you for it. You wouldn't want to live with me, knowing I hated you, would you?"

"Why not?" she said, staring at him. "Why should I care? I'm considering myself. You don't love me anyway. I've got beyond thinking of what I want and what I don't want. This is my life: my future. I'm going ahead with this, and you can't talk me out of it. Hate me if you want to. It won't hurt me as much as it will hurt you. I intend to marry you because it will increase my security. If you go off with another woman, I'll divorce you, but I shall get alimony and damages from you and I shall keep the twenty-five thousand. I'm thinking of myself for a change. Something I've never done before."

"Yeah, I can see that," he said, making an effort to keep control of himself. "Well, it looks like you're sitting pretty, doesn't it? Are you quite sure you're going ahead with this?"

She looked steadily at him.

"I'm quite sure."

"Suppose I give you thirty thousand ? Will you get out of here and leave me alone?"

"No. I'm not changing my terms. Tomorrow morning you must arrange for the marriage licence; It'll take a week or so before we can get married, but I can wait. In the meantime go ahead and look for someone who'll sell you a partnership in this air-taxi business. I'll look too. If we can't find anything here, then we must move on until we do. I want you to transfer twenty-five thousand dollars to the West National Bank in my name and I want that done tomorrow. I don't think there is anything else for the moment. I think we

should leave this motel and find somewhere cheaper to live. We might rent a furnished bungalow. I'll look into that tomorrow." She got to her feet. "Shall we have dinner now? I think you said you were hungry."

Harry tried his last shot.

"If you gave me away to the police, you would be in the soup too. They'd slap an accessory rap on you: you'd draw ten years."

She moved past him to the door.

"Do you think I'd care? The only life I have before me is with you. If I haven't you, I wouldn't care what happened. Ten years in prison doesn't frighten me. At least I wouldn't be alone, not knowing where the money Was coming from to pay my rent. I'd know too they wouldn't put me in the death house as they would you." She opened the door. "Are you coming?"

"You can't do this to me!" Harry shouted, losing control of himself. "I'll make you damn well pay if you do. I'm warning you, Glorie! If you go ahead with this I'll fix you somehow!"

"There's no need to shout," she said quietly. "Unless, of course, you want everyone to know you're on the hook and you don't like it."

"I'll fix you for this if it's the last thing I do!" Harry shouted, glaring at her.

"It probably will be," she said. "So long as you know what the consequences will be, you must please yourself."

"Okay, but don't expect any mercy from me. It may take time, but you'll get what's coming to you. Make no mistake about that."

"The window's open," she said coldly. "They will hear you."

She went out and shut the door after her.

Borg slid into the shadows as Glorie came out of the cabin.

She passed within a few yards of him, not seeing him and walked across to the brightly lighted restaurant.

He pushed his hat to the back of his head. The simplest thing to do would be to walk in and give it to the rat, but perhaps it was too simple. Borg had taken a liking to Miami, he was in no hurry to leave. He decided to wait a little longer. He was interested to see what Harry would do. Maybe he would think up a way of getting off the hook.

Inside the cabin, Harry remained motionless, sweat on his face, his heart hammering. He remained like that for several minutes, then he reached for his pack of cigarettes, lit one and stretched out on the bed. He stared up at the

ceiling, his face hard, his mind busy.

What was he to tell Joan? He must gain time. It would be fatal for Joan to talk to her father at this stage of the setup. If Glorie thought she could stand in his way like this, she was making a fatal mistake. No one was going to stand in his way now. The prize was too great. He loved Joan: there was a chance of marrying her. She would come into most of her father's money.

His life would be completely changed. He would have a business, a lovely wife and as much money as he could handle. Glorie wasn't going to block that. There was only one obvious solution to this, he told himself. Glorie would have to be silenced. Either that or he would have to knuckle under to her for the rest of his days and he wasn't going to do that. He didn't flinch from the thought of killing her. There was too much in the balance to think of flinching. After all, he was already wanted for murder. One more murder meant nothing to him now. It was her life or his future. He had already made up his mind about that while she had been talking.

She held all the tricks except one, and he held that: the winning trick. He would silence her. She had asked for it and it served her right.

For five minutes or so he lay still, his mind busy, then abruptly he swung his legs off the bed and stood up. He crushed out his cigarette, walked to the door, turned off the light and went out into the hot night.

Across the way was the brightly lit restaurant. He could see Glorie sitting at one of the tables in the bay windows. A waiter was serving her and she was speaking to him.

Harry walked down the path that led to the office, pushed open the door and made his way to a row of pay booths. He found Howard Graynor's number in the book, shut himself in a booth and dialled the number.

A man's voice said, "Graynor residence."

"Will you tell Miss Graynor, Mr. Griffin is calling?"

"If you will hold on a moment, sir."

Harry held on. He stared through the glass panel of the door at the tall, willowy redhead who leaned over the counter, making an entry in a ledger. From where he stood he could see down the front of her dress. He wasn't in the mood to appreciate What he saw.

"Hello, Harry. . ."

He straightened, turning his back on the redhead.

"Hello, Joan." He tried to make his voice sound animated, but it didn't

come off. "You were right. I've got trouble here. She isn't playing ball for the moment."

"Oh, darling, I'm sorry. Is there anything I can do?"

"No. I can handle it, but I won't be able to rush it. She's after more money. Look, don't talk to your father just yet. I may have to give her more than I had planned and I may be short by the time I get rid of her. She's on to us, Joan. We'd better not meet until she's gone. I don't want to antagonize her. You understand, don't you?"

"I knew it, Harry. Look, couldn't I talk to her? I knew she would make trouble."

"No. You must keep out of it," Harry said. "I can take care of her. It's just a matter of money. She'll give me up if I pay her enough."

"All right, darling. I won't say anything to Father until you're ready. When are we going to meet?"

"I'll call you the moment she has gone. It may take a day or so, but I'm thinking of you and loving you. You know that."

"Yes, Harry. I know it, and you know I'm thinking of you too. You're sure there's nothing I can do?"

"Nothing. I'll fix it. Give me a couple of days. I'll call you the moment I've got rid of her. I love you, Joan."

"Oh, darling, I'm sorry about this. Don't do anything reckless, will you?"

He grinned mirthlessly.

"Of course not. It's just a matter of shelling out. I'll get rid of her even if it costs me all I've got."

"You mustn't do that, Harry. You'll want your money."

"I'll fix it: don't worry. I'll call you, sweetheart."

He left the pay booth, walked down the path, across the road and on to the sands. He sat down under a palm tree, lit a cigarette and folded his hands on top of his knees.

Borg, who was sitting in his car twenty yards away, took his gun from its holster and laid the sight at Harry's head. It was a tempting target and he had to make a conscious effort not to squeeze the trigger.

Unaware that he was but a heartbeat away from death, Harry told himself that he now had to think of a foolproof plan to get rid of Glorie. The circumstances favoured him. They had only just arrived in Miami and no one knew them. Joan would be under the impression that Glorie had left town.

Glorie had no relations nor friends who would want to know what had happened to her. That was important. It was usually an inquisitive relative who started a police enquiry. Glorie was alone. There was no one to care if she were alive or dead.

But he would have to be careful. He had beaten one murder rap. He must be sure not to make a mistake with this one. How was he to get rid of the body? That presented the greatest problem. He sat smoking for more than an hour while he considered what he had to do. At the end of the hour, he stood up, slapped the sand off his clothes and walked back to the motel. He went to the quick-snack bar, ordered a sandwich and a double whisky, and while he ate the sandwich, he went over in his mind the plan he had decided upon. There was an element of risk in it, but that was to be expected. At least it was simple and uncomplicated. But would she be on her guard? Would it occur to her that he might try to silence her? He would have to be careful how he handled her for the next twenty-four hours. His first move would be to lull any suspicions she might have. If he could do that, the rest was easy.

He asked the barman if he could lend him a large-scale map of the district. The barman found him one, and for twenty minutes or so, Harry studied the map. Then he finished his drink, returned the map, tipped the barman and walked over to the cabin.

There was a light showing in the window and he could see Glorie's shadow against the blind. As he walked in, closing the door behind him, Borg heaved himself out of his car and moved silently back to his post by the cabin window.

Glorie was slipping into her nightdress as Harry came in. For a brief moment he saw her white, well-made body before the silk garment covered it.

She didn't look at him, but walked over to the dressing table and began to brush her hair.

He took off his coat, undid the top button of his shirt and pulled off his tie.

"Glorie . . ."

"Yes?"

She didn't look around, but went on brushing her hair.

"I want to apologize," Harry said. "I've acted like a heel. I'm sorry: I'm really sorry."

She paused, the hairbrush stranded in midair, while she looked at him. Her

big, dark eyes stared steadily at him. He had to make the effort to meet her gaze without flinching, but he did it.

"What exactly does that mean?" she asked, her voice low and cold.

"I've been sitting out there thinking," he said and lit a cigarette. "I don't know what got into me to talk to you the way I talked to you, nor do I know what got into me to treat you as I have treated you. You are right, Glorie. I do owe everything to you. I've treated you damned badly and I'm sorry. I guess I've always been a fool about women. This kid knocked me off balance. There's been no other woman but you until she turned up. You know that. Now I've had time to think about her I realize what a fool I've been. You're right: she's only a kid. I was dazzled by her money, but I know now her old man would never let me get near her nor the money even if I wanted to, which I don't now."

He ran his fingers through his hair, frowning. "You gave me a jolt, Glorie. It was what I wanted. I know now we two will be much better off working on this thing together without any outsider to help us. I might even teach you to fly. I've been making plans out there for us, Glorie. I want you to forgive me. I can't say how sorry I am to have treated you like this. It won't happen again."

There, you smart bitch, he thought, swallow that lot, and if that's not enough to convince you, I've still got some more soft soap to feed you with.

"All right, Harry," she said, still not looking at him. "I'm glad you feel that way about it. You gave me a jolt too. Perhaps that's what we both needed."

"Yeah." He had to stifle the spark of anger that threatened to flare up. It had cost him a lot to make this speech; the effect on her was disappointing. He had expected to see her melt, but her face remained as set and as cold as before. "Well, what are we going to do? You're not going to keep me in the doghouse forever, are you? I'm sorry, and I mean it. It won't happen again: I promise you that."

She put down the hair brush and stared at herself in the mirror.

"And I'm sorry and ashamed I had to threaten you," she said. "I love you. You mean more to me than any other man can ever mean. I hate myself for holding this thing over your head, but for both our sakes, Harry, I've got to do it. You have had the chance to be the boss of this partnership. You haven't done very well, have you? Now it's my turn to see what I can do."

"That's right," Harry said. He had to fight the urge to get up, cross the

room and slap her face. "I'm glad in a way you're taking charge, Glorie. You've always been just that bit smarter than I've been. But look, I've been doing some thinking out there and it seems to me we'd be sensible if we left Miami instead of staying on here. I'm going to be frank with you. I want to get away from temptation. This girl may try to hang on to me. Anyway, we're bound to run into her if we stay on here and I don't ever want to see her again. Let's clear out tomorrow. I'll buy a car and we can chuck our things in it and go. I thought we might have a look at New Orleans. What do you say?"

That was his trump card and he watched her closely, waiting for her reaction. Surely this should prove to her that he was sincere, he told himself. She was looking at him. He could see she was still a little doubtful, but she was melting. He could tell by the expression in her eyes.

"When we get to New Orleans, I'll fix a licence so we can get married," he went on. "I'll arrange for our capital to be transferred from New York and I'll turn twenty-five thousand over to you. I want you to have it, Glorie. You should have had it before." Somehow he managed his wide, charming smile. "Then we'll really be partners. How's that?"

She turned her head away, but not before he had seen tears in her eyes.

"Yes, all right, Harry."

His hands closed into fists. The trick was his! He had made a dent in her armour. That had been the right board to play.

"Fine. Well, let's turn in now," he said. "We've got a lot to do tomorrow." He had to make an effort to conceal a grin. "A hell of a lot to do."

"Yes."

As she moved past him to her bed, he caught hold of her and pulled her against him.

"It's going to be all right, baby," he said. "You wait and see: we'll make a new start."

She broke away from him.

"Please don't touch me," she said. He could see her breasts under the thin silk of her nightdress rising and falling in her agitation. "I'll get over it, but it'll take a little time. You don't know how you hurt me, Harry. It's something I can't throw off in a moment."

"Yeah," Harry said. He would have given a lot to have put his fingers around her white throat and squeezed the life out of her. "I know how you feel, but it's going to be all right."

He watched her get into bed, then he hurriedly undressed, put on his pyjamas and got into the other bed.

“Good night, Glorie,” he said as he reached for the light switch. “It's going to be all right.”

“Yes, Harry.”

He turned off the light. Darkness pressed in on him. He lay still, his mind active. It hadn't been as easy as he had hoped, but at least she had agreed to leave Miami, and that was vital to his plan. He would have to be very careful how he handled her in the morning. By tomorrow night, with any luck, he would be free of her for good, free to go ahead with his plans and, more important still, free to meet Joan again, and this time in safety.

It was a long time before Harry fell asleep. Sometime in the early hours of the morning, as the faint light of the rising sun came through the blind, he was awakened by a sound that chilled him.

It was the sound of Glorie weeping.

III

Soon after eleven o'clock the next morning, Harry completed the purchase of a 1945 Buick saloon. He drove the car to a parking lot in the centre of the town. Then he set out on foot in search of a hardware store which he found a hundred yards or so up the road. He bought a short-handled shovel and had the salesman wrap it in brown paper. He returned to the car and locked the shovel in the boot.

Fifteen yards or so behind him, Borg moved after him. The significance of the shovel was not lost on him. Having heard Glorie's terms and Harry's apparent capitulation, he had already guessed that Harry planned to wipe Glorie out. The shovel confirmed his guess. He watched Harry take a heavy wrench from the tool kit of the car and conceal it in the pocket of the driver's door. He then got into the car and drove back to the motel.

Knowing the direction he intended to take, Borg didn't follow him. He drove in his car to a side road on the main highway and settled down to wait.

Harry found Glorie closing her suitcase. She had already packed.

"Come and see what I've bought," he said, "and tell me if you approve." Somehow he managed to make his voice sound friendly and he noticed her reaction. Her face brightened as she came to the door.

Together they inspected the car.

"It'll do to get on with," he said. "There's plenty of room. When we hit the jackpot we'll get something better."

"I think it's fine," she said.

He watched her turn the handle on the boot and try to open it.

"The lock's busted," he said. "The guy who sold me the car offered to put it right, but I didn't want to wait. We can put the suitcases on the back seat."

He brought the cases out and put them in the car.

"I guess that's all. Did you settle up here?"

"Yes."

"Well, fine, then we can get off."

She went back into the cabin for her handbag and hat. He stood in the doorway, watching her while she put her hat on and tucked up her dark hair. She looked suddenly over her shoulder at him.

“You're not angry with me anymore, Harry?”

He forced a smile.

“No, I'm not angry. Let's forget it, shall we?”

“You do see why I . . .”

“Let's forget it,” he said. He knew this was his cue to go to her and take her in his arms, but knowing what he was going to do to her made such a move impossible. “Well, come on, baby, let's get out of here. This place gives me the creeps.”

She followed him out to the car. He slid under the driving wheel as she went around to the far door. He started the engine.

“It should be a pretty good trip,” he said, as he engaged gear.

“We have some fine country to go through. We'll spend the night at Tampa. I've always wanted to go there. That's where they make cigars and can rattlesnakes.”

He talked on as he drove swiftly along the broad U.S.27, heading for the Everglades National Park. And as he talked, giving Glorie bits of information he had picked up about the district, he felt sure she was relaxing. Looking at her out of the corner of his eye, he saw she had lost the scraped, bony look and she seemed more her old self.

They drove for an hour before they hit the road that cut through the lonely primeval swamp land, and they passed Borg, sitting patiently in his car, without noticing him. Soon they were running alongside Tamiami canal.

On the highway lay the mangled bodies of raccoons and snakes that had crawled out of the swamp to sleep on the warm road and had been caught by the early morning traffic. Flocks of yellow-headed, red-cheeked buzzards were gorging themselves on the corpses. It was only when the Buick was nearly on them that they flew croaking out of the way.

Glorie hunched her shoulders with a shiver.

“It's horrible, isn't it?”

“Yeah,” Harry said, “but it's nature. I guess the snakes were suckers to come out on the road and get run over.”

He was thinking of the buzzards. There was no need to have brought the shovel. In an hour or so there would be nothing left of Glorie except her bones if he left her body in the undergrowth.

He felt a cold trickle of sweat down his back. He had planned to knock her on the head and bury her somewhere along the coast road to Naples, but this

seemed easier.

There was fast-moving traffic at the moment, but if he was quick, timed it right, he could stun her with the wrench, wait until there was no traffic in sight, then carry her across the road into the forest. He needn't carry her far; just out of sight of the road, and then leave her to the buzzards.

He looked in his driving mirror. There was a car coming, but behind the car he could see a long stretch of empty road. He looked ahead. Apart from a truck that was toiling along about a quarter of a mile away, there was no other traffic.

He slowed down, letting the car pass him. It was travelling at a high speed, and it went past with a swish and a rush of air "Do you hear that knocking?" he said. "Something's loose at the back."

"I didn't hear anything."

He had slowed to a crawl. The truck was coming up faster now it had crested the slope. It would be on him before he could do anything, and he cursed silently. He glanced in the driving mirror again. The road behind him was empty.

"Maybe I was mistaken."

He had trouble in keeping his voice steady. Sweat beaded his forehead and his heart was hammering. He shoved his foot down hard on the gas pedal and sent the car surging forward so as to meet and pass the truck.

The truck went past and thundered on down the road. A quick glance behind and a look ahead told him the road was now empty for at least a quarter of a mile either way. He trod down hard on the foot brake and pulled up by the side of the road.

The steamy heat and the smell of decaying vegetation came out of the forest of cypress and palmetto trees.

"Have a look at the back, will you? It sounds as if the bumper has come adrift."

She opened the door.

"I didn't hear anything, Harry."

"Well, look, will you?"

He found his voice was shooting up and he throttled it back just in time. His hand slid into the pocket of the door and his fingers closed around the wrench. He opened his door as Glorie got out on to the hot road and went around to the back of the car.

This was it, he thought, one quick blow, then he'd pick her up and rush her into the undergrowth. He could finish her there.

He kept the wrench hidden behind his back as he went around the car.

"There's nothing loose," Glorie said. "I think you imagined it, Harry."

She was facing him, looking right at him. He couldn't meet her gaze. He bent over the bumper and pushed it.

"That's funny," he said. His voice sounded far away. "I could have sworn . . ."

"Shall we go on?"

"Yes."

He waited for her to turn. He held the wrench so tightly his fingers ached. As he turned, he saw a car coming fast, and he just stopped the upward swing of his arm in time.

The car, a low-slung coupe, was coming like a bolt out of the blue. Glorie had reached the car door. She opened it. Harry watched her. He was shaking, but he had enough presence of mind to keep the wrench out of sight. The sports car flashed by and went snarling down the road, leaving behind it a cloud of dust.

Harry shoved the wrench into his hip pocket, moved forward and caught hold of Glorie's arm, stopping her as she was about to get into the car.

"Just a second..."

A big oil truck struggled up the slope and into sight and came pounding towards them. Harry thought he must be nuts to have hoped to get rid of her on this road. It seemed alive with traffic.

"Don't let's get in just yet," he said. "I want to have a look at the forest. Come on. Let's stretch our legs."

If he could get her into the forest and out of sight of the passing traffic...

"Oh no," she said, pulling away from him. "I wouldn't go in there. It's full of snakes."

The oil truck came abreast of them and slowed. The driver leaned out of the cab window.

"I'm looking for the Denbridge Service Station," he shouted above the roar of his engine. "Is it on this road?"

Glorie got into the car and shut the door.

"Yes," Harry said, silently cursing the truck driver. "About three miles further on."

The driver waved and accelerated. The truck went on with a grinding of gears.

For a long moment Harry stood motionless, then he walked slowly around the car. It would have to be the coast road, he told himself. He was crazy to have stopped here.

"I forgot the snakes," he muttered as he got into the car. "I wouldn't want to tread on a snake myself."

"The wood must be full of them," Glorie said. "You've only got to look at the road..."

"That's right."

He accelerated and sent the car forward fast. They had over a hundred miles ahead of them before they reached Naples.

The canal side of the road was alive with wild birds and the surface of the milky coloured water was constantly being broken as fish reared up to snap at the swarm of insects buzzing above the water.

As Harry drove the Buick mile after mile, the scene gradually changed: the cypress forest gave way to low oak and willow hammocks with the occasional maple tree forcing its way through the dense undergrowth. Every now and then he caught a glimpse of an isolated Seminole village, half hidden from view behind high palisaded walls.

From the barman's map, Harry knew that some way ahead the road forked to Collier City. From the look of the map he had judged there would be lonely stretches along that road, and it was there where he had planned to get rid of Glorie.

Glorie seemed too absorbed by the scenery, the flocks of wild birds that rose out of the forest, startled by the noise of the speeding car, and the turtles that basked along the side of the canal, to talk, and Harry was glad of her preoccupation.

When they reached Royal Palm Hammock, with its white palms growing wild and thrusting their trunks above the cabbage palms, Harry slowed his speed. Somewhere ahead, within a few miles, was the junction to Highway 27A where he was to turn off for Collier City.

After ten minutes of slow driving, he saw ahead of him the fork in the road. He swung the car on to it, leaving the main road on his right, and entered the flat area of wasteland that was covered with palmettos and pines.

After driving a mile or so, Glorie said suddenly, "Is this right?"

Shouldn't you have kept to the main highway?"

"It doesn't matter," Harry said curtly. "This is more interesting, and we can pick up the highway later on. Look what we're coming to. There must have been a clam-canning plant here at one time."

On either side of the road now appeared great mounds of gleaming clamshells, bleached white by the sun that formed a solid wall, shutting out the view. The mounds continued for nearly half a mile, then the road suddenly opened out on to a dazzling white sand beach with palm trees, palmettos, sea lavender and coco-plum trees to provide a mile deep belt of shade.

The strip of beach was lonely and desolate. Harry slowed the car. "Pretty good, isn't it?" he said huskily. "Let's stop here and have a swim."

"My costume's right at the bottom of the suitcase," Glorie said.

"Why worry about a costume? Who's here to see you except me."

He swung the car into the shade of a palmetto tree and pulled up.

"Come on; let's swim."

She got out of the car and walked away towards the sea, leaving a trail of footprints behind her.

For a long moment Harry sat watching her, his heart pounding.

He had a strange feeling that they were suddenly the only two people left on earth. The long sweep of the beach, the dense forest at their backs, the blue sky, the hot sun and the silence told him this was the place. There could never be any place more lonely than this.

His hand reached behind him and his fingers closed over the handle of the wrench. He opened the car door. This was it, he told himself. She was standing with her back to him, looking towards the sea. The breeze moulded her dress around her so he could see the roundness of her hips and her long legs.

The beach stretched away for miles and was completely empty of life. The hot sun had turned the sea into a bronze, shimmering mirror.

He left the car, feeling the hot sand through the thin soles of his shoes. Even if she screamed there would be no one to hear her. He pulled the wrench from his hip pocket and began to walk slowly towards her. She remained motionless, her back to him, her hand shielding her eyes as she looked at the sea that came inshore in little waves, running up the dry sand and then receding, leaving the sand dark and wet.

He kept the wrench behind him as he came up to her. His heart was pounding and his mouth was dry. There was no one to stop him now. He had to do it. There was no way out for him unless he silenced her.

When he was within a few yards of her, she turned and looked at him. The expression in her eyes brought him to a standstill as if he had walked into a brick wall. He could see at once that she knew what he was going to do. The fearless contempt in her eyes paralysed him. He could only stand motionless, staring at her, his face white and glistening in the hot sunlight. For a long moment, they faced each other, then she said quietly, "What are you waiting for?"

He willed himself to hit her, but he was unable to do it. If she had screamed, run, thrown up her arms, he would have hit her, but this motionless lack of fear held him rigid.

"Go on," she said. "I knew you were going to do it. Well, do it. I don't care."

"You shouldn't have threatened me," he said, his voice a harsh whisper. "You asked for it and now you're going to get it."

He was holding the wrench so she could see it.

"Is that what you're going to use?" she said calmly. "Is that what you were hiding in the car pocket?"

He was confounded by her complete lack of fear and by her quiet, calm tone. He could only stand, facing her, while he tried to force himself to strike her.

"You were crazy to think you could dictate to me," he said hoarsely. "You're in my way. Do you imagine I'd ever knuckle under to your orders? Joan and I plan to get married. When her old man dies, she'll come into all his money. He's worth millions. Do you think I'd let you stand in the way of such a chance? It's your life or my future!"

He wanted her to run, to show fear so he could strike. This stillness of hers, this cold, unfrightened stare demoralized him.

Borg, who had driven down the beach road and had hidden his car in the wood, watched this scene from behind a clump of palmetto trees. In the hot silence and stillness, every word they said came clearly to him.

"I'm going to kill you," Harry said, taking a step nearer, hoping she would give ground. "Why don't you run? Why don't you try to save yourself? I'm going to kill you!"

"I'm not stopping you," she said, not moving nor taking her eyes from his. "I knew you would do this. Yet it was difficult to believe you could be so wicked. Did you really imagine I believed those lies about sharing the money or marrying me? You were so obviously lying. When you tried to get me into the forest, I knew what was going on in your hateful mind. You thought the buzzards would hide your crime, didn't you? Well, now you have me alone. There is no one to see what you do, so why don't you go ahead and kill me?"

He didn't move, sweat ran down his face and he was shaking.

"I'll tell you why," she went on, her voice harsh with scorn. "You're a coward. I found that out as soon as your own precious life was in danger, but even then I was fool enough to go on loving you, even when I knew you were yellow and rotten. It was only when you threw me over for that chit of a girl that at last I realized what a weak fool I'd been. You haven't even the nerve to finish what you've begun. I'm not afraid of you! Go on, hit me! I dare you to, you miserable coward!"

Harry half lifted the wrench, then, with a furious gesture, he threw it violently from him. It sailed through the air and landed within a few yards of where Borg was standing.

"Yes, you've beaten me!" he said, his breath coming in great heaving gasps. "I haven't the nerve to finish it. Okay, I'll marry you. I'll do what you say, but I'll hate you for the rest of my days!"

"I wouldn't marry you now if you were the last man left alive!" Glorie cried, her voice suddenly shrill. "I must have been out of my mind ever to have loved you! To think that after all I have done for you, all the risks I've taken and the love I have given you, you could be so wickedly evil as to plan to kill me. If you hadn't been such a rotten coward you would have killed me. I'd be dead now if I had shown any fear of you. Get out of my sight! I never want to see you again! I wouldn't marry you or touch your rotten money if you went down on your knees and begged me to. I never intended to take the money. I wanted to see how far you would go to hang on to it, and I know now. Go back to your blonde woman and marry her. I don't envy her having you. Get away from me, the sight of you makes me sick!"

The scorn in her voice was like a whiplash. Harry started to say something, but she screamed at him: "Get out of my sight! Go away and hide, you stinking coward! Don't let me ever see you again!"

He turned and walked unsteadily back to the car. Without quite knowing

what he was doing, he got into the car, started the engine and drove back the way he had come. He drove until he reached the wall of clamshells, then he stopped because he could drive no further. He was shaking, and his breath came in hard, sobbing gasps. He sat holding on to the driving wheel, his eyes shut, hearing the scorn in her voice and realizing just how rotten he was.

After he had walked away, Glorie sank down on the sand and hid her face in her hands .she heard the car engine start up, but she didn't look round or move. She too was shaking, but she was thankful it was over, thankful to be rid of him. She didn't care that she had a two-mile walk back to the highway before she could beg a lift The way he had treated her had stiffened her fibre and for the first time in ten years she felt free and she didn't care what became of her. She didn't care either that he had gone off with her suitcase. The relief to be rid of him was so great, she found herself crying with happiness.

She didn't see nor hear Borg as he came silently across the strip of golden sand In his gloved right hand he held the wrench that Harry had thrown away.

It was only when his gross black shadow fell across her that she realized she wasn't alone. She looked up, her body stiffening and her blood congealing. She had a momentary glimpse of his fat, savage face and his descending hand that held the wrench. She opened her mouth to scream, but before the sound could rise in her throat a terrifying bright light flashed before her eyes, and her life disintegrated into death.

chapter seven

I

It was only when the rays of the sun came through the car window, unpleasantly hot against his face, that Harry stirred himself. He had no idea how long he had been sitting in the car, and now he wondered what Glorie was doing. He couldn't leave her in this lonely spot, he told himself, that was at least two miles from the highway, and yet he hesitated to go back after the way she had screamed at him.

With a hand that was still unsteady, he lit a cigarette. Then he turned to look through the rear window to see if there was any sign of her, and his eyes fell on her suitcase, lying on the back of the seat. That decided him. He couldn't go off with her things, nor could he leave the heavy suitcase by the road for her to lug to the highway.

He started the car, and after some trouble, for the road was narrow, he turned and drove slowly down the road until he reached the open beach.

By now the mid-morning sun was violently hot, and it beat down on him as he got out of the car and walked beyond the palmetto trees on to the soft sand.

He paused, frowning, as he looked across the stretch of beach.

He could see Glorie: she was lying on her side, apparently asleep or resting. He wondered why she had remained out there in the heat of the sun instead of seeking shelter in the shade.

From the palmetto thicket, Borg watched him, his fat face expressionless, his hand resting on the butt of his gun that he carried strapped under his armpit.

"Glorie!" Harry called, not wanting to go over to her and startle her. "Glorie!"

But she didn't move nor did she appear to hear him. With growing uneasiness he started across the beach towards her.

"Glorie!" he called again, and then he came to an abrupt stop.

The crimson stain on the sand by her head sent a cold chill creeping over

him.

For a long moment he stood motionless, then very slowly he moved forward until he was within a few feet of her. Then he saw the injuries to her head, her fixed grimace of terror, her half-open, sightless eyes, and he knew without touching her that she was dead.

The cigarette he was holding slipped out of his fingers and dropped in the sand. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. It came into his mind that he had done this thing himself, and it took him some seconds to gain enough control to reassure himself that he hadn't. She couldn't possibly have given herself such injuries, he thought, and he looked to right and left, his body going clammy with fear.

The great stretch of beach was empty. His eyes went to the long, thick belt of wood. Was someone hiding in there? Had someone been watching him and her as they had quarrelled?

He looked for the extra set of footprints in the sand. There were his; there were hers, but there were no other footprints.

He wasn't to know that Borg had stepped back into his own prints as he had retreated to the wood, and had smoothed over each print with his fat, dirty hand as he stepped from it. He had had plenty of time, and he had made a good job of it. He had left no trace of his coming nor of his going.

The empty, unmarked sand that stretched back to the wood convinced Harry that no one had come down to her. Had something fallen from the sky and hit her? But he could see no missile of any description near her, only her handbag that lay by her side.

He wiped his sweating face, keeping his eyes from her still, injured body. If anyone should come down to the beach now, he thought, they would imagine he had killed her. Fear gripped him. Even if no one saw him, and the body was found, the police would suspect him before anyone.

They would have reason to suspect him. It was possible that someone had heard their quarrel in the cabin. He remembered that Glorie had warned him he had been shouting. Then there was the truck driver who had seen them standing by the road and had asked the way to the Denbridge service station. He would remember them and tell the police. If they found her body, he was sunk!

Again he looked towards the wood, and Borg, guessing his intentions, moved silently away to where he had hidden his car. Harry felt he couldn't

leave without making sure no one was in the wood. He turned and began to walk slowly back the way he had come. He had only taken a few steps when he heard a car engine start up.

The sound brought him to an abrupt stop, his heart slamming against his ribs. So there had been someone! He heard the engine accelerate, and, galvanized into action, he raced across the burning sand to the head of the road. But he was too late. When he reached the road there was no sign of the car. His own car still stood at the opening of the road, but it was facing the sea, and he knew by the time he had turned it, the other car would be too far away to pursue.

Who had it been? he asked himself. Some crazy creature who had seen Glorie on her own and had attacked her? It could only have been the killer who had driven away. He wasn't likely to tell anyone he had seen him, Harry thought. He would be too scared he would implicate himself.

As he stood by the car, the hot sun beating down on him, Harry tried to calm his frightened mind, and to plan what he had best do. He could drive to Collier City and tell the police that someone had murdered Glorie, but he had no hope of the police believing him. If they arrested him and took his fingerprints he would be sunk. The safest thing he could do was to follow out his original plan. He unlocked the car boot and took out the shovel. He stripped off the brown paper, folded it and put the paper in the boot which he closed. Then he walked back to where Glorie lay.

He knew he should carry her to the wood and bury her there where she would be less likely to be found, but he couldn't bring himself to pick her up. He dug a grave within a few feet of where she lay. Digging the sand out wasn't easy, as it kept collapsing into the hole as he made it, but eventually he made a hole, big and deep enough to take her.

His shirt was black with sweat by the time he had filled in the grave, and he was gasping for breath. He smoothed the sand over with the back of the shovel, then he went down to the sea and collected a pile of seaweed, returned to the grave and scattered the seaweed over it, concealing the disturbed sand. He guessed in a day or so the action of the wind would settle the sand and no one would be able to tell that she was buried there. The danger lay in the next day if someone happened along and wondered at the disturbance of the sand.

He looked back at the footprints he and Glorie had made. He would have

to get rid of them. For the next half-hour he toiled in the sun, smoothing over the footprints as he slowly worked his way back to the car. When he finally reached the car, he paused to examine the stretch of beach that lay before him.

Except for the little heap of seaweed there was no evidence that he and Glorie had been there, and for the first time since he had found Glorie's body, he felt more sure of himself.

He cleaned the shovel in the long grass and put it in the boot. Then he remembered Glorie's suitcase and he cursed. That too would have to be buried. He got out the shovel, and, carrying the suitcase into the wood, he found a soft piece of ground and dug out a hole. He buried the suitcase, then sat on the trunk of a fallen pine for a few minutes' rest.

His mind was already becoming active again. He was rid of Glorie now for good, and he hadn't her death on his conscience. He was free to return to Miami. He had his capital intact, and there was Joan, anxiously waiting for him. He'd better get away from here, he told himself. Someone might come and find him, although the danger, he felt, was now past. As he stood up, he remembered the wrench he had thrown away. He had to have that.

If it were found it might be checked for fingerprints and he was sure his prints were on it. He tried to remember where he had thrown it. He recollected flinging it away from him in his fury. He remembered it flying off somewhere towards the wood.

He walked along the edge of the wood, his eyes searching the sandy ground. He hadn't gone more than a dozen paces when he came upon, in the sand, the unmistakable impression of the wrench, but the wrench itself wasn't there.

He stared down at the clear cut impression, his heart thudding.

There were three odd little marks by the impression, and it was only when he bent down and placed the back of his hand alongside the marks that he realized they had been made by the knuckles of a hand that had dipped into the sand to pick up the wrench.

It occurred to him then that the killer had murdered Glorie with the wrench, and, in spite of the blazing heat, he turned cold. If the killer had thrown the wrench away and it was later found by the police, it would hook Harry for the killing.

For more than half an hour, he feverishly searched the wood, but he didn't

find the wrench, and finally he had to give up looking for it. He tried to assure himself that the killer had hidden the wrench where no one would find it. He must get, this whole thing out of his mind, he told himself. He was now free of Glorie, he had his future to think of. He must get back to Miami and to Joan.

He drove up the road leading from the beach. When he reached the junction, he turned left and on to the main highway. Almost at once he was caught up in a ribbon of traffic, and he felt safer as he drove fast along the road back to Miami.

In his car, at the edge of the road, Borg had been waiting patiently. When he saw Harry's Buick go by, he went after him. He drove about a quarter of a mile behind the fast-moving Buick, content to let two other cars keep between his car and Harry's.

After Harry had driven some miles, he saw an oil truck coming towards him and he recognized the green-and-white markings: it was the truck driven by the man who had asked the way to the Denbridge service station. Harry cursed his bad luck to meet this driver again. He sank low in his seat, hoping the driver wouldn't recognize him, but he did. He blasted his horn and waved out of the window as he went by. Harry ignored him, increasing his speed.

If the police found Glorie's body and the murder got into the papers, the truck driver was certain to remember that he had seen Harry with Glorie, and some three hours later had seen Harry coming back without her. Harry felt a trickle of cold sweat run down his back. That kind of bad luck could put a man into the death cell, he thought.

He reached Miami around half-past four. Pulling up outside a drug store, he left the Buick, went in and put a call through to the Graynor's residence. He was told that Joan was out, but she was expected back after six. He said he would call later and went out on to the street again. Pausing by the car, he considered what his next move should be.

He decided to find cheaper accommodation than the motel he had left. Across the way he spotted a Tourist Information Bureau. He crossed the street and got from the bureau the address of a moderate motel. He drove out to Biscayne Boulevard where he found the motel facing the sea. He rented a cabin in a secluded corner of the well-laid-out grounds and, leaving his car outside, he entered the cabin.

A minute after he had closed the door, Borg appeared. He noted the

number of Harry's cabin, then went to the office and rented a cabin near Harry's. He also left his car outside his cabin. He entered and, pulling up a chair to the window, he sat down. From where he sat he could see Harry's front door and from time to time he caught a glimpse of him through the window as Harry moved around the room.

Borg was feeling relaxed and a little tired. The heat and the exertion of the day hadn't agreed with his bulk, but he didn't care. So far it had been a satisfactory day. He had killed for the first time in two years. Killing agreed with him. He looked across at Harry's cabin. Well, one of them was dead, the other could wait awhile. There was no need to rush it. Once he went back to work for Delaney he wouldn't get the chance of another killing.

He took from his hip pocket a flask containing sherbert powder mixed with water. He took a long swig from the flask, wiped his thick lips with the back of his hand and sighed contentedly.

Since he had been a kid playing in the gutters of Chicago, he had had a passion for sherbert: now he drank nothing else. He took another long swig, then, setting his flask on the windowsill, he settled down to wait.

By the time Harry had taken a shower, changed and had a couple of drinks from a bottle of whisky he had telephoned for, it was after six, and he called the Graynor's residence. Joan answered the telephone.

"What news, Harry?" she asked eagerly. "I didn't expect you to call so soon."

"She's gone. I finally got it fixed."

"She really has? Where has she gone to?"

"Mexico City. Didn't I tell you? She has a brother there."

"I'm so glad. Did you have to give her much?"

"Well, no. When it came to the shell out, she'd only take a couple of thousand. I wanted her to have more, but she wouldn't. She was pretty nice about it. She even wished us luck."

"She did?" The incredulous note in Joan's voice warned him to be careful what he said.

"Yes. I guess it was a shock when I told her we had to part. Her immediate reaction was to turn sour, but she soon got over it. She didn't realize you and I plan to get married. As soon as the nickel dropped, she was fine."

"Thank goodness. I was worrying. Did she go by train?"

Harry moved impatiently.

“Yeah. Look, Joan, never mind about her. When am I going to see you? We've things to talk about.”

“Where are you?”

“In the Biscayne Boulevard motel: cabin 376.”

“I'll come out now. Wait for me, Harry.”

“What do you think? Of course I'll wait.”

“I love you.”

“Yeah, me too.”

He replaced the receiver, then, taking the whisky and his glass he went out on to the stoop and sat in a wicker rocking chair, feeling the hot rays of the evening sun on him. From his window, Borg watched him, his little pig's eyes screwed up as the smoke from his cigarette spiralled up past his short, fat nose.

II

By the time Joan arrived in a cream-coloured Cadillac convertible, Harry was feeling a little high. He had had four drinks in a row, and his nerves, under the effect of the alcohol, were much more steady.

Joan parked nearby, opened the car door and, with a show of pale blue underwear and long, slim, nylon-clad legs, she slipped out of the car. She waved to him and came over.

"Come on in," Harry said, getting to his feet. "This isn't such a smart motel as the other one, but it is more reasonable and I've got to save my money now."

When they got inside and he had closed the door, she said, "I'm so relieved it's over, Harry. I was really worried. I didn't think she'd let you go as easily as this."

He put his arms around her.

"I told you: we were washed up. She was only throwing her weight around. As soon as I explained we were getting married, she behaved herself. Anyway, let's get her out of our minds."

She looked up at him.

"I was so sure she would make trouble. She was in love with you, Harry. Are you quite sure you've seen the last of her?"

Harry had to make an effort to meet her eyes.

"Of course I'm sure. Now forget her. We have a lot to talk about. We can go ahead now. That is if you still want to go ahead."

"Yes, that's all I've been thinking about since last we met."

He took her chin between his fingers and bent to kiss her. When he felt the movement of her lips against his, his arms tightened around her.

"I'm crazy about you, kid," he said.

She pushed him back.

"Yes, darling, but we must talk now. Please. There's so much to arrange."

"We've got all the evening to talk."

"No, we haven't. I must get back for dinner."

"That's just too bad," he said, smiling at her, "because we're not going to talk now."

He let go of her, turned the key in the lock, then went to the window and reached for the cord of the blind.

Watching him, she saw him suddenly stiffen then he seemed to turn to stone. His right hand remained in midair, his body rigid.

“What's the matter?” she asked sharply, sensing his tension.

He didn't move nor speak.

She joined him at the window, but, before she could look out, he pushed her back with a roughness that startled her.

“Keep out of sight!”

His voice was low and tight.

“Harry! What is it?”

“There's a cop outside!”

He watched the big man through the curtain. He had no doubt that he was a policeman. He had seen too many plainclothes men in Los Angeles not to be able to recognize the breed.

The cop was tall, broad and bulky, wearing a creased brown suit and a slouch hat pulled low over his right eye. His hard, fleshy face, his thin lips and stony, small eyes turned Harry cold with fear.

The cop was looking thoughtfully at Harry's car. He turned his head and eyed the Cadillac convertible parked nearby. Then he rubbed his jaw, frowning. He walked up the steps of the cabin then paused again to look back at the Cadillac.

“What's the matter, Harry?”

Joan's worried voice penetrated Harry's paralysed mind “He is coming here” he said in a cracked whisper.

“What if he is?” Joan sounded impatient. “Does it matter?”

Her matter-of-fact attitude to the situation helped to steady Harry's jangling nerves. If the police had found Glorie's body he thought, they wouldn't send one lone cop to arrest him They would send at least two, if not more. But what did this guy want?

He turned and waved Joan to the bathroom.

“Get in there and keep out of sight. He mustn't see you. If your father got to hear . . .”

“My goodness, yes!” Joan's eyes widened. “He'd never forgive me.” She gave him a puzzled, worried stare. His white, sweating face frightened her. Then she went quickly into the bathroom and shut the door as a heavy rap

sounded on the outer door Harry splashed whisky into his glass, gulped it down, wiped his face with his handkerchief, and crossed the room to the door. He hesitated for a long moment, then, with his heart hammering and a cold feeling in the pit of his stomach, he opened the door. The detective was looking away from him, his eyes on Joan's car and for perhaps three or four seconds, Harry waited.

Although he must have known Harry was waiting, the detective continued to stare at the car. Then, finally, he turned his head and Harry got the full blast from his hard, piercing eyes.

"You Griffin?" the cop said, pushing his hat to the back of his head and putting one large, hairy hand on the wall of the cabin and leaning his weight against it.

"That's right."

"I'm Detective-Sergeant Hammerstock. Mrs. Griffin around?"

Harry's heart lurched. Somehow he managed to crush down the fear that rose inside him and to keep his face expressionless.

"Who?"

The word came out in a husky whisper.

"Your wife," Hammerstock said, his eyes probing more intently.

Harry saw the danger. He mustn't be caught out in a lie, he told himself. They could easily find out that Glorie wasn't his wife.

"You've got your lines crossed," he said. "I'm not married."

Hammerstock rubbed his fleshy nose with the ball of his thumb.

"You are Harry Griffin?"

"Yes."

"You registered at the Florida motel the night before last?"

"Yes. What's this all about anyway?"

"You had a woman with you. You registered as Mr. and Mrs. Griffin right?"

"Yes, but don't tell me that's police business," Harry said, forcing his stiff lips into a smile.

Hammerstock cocked his head on one side.

"You mean this woman isn't your wife?"

"That's what I mean."

"Okay," Hammerstock said, shifting his position. "Let's start from the beginning again. Is the woman who isn't your wife but who registered at the

Florida motel as your wife around?”

“No, she isn't. Why do you want her?”

Hammerstock looked past Harry and, into the room beyond.

He saw Joan's gloves and handbag on the dressing table and he lifted his heavy eyebrows. Harry looked over his shoulder, saw what Hammerstock was looking at, moved forward, forcing Hammerstock to give ground, and pulled the door shut. He leant against it.

“Sure she isn't?”

“Yes, I'm sure.”

Hammerstock appeared to relax a little. He pushed his hat further to the back of his head, took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

“Could we talk inside, out of the sun?” he said.

“If we've got to talk, we talk right here.”

Hammerstock suddenly grinned. It wasn't a pleasant grin, but it had a certain brutal humour about it.

“Looks like I've called at the wrong time,” he said. “Well, never mind. I won't keep you long. Where can I find your girl.” Harry drew in a slow, deep breath. At least, they hadn't found Glorie's body. That was certain. The relief made him feel a little light headed.

“Why the mystery? What do you want her for?”

Hammerstock's grin widened.

“I've got fifty bucks for her. That'll come as a nice surprise to her, won't it?”

“Fifty bucks?” Harry stared at him. “I don't get it.”

“Look, the redhead who tries to run the office at the Florida happens to be my sister. That's my hard luck, but I won't bore you with my troubles,” Hammerstock said. “It so happens she has a bird brain. When a guy whistles after her, she thinks he's doing it because he happens to be musical: that's how dumb she is. Your girlfriend paid the check when you two left and birdbrain overcharged her fifty bucks. She made a two look like a seven, and your girlfriend didn't query it. Birdbrain only found it out after you'd gone, then she worked herself into a state about it. When she gets into a state, she calls me. I get called four or five times a week, and because I have the bad luck to be her brother, I have to straighten her out. Fifty bucks is quite a piece of money so I thought I'd better do something about it. I called three or four of the cheaper motels, thinking maybe you two had moved to some place that

doesn't charge for the air you breathe like the Florida does, and I found you here. I've got fifty bucks for your girlfriend."

"That's pretty nice of you to take all this trouble," Harry said. "Well, thanks. I'll take charge of it."

Hammerstock shook his head.

"I was told to give it to your girlfriend. Birdbrain wants a receipt from her so she can sleep easy tonight."

"I'll give you a receipt," Harry said. "It's my money. I gave her the dough to settle the check so the fifty belongs to me."

"Fifty bucks is money," Hammerstock said. "I'd like your girl to confirm the money's yours. Where can I find her?"

"I don't know," Harry said, trying to keep his voice steady. "We parted. I don't know where she is right now."

"Is that right?" The small eyes became inquisitive. "Birdbrain tells me you and the young woman went off in a Buick, heading for Highway 27. Didn't you take her someplace before you parted?"

This was dangerous, Harry thought, aware that his heart was pounding and wondering if Hammerstock could hear it. He couldn't risk a lie. Out of sheer cussedness, this cop might check.

"I took her to Collier City," he said. "She talked about going to New Orleans."

"Did she?" Hammerstock scratched the side of his jaw. "That's a funny place to leave anyone. You can't get to New Orleans from Collier City."

"Can't you? Well, that's nothing to do with me," Harry said curtly. "She wanted to go to Collier City so I took her there."

"Yeah. You never know with women: they're funny animals. What did you say her name was?"

"Glorie Dane."

Hammerstock took out a pack of Lucky Strikes. He flicked one out and offered it to Harry who shook his head. Hammerstock put the cigarette between his thin lips, took out a kitchen match and scratched it alight with his thumbnail.

"Seems you and Miss Dane had a quarrel before you left the Florida," he said. "Birdbrain had a complaint from a cabin near yours. That right?"

"I don't know," Harry said, forcing himself to meet the probing eyes. "Could be. I guess we slanged each other often enough. That's why we

parted.”

“My wife and I slang each other too, but I haven t been able to get rid of her,” Hammerstock said and grinned. “Well, I've got these fifty bucks. Maybe I'd better give them to you. I can't go out to Collier City. I've got work to do.”

“That's up to you,” Harry said. “I gave her the money so the fifty's mine, but I can't prove it.”

“You'll give me a receipt?”

“Oh, sure, I'll give you a receipt.”

Hammerstock took out his notebook, scribbled on a page, eased the page from the book and handed it to Harry with a stub of pencil. Harry signed the paper and handed it back. Hammerstock handed over five ten-dollar bills.

“Thanks for your trouble,” Harry said. “Maybe I should give your sister something. How about twenty bucks?”

Hammerstock shook his head.

“No, she wouldn't accept it. She's very high-minded, considering how dumb she is. You stick to it: you'll probably need it.”

He looked deliberately at the Cadillac convertible. “That your car?”

“No,” Harry said, opening the cabin door and moving back into the room.

“Nice job,” Hammerstock said. He looked at Harry and grinned. “And it seems you're a fast worker. Off with the old and on with the new, huh?”

“So long and thanks,” Harry said woodenly and shut the door in Hammerstock's face.

III

As Hammerstock walked down the asphalt path to where a dusty Lincoln was parked, Harry and Joan stood at the window, looking through the curtain at him. There was a tight, still silence in the cabin and, when the Lincoln had disappeared, Joan moved from Harry's side and wandered over to the dressing table.

Harry was aware of the tension in the room. He felt it wasn't entirely due to Hammerstock's visit. He had a feeling that the tension was also coming from Joan.

Trying to speak casually, he told her briefly why Hammerstock had called.

"I can't understand Glorie letting that dumb redhead make such a mistake," he said. "Usually, she's pretty smart. I've never known anyone to get the better of her before."

Joan didn't say anything. She opened her handbag, took out a comb and tidied her hair. Looking sharply at her, Harry was startled to see how pale and set her face was. He was still badly shaken by Hammerstock's visit. He realized he must make an effort to pull himself together. It was obvious to him that Joan was upset by something, and he had to find out what it was.

"Well, he's gone now," he went on, hoping to ease the tension. "Come here, Joan. Let me tell you how much I love you."

"I must go home," Joan said. Her voice sounded flat, and she picked up her gloves and handbag.

"But you can't go yet. You've only just come. You've plenty of time." He came around the bed to her, but she backed away, her face so tense he stopped abruptly. "What's the matter? What is it? Why are you looking like that?"

She faced him, her eyes large and scared.

"There's something wrong," she said. "Why did that policeman scare you?"

"Scare me?" He tried to smile, but his mouth felt frozen. "He didn't. He startled me. I was thinking of you. . . ."

"No, Harry, he frightened you."

Harry rubbed his sweating face, his mind crawling with alarm.

He had to be careful. If she suspected something was really wrong . . .

“Well, okay, maybe he did scare me,” he said and forced himself to smile. “It’s not to be wondered at, is it? I didn’t want him to find you here with me. Suppose he told your father? Isn’t that enough to scare anyone?”

“Why should he tell my father?”

“It’s possible, isn’t it? Anyway, I was thinking of you. He took me by surprise.”

“I want the truth, Harry!” she said sharply. “Why did you tell him you took Glorie to Collier City after you had told me you had put her on the train to Mexico City?”

Harry felt his smile freeze on his face. As soon as he had closed the outer door, he thought, she must have left the bathroom and listened by the open window to all that had been said.

Think! he told himself savagely. Everything depends now on a convincing lie. Make a mess of this and she’ll know something is wrong. Think, you fool!

“Collier City?” He managed somehow to force a laugh. “Well, I had to tell him something, didn’t I? I didn’t want him to know she had gone to her brother’s place.”

Her grey eyes stared at him uncomfortably “Why not?”

“What’s the matter, Joan? What’s this—a third degree?”

“Why didn’t you want him to know she had gone to Mexico City?” she repeated, moving further away from him.

His mind was working now. He had got over his scare. His inventiveness didn’t desert him. He sat on the bed and took out his pack of cigarettes.

“It’s not my secret, but I know you’ll keep it to yourself,” he said. “Sit down, and, for the love of mike, don’t look as if I’ve done something terrible. I assure you I haven’t. Relax, kid, and I’ll tell you.”

She moved past him to the armchair and sat down. Her face was still tense and her eyes worried and alarmed.

“You remember I told you Glorie was in trouble?” he said. “I told you she was about to kill herself when I ran into her. What I didn’t tell you was why she was in trouble. The police were after her. She never told me why they were after her, but only they were after her. I didn’t trust that cop. Maybe the fifty-buck story was true. It probably was, but I wasn’t going to risk telling him where Glorie had gone. For all I knew he had spotted her description from his sister. By telling him she had gone to Collier City—it was the first

town that jumped into my mind— I've put him on the wrong track. For all I know he'll get the Tampa police to look for her. If they do that, they won't be looking for her in Mexico City, will they?"

Joan looked away from him. She fiddled nervously with the clasp of her handbag.

"I see," she said quietly. "Yes, of course. I understand now. When I heard you tell him she had gone to Collier City it frightened me."

"But why?" Harry asked, trying to sound casual. He could see he hadn't convinced her and it made him anxious and uneasy.

"Because I still can't believe she would leave you like this," Joan said. "She loved you. I could see that in her eyes, by the way she looked at you and by the way she talked to me about you. A woman with her character doesn't give up a man she loves so easily. It still worries me."

"But don't you see," Harry said, trying to keep the desperation out of his voice, "it was because she loved me, she didn't want to stand in my way? I made it clear to her that you and I wanted to get married. As soon as she knew how it was she ducked out gracefully. Okay, it was good of her, but there's no need to make a fuss about it. After all, she knew I was through with her."

"But you said she was being difficult. You said she wanted more money and you would probably have to give her all your capital to get rid of her."

"I know. I said that," Harry said, having difficulty in controlling his rising impatience. "She did feel that way about it at first, but she changed her mind. She realized she was in the way. She thought it over and when I said I'd give her what she wanted, she would only take the two thousand."

Joan huddled down into her chair.

"Aren't you sorry for her, Harry?"

The question took him by surprise.

"Why sure, of course I am, but there's no point in two people spoiling their lives, is there? She'll get over it. I've given her some dough, and she's got her brother to look after her. Let's forget her, Joan."

"Who is her brother?"

Harry's hands turned into fists. He managed to say quietly, "I have no idea. I didn't ask her. Does it matter?"

"No, I suppose not. Well . . ." She stood up. "I must go now."

He got up and moved towards her, but she moved more quickly and

reached the door. Her obvious reluctance to let him touch her made him anxious and nervy.

“For heaven's sake, Joan . . . haven't we got this thing straightened out?” he said, exasperated.

“Yes, of course. Let's meet tomorrow. There isn't time to talk now. I must get back.”

“All right. I'll call you around ten o'clock. We've got that agent to see. And how about your father? Do you think I could meet him? I want to get ahead with this business now. There's no point in wasting time.”

“I'll see what I can do.”

He moved towards her, but she opened the cabin door and went quickly across to the Cadillac. By the time he reached the door, she was in the car. He paused in the doorway, watching her. She started the engine, lifted her hand in his direction, without looking at him, and drove away.

He remained in the doorway, his face set, his mind busy, then he went back into the cabin again and closed the door. He sat down in the armchair, poured another whisky into his glass and gulped it down.

What was the matter with her? he wondered. His story was convincing. It must have convinced her, and yet to have left like that . . . what was the matter with her?

Abruptly he got to his feet and crossed the room to the mirror on the wall. He stood before it and stared at himself. What he saw in the reflection shocked him and gave him his answer. The gaunt, white, glistening face with its eyes sunk into their sockets, the hard, thin mouth, the skin that seemed to be too tightly stretched over the facial bones wasn't the face he was used to seeing. It was the face of a frightened man with something bad on his conscience.

He cursed softly.

No wonder she had been scared, he thought. He'd have to pull himself together. He couldn't go on looking like this. He ran his tongue over his dry lips. Had he frightened her away for good?

He took out his handkerchief and wiped his face, suddenly aware that he was in a cold sweat. He went into the bathroom, stripped off his clothes and got under the cold shower. He remained under it until he was gasping, then he rubbed himself furiously with a hard towel and examined his face again in the bathroom mirror. He looked a little better, but there was still that tight,

skull-like look of fear in his face.

What are you frightened of, you fool? he asked himself as he glared into the mirror. They won't find her. They can't do anything to you if they don't find her and how can they possibly find her? No one has been out to that place in months. If they had you would have seen their footprints. No one ever goes there!

Then suddenly his legs went weak and he had to sit abruptly on the edge of the bath. There had been someone there . . . someone who had watched them quarrel, who had sneaked out of the wood and killed her and had sneaked back again, covering his prints as he had gone. He had remained in the wood, watching while he had buried Glorie. This killer knew where Glorie was buried. What was there to stop him telephoning the police from a paybooth and telling them he had seen him burying Glorie?

For a long moment Harry sat rigid. He hadn't thought of this before. He remained motionless, listening to the thud of his heartbeats while he tried to think what he had best do. Then he realized there was only one thing he could do. He would have to go out there, dig up Glorie's body and hide it somewhere else.

Then if the killer did phone the police and they went out to check and didn't find her, they would think it was a hoax.

The thought of going out there and handling Glorie's body sent a cold chill through him, but he knew he would have to do it. There was no other way. His future depended on the police not finding her.

He pulled on his clothes. His hands were shaking so badly that he had trouble in doing up his shirt buttons. He would go out there as soon as it was dusk: in another hour. By the time he got there it would be dark. He would have the place to himself. He would put her body in the car and drive along the coast road until he found a safe place to bury her.

He opened the bathroom door and stepped into the bedroom. Then he came to an abrupt stop. His blood seemed to freeze in his veins, his heart stopped, then raced.

Sitting in the armchair facing him, his black dusty hat at the back of his head, a cigarette smouldering between his thick lips, his fat, dirty hands folded on his gross thighs, was Borg.

IV

For the past twenty-four hours, Borg had ceased to exist in Harry's mind. The sight of him sitting in the armchair came like a devastating punch to Harry's solar plexus. He stood rigid, his mouth a little open, his eyes fixed, his heart fluttering.

Borg watched him. It pleased him to see the naked fear on Harry's face.

For several seconds the two men stared at each other, then Harry began to recover from the initial shock. He had no illusions about Borg. This gross brute was as dangerous as a rattlesnake and much more ruthless. He realized his fear and his reaction at the sight of Borg was a complete giveaway. It would be useless to try to bluff, to try to pretend he wasn't Harry Green. Borg must know, even if he hadn't known when he had come into the cabin.

Harry thought of his gun in the glove compartment of the car parked outside and cursed himself for being so careless as to leave the gun out of reach. Not that the gun would help him now.

He was sure Borg could handle a gun far quicker than he could.

"Hello, Green," Borg said in his hoarse, wheezy voice. "I bet you didn't think you'd see me again, did you? Sit on the bed. You and me've got things to talk about."

Moving like a sick man, Harry crossed to the bed and sat down. He put his hands on his knees while he stared at Borg.

"Did you really kid yourself you'd lost me?" Borg went on, screwing up his eyes as the cigarette smoke drifted before his fat face.

Harry didn't say anything. Even if he had wanted to speak, his mouth was too dry for him to make a sound.

"I've been with you since you took off from Oklahoma City airport," Borg went on. He crushed out his cigarette on the arm of the chair, burning a hole in the cover. "You've been having fun, haven't you? I like your girlfriend."

"What do you want?" Harry managed to say.

Borg showed his discoloured teeth in a wolfish smile.

"I've got something to sell you, palsy. Something you want pretty badly."

Harry stared at him.

"What do you mean?"

"I've got a car wrench with blood and hair on it as well as a nice set of your fingerprints. I thought maybe you'd like to buy it off me."

Harry had thought he had got beyond shock by now, but this statement brought him upright, sweat running down his face.

So Borg had killed Glorie!

What a fool he had been not to have thought of Borg before!

But why hadn't Borg wiped him out at the same time? He could have shot him as he was burying Glorie. No one would have heard the shot; no one would have known.

"So it was you who killed her," he said hoarsely.

Borg smiled.

"That's right," he said. "She had it coming. Only you and me know I killed her. The cops will think you did it if they dig her up. They'll *know* you did it if I give them the wrench. Want to buy it, palsy?"

Harry's mind was beginning to work again. He must gain time, he told himself. If he could outwit this fat killer in some way . . . it was his only hope of survival.

"Yes," he said. "I'll buy it."

"I thought you might," Borg said, and his thick lips curled into a sneering smile. "It'll cost you fifty thousand bucks, but it's cheap at the price."

Harry realized then why Borg hadn't wiped him out on the beach. Borg wanted to give Delaney his money back first.

"I haven't got it," he said. "I'll pay forty thousand: that's all there's left."

Borg shook his head.

"Delaney will want every nickel back. If you haven't got it you'll have to get it from your girlfriend. It should be a cinch. She's gone on you, palsy. I've been watching you. Besides, she's floating in dough."

"She won't give it to me," Harry said. "I can't ask her for it."

Borg shrugged.

"Please yourself," he said. "It's fifty grand or the wrench goes to the cops. I want the dough by tomorrow night."

Tomorrow night! Harry thought. That would give him twenty-four hours to think of a plan to get out of this jam.

"I'll see what I can do," he said. "Then what happens?"

Borg's eyes went sleepy.

"You get the wrench back. That's what happens."

“How do I know you won't double cross me?” Harry said, watching Borg closely.

Borg smiled.

“You don't. You've got to trust me the way Delaney had to trust you.”

That was another way of saying that when he had got the money, Borg would kill him, Harry thought. Well, maybe two could play that game.

“I don't part with the money until I get the wrench,” he said.

“That's okay—I don't part with the wrench until you hand over the dough—so that makes two of us,” Borg returned. “We'll meet tomorrow night at ten o'clock. You bring the dough and I'll bring the wrench.”

“We meet here?”

Borg shook his head.

“No, we don't meet here. We'll meet on the beach where you planted the girl.” His little pig's eyes searched Harry's white face. “Then if you want to double cross me or I want to double cross you, there'll be no one to see what happens.”

Harry stiffened. Out on that lonely beach, miles from anywhere, he would have only his wits to save him. He was now certain Borg intended to murder him.

“And if I were you,” Borg went on, “I wouldn't try a double cross. Let me show you something, palsy.” He lifted his right hand. “Watch.”

Harry was aware of a movement, but it was too quick to follow.

A .38 automatic appeared in Borg's hand as if he had plucked it out of the air.

“See what I mean?” Borg said and grinned. “I'm full of tricks like that. There've been guys who have thought they would be smart. They got up to all kinds of ideas, but something always went wrong at the last moment. So watch your step, palsy. Don't try to be smart with me.” He slid the gun into its holster and stood up. “Tomorrow night at ten. If you don't show up, I'll send the wrench to the cops. And it's got to be fifty grand or nothing. Get all that?”

Harry nodded.

“Yes.”

“Don't try to fade away,” Borg said as he opened the cabin door. “The cops will find you even if I don't. Remember what she said, palsy? You're on a hook, and you can't wriggle off it. This time it isn't her hook; it's mine.” He stepped out into the gathering dusk and walked across the grass to his cabin.

Harry went to the window. He watched Borg disappear into his cabin, then he pulled down the blind, turned on the light and went over to the table on which stood the bottle of whisky. He poured himself out a stiff shot, drank it, recharged his glass and then sat down in the armchair.

This was the showdown, he told himself. If he could beat Borg, he was in the clear. He had no doubts of Borg's intentions. As soon as he handed over the fifty thousand dollars, Borg would kill him. Harry was sure now that Borg wanted to return to Delaney with the fifty thousand and the news that he had got rid of Glorie and himself. That meant Harry should be safe until after he had parted with the money. Borg wasn't likely to ambush him, to shoot him on sight, unless he was sure he had the money with him. As soon as the money had exchanged hands and Borg had checked it, then Harry was as good as dead.

If he was to defeat Borg, he would have to do it either before the money was handed over or while it was in the act of being handed over. After it had been handed over, he was sure he wouldn't be able to cope with Borg's efficiency as a killer. It was only while Borg was uncertain that he was going to get the money that he would be off his guard, and that was the only possible moment to beat him.

For a long time, Harry sat staring at the opposite wall while he thought of a way to outfox Borg. Finally he came to a decision. It would be a gamble that might or might not come off, but it was a reasonable risk, and Harry could think of no other alternative plan. He knew he couldn't hope to match Borg's speed with a gun. His one chance was to take Borg by surprise. It was only by surprise that he could hope to save his life.

By the time he had reached his decision, it was just after nine o'clock. Darkness had fallen. He turned off the light and crossed the room to look out of the window. There was no light showing in Borg's cabin, but Harry was sure the fat killer, although out of sight, was at the window, alert and waiting.

At least, he thought, he didn't have to go out to the beach and dig up Glorie's body. He was sure that Borg would follow him now wherever he went and there was no point in attempting to change her burial place.

He went outside, got into his car and drove it into the garage a few yards from his cabin. He turned off the car lights, then opened the glove compartment and took out the .45. The cool feel of the gun butt gave him a little confidence. He slid the gun into his hip pocket, knowing that Borg

couldn't possibly see what he was doing. He got out of the car, closed the garage doors and walked across to the brightly lighted restaurant.

As he pushed open the swing doors, he knew Borg could see him outlined against the bright light from the overhead sign.

He didn't mind that. Up to a point he wanted Borg to know what he was doing.

The restaurant was nearly empty. Only four couples still lingered over their meal. No one paid any attention to him as he walked to the far end of the room, out of sight of the uncurtained windows, and sat down at a corner table.

A waiter, a sullen, bored expression on his face, came over and gave Harry the menu card. Harry ordered a fillet of steak, french fried potatoes and a salad. As the waiter moved away, Harry stopped him.

"While the steak's being fixed, I'd like you to do me a favour," he said, taking out two five-dollar bills. He slid them across the table towards the waiter. "That's for the trouble I may cause you."

"Yes, sir." The waiter snapped up the bills and stowed them away. He was suddenly anxious to please. He bent over Harry with a deferential air. "What can I do for you?"

"I want five pieces of wood: three measuring twelve by six and two measuring three by six. Think you can get them for me?"

The waiter looked startled,

"Well, I don't know. Maybe our carpenter can fix it if he hasn't gone home. I'll ask him."

Harry took another five-dollar bill from his wallet and handed it to the waiter.

"Give that to the carpenter. I wouldn't want him to work for nothing. I also want a dozen half-inch nails, a hammer, a drill and a fretsaw. Okay?"

The waiter looked at Harry as if he thought he was crazy.

"You want to buy the tools?"

"No, just to borrow them. I'll let you have them back tomorrow."

"You want five pieces of wood, three measuring twelve inches by six, and two three by six, a hammer, a drill, twelve half-inch nails and a fretsaw. Is that right?" the waiter said.

"That's right, and I'd like about a foot of thick copper wire."

"I'll see what I can do," the waiter said and went away to the kitchens.

Harry lit a cigarette and stared across the room at a dark, sexy-looking girl who was talking to a thin man with Latin eyes and high cheekbones. Harry didn't see the girl, but his steady stare in her direction so disconcerted her that she shifted her chair around so her back was turned to him.

After a twenty-minute wait, the waiter came back with Harry's steak. He said he had talked to the carpenter who would have the pieces of wood ready for Harry by the time he had finished his dinner.

"I'm in cabin 376," Harry said. "Would you bring the wood and the tools over to me, and a bottle of Scotch? I want you to keep the wood and the tools out of sight under a napkin. Will you do that?"

The waiter looked wonderingly at him, nodded and said he would come over after Harry had finished his dinner.

Harry didn't hurry over his meal. He had a lot to think about.

First thing in the morning, as soon as the bank opened, he would have to draw out all his capital. He mustn't let Borg think for a moment that he was about to pull a fast one on him. He would have to persuade Joan to lend him a further ten thousand, and he'd have to draw that from her bank. He wondered uneasily if Joan would lend him the money. He was sure Borg would keep track of him, and it was essential not to rouse his suspicions. If he were going to outwit Borg he would have to lull him into a feeling of security, to blunt his razor edge of alertness. If he could do that, he stood a chance of beating him.

After he had finished his meal, he returned to the cabin and sat down to wait. Ten minutes later the waiter came over from the restaurant. He had followed out Harry's instructions to the letter.

He carried a tray, covered with a white napkin under which were the five pieces of wood, a hammer, a fretsaw, a drill, some nails and a length of copper wire. In his other hand he carried a bottle of Scotch.

Harry thanked him and got rid of him. Then he locked the door, and, taking the strips of wood over to the table, he assembled them to make an open-top box. From his hip pocket, he took out the .45 automatic and laid it in the box. With a pencil, he made a mark on the wood at one end and another mark in the middle of the bottom of the box. He removed the gun, and with the drill and the fretsaw, made two small openings at the places he had marked. He put the gun back in the box and checked his calculations. The barrel of the gun just poked through the end opening.

The trigger could be reached through the opening in the bottom.

Satisfied that his calculations were accurate, he fixed the gun to the bottom of the box with the length of wire. Then he held the box in the palm of his hand, his thumb and little finger gripping each side, it was simple to insert his forefinger through the opening in the bottom of the box and to curl his finger around the trigger. He found he hadn't made the opening quite wide enough to allow him to pull the trigger. He unfastened the gun, took it out of the box and widened the hole. Then he replaced the gun, fastened it with the wire and tried again. This time he had no difficulty in pulling the trigger. He again took the gun out of the box and sitting on the bed, he carefully oiled and cleaned the gun. Then he broke open a box of cartridges, and, using a penknife, he cut a ridge in the heads of four of the bullets, slightly spreading the soft lead to make a rough kind of dum-dum. He loaded the gun with these bullets, jacked one into the breech, and once more fastened the gun into the box. Satisfied with his work, he locked the box away in a drawer in his chest, cleared up the mess he had made on the table, wrapped the tools in the napkin and left the bundle on the dressing table.

He undressed and got into bed, poured himself another whisky, drank it, then turned out the light. Lying in the darkness, he went over his plan in his mind. He knew his life and future depended on its success, and the responsibility made him feel cold and frightened. He wished he had Glorie at his side to give him confidence and to soothe his tears.

It was only at this moment that he realized how much he was going to miss Glorie. He dared not confide in Joan. He knew that from now on, even if he did manage to beat Borg and remain out of trouble with the police, he would have no one to share his tears, no one he could lean on, no one to think for him in an emergency as Glorie had done.

When at last he fell asleep, he dreamed that Glorie was in the room, sitting at the dressing table, brushing her hair. He could see her face reflected in the mirror, she looked gay and happy as she had done on that morning before he had told her he was going after the diamonds. But when he spoke to her, she didn't turn nor seem to hear him, and when he tried to get out of bed to go to her, he found he couldn't move—as if some force were holding him down.

He woke to hear himself calling her name, cold sweat running down his face and his heart hammering with fear.

chapter eight

I

Leaving the Buick in a parking lot on Bay Shore Drive, Harry walked along the promenade to the main entrance of the Excelsior hotel where he was to meet Joan at midday.

He had already been to his bank and had arranged for thirty thousand dollars in bearer bonds to be ready for him to collect during the afternoon. He had drawn ten thousand dollars in cash, and he now carried this sum in a leather brief case.

While he had been arranging about the bonds with the bank teller, he had seen Borg come into the bank.

Borg had given him a sly, sneering smile. Pausing only long enough to watch at a distance the clerk complete a withdrawal form and give it to Harry to sign, he had left the bank, and Harry had seen no sign of him since.

But Harry was sure he wasn't far from him, and as he paced up and down outside the hotel, he had a feeling that somewhere, masked by the heavy traffic and the crowds that swarmed along the promenade and sidewalk, Borg continued to keep watch on him.

He suddenly caught sight of the cream Cadillac convertible as it came slowly along in the tide of the traffic. He stood on the kerb, waiting. As Joan pulled up, he opened the car door and got in.

He looked anxiously at her. She was pale, and there were smudges under her eyes. He could see she was still as tense and as worried as she had been when she had left him the previous night.

"I'm not late?" she asked as she steered the car into the stream of traffic again.

"It's just on twelve. Let's get away from this crush where we can talk," he said. "Turn left here. We can go out to the golf course. We can lunch there if you like."

"Yes."

They drove in silence up South West 27th Avenue. Harry kept his eyes on

the driving mirror on the right wing of the car.

He spotted Borg's car turn into the avenue after they had reached the intersection at West Flagler Street.

"Did you speak to your father?" he asked abruptly.

"No." Joan didn't look at him. "He's busy today."

Harry moved uneasily. He glanced at her, wondering what was going on in her mind.

"You look as if you didn't get much sleep last night," he said. "Are you still worrying yourself about nothing, Joan?"

"I wish it were nothing. Did you manage to sleep then?" she returned, slowing at the entrance to the golf course. She swung the car on to the private road, then accelerated, sending the car forward at a fast speed. Neither of them spoke until she had parked the car before the clubhouse, then she said, "We can go on to the terrace."

As Harry got out of the car, he looked back along the straight drive to the main road. There was no sign of Borg.

He followed her along the begonia-lined path, around the clubhouse and on to the broad terrace with its tables and gay sun umbrellas. There were not more than six or seven people on the terrace, and it was easy enough to find a secluded table. They sat down, and when the waiter came over, Harry ordered a double whisky after Joan had said she didn't want anything.

They waited until the drink was brought, then Harry said, "When do you think you'll be able to talk to your father, Joan? I don't want to waste any more time if I can help it."

She looked down at her hands, frowning.

"I'm not going to talk to him now, Harry."

Harry felt as if someone had punched him under the heart.

"You mean you don't want to go ahead with the idea?"

"Yes, that's what I mean. I'm sorry, but I can't go ahead with it now."

"But, Joan, I have been relying on you," he said, his voice husky. "We had it all worked out. I can't believe you're going to let me down. Why have you changed your mind?"

"My father trusts my judgment," she said, looking across at the distant fairway where four men were coming down the hill towards the eighteenth green. "He never questions anything I do or want to do. He would back me if I asked him to put up capital for a business. He'd take my word that it was a

sound investment. That puts me in a difficult position. I couldn't tell him the idea is a sound one."

Harry felt the blood rise into his face.

"I don't understand," he said sharply. "You know this is a sound idea, Joan. Why can't you tell him so?"

"The idea is sound enough," she said quietly, and suddenly she looked straight at him, "but I am not sure now it would be sound if you handled it."

Harry felt himself turn white.

"Are you telling me that you don't love me?"

She shook her head.

"I'm not saying that: love has nothing to do with it, Harry. I've been told often enough by my father that business and sentiment don't mix. He's right: they don't."

Harry ran his fingers through his hair. Without Graynor's backing, he would get nowhere, he told himself. He would have to be content to buy one aircraft which would give him plenty of headaches and only a bare living.

"But why have you changed your mind? What have you got against me?" he asked.

"It has suddenly dawned on me that I don't know anything about you," she returned. "I know I have behaved very badly, and I should never have let you make love to me. You swept me off my feet. I thought you were a wonderful person, but now I'm not sure that you are. Yesterday, I discovered two things about you: you are afraid of the police and you are a liar. I couldn't go into a partnership with a man I can't trust."

With a hand that shook, Harry picked up his drink and gulped down half the whisky.

"Well, that's pretty good," he said, his voice off-key. "So I'm a liar and you can't trust me. I didn't expect this from you."

"What have you done to Glorie Dane?" she asked quietly, her eyes looking into his.

Harry felt sweat break out on his face.

"Done to her? What do you mean?"

"What I say. What have you done to her?"

"I've done nothing to her," Harry said, sitting forward, his fists clenched. "I told you: I put her on a train for Mexico City. She's gone to her brother's place."

“Will you give me her brother's address so I can find out if she has arrived there?”

“If I had it, I'd give it to you,” Harry said, talking out of his handkerchief and wiping his face. “But I haven't got it. I don't know where her brother lives, and I don't give a damn either.”

“You saw her on the train?”

“Yes. Now look, Joan . . .”

“What time did the train leave?”

Harry immediately saw the trap. This was something she could check. He cursed himself for giving her such an obvious opening.

He should have checked the trains when he had first told her Glorie had left for Mexico City.

“Some time in the morning,” he said, reaching for his glass again to cover his confusion. “For the love of mike, Joan . . .”

“Are you quite sure it was in the morning?” she asked quietly.

He put down his glass with the drink untouched and faced her.

He knew he couldn't hedge anymore. She had cornered him, and whatever he said, she could prove he was lying. He realized he must shift ground and tell her half the truth in the hope he could convince her.

“All right: she didn't go to Mexico City. Now are you satisfied?” he said angrily.

She continued to stare at him, her eyes cold and hurt.

“So you admit lying to me?”

“Yes, I lied,” Harry said, “and I'm sorry. I'll tell you what happened if you must know. Glorie did turn sour as I told you she had. She wanted thirty thousand dollars to let me go. She said she would go to your father and tell him she was my mistress if I didn't give her the money. If I did give it to her I would have no capital to go into partnership with you. I was in a spot. I decided I'd have to give you up and go with her. She wanted to go to New Orleans. She thought she and I could run this air-taxi business there better than here. We got as far as Collier City, then I suddenly couldn't take it. I felt if I gave in to her, I wasn't only ruining my life and yours, but hers as well. I told her so. I told her if she continued to blackmail me, I'd blackmail her. I said I'd give her away to the police: I should have told her that before, but I didn't want to do it. That settled it. She climbed down. I made her take two thousand and promise to leave me alone. I put her on a bus to New Orleans

and I came back here. That's what happened and that's the truth."

Joan continued to stare at him.

"Why didn't you tell me this before instead of making out she had gone to Mexico City?" she asked in a quiet, cold voice.

"I didn't want to worry you, I thought if I told you she was going to her brother instead of going off into the blue to New Orleans you'd be more easy in your mind about her," Harry said, trying not to show how desperately he was lying.

"So she is in New Orleans now?"

"I guess so. I don't know. I put her on a bus to New Orleans. What's happened to her now I don't know and I don't care." He finished his drink and set down the glass. "Can't we get her out of our lives, Joan? I'm through with her, and she is through with me. I love you. I want to marry you, and I want to go ahead with my plans. Can't we do that?"

"No, we can't," she said. "You see, Harry, I just don't know if I can believe you or not. I'm certainly not going into a business partnership with you. I couldn't risk my father's money in anything you were handling. I can't marry you either until I know for certain you are speaking the truth."

"Of course I'm speaking the truth," Harry said angrily. "I give you my word . . ."

"Then why are you looking the way you're looking? What are you frightened about? You have something on your conscience," she said. "Anyone can see that. It's as if you have done something dreadful." She paused, her hands turning into fists. "You know what I'm beginning to suspect, don't you?"

He stared at her, his face glistening with sweat.

"It's not true, Joan. I swear it isn't."

"Then you know what I mean?"

"No, I don't, but I've done nothing wrong. You've got to believe me."

"I'm frightened for you, Harry."

"You don't have to be. I tell you I've done nothing wrong. You've got to believe me, Joan!"

"All right, I will believe you on one condition," she said. "I can't accept your word now. You have told me too many lies for me to do that, but I'm willing to be convinced. If you will go with me to New Orleans so I can talk to Glorie myself and hear her version of this business, I'll be convinced, but

not before. Will you come to New Orleans with me?"

He hesitated, and the hesitation was fatal. She had been watching him closely. She saw his eyes shift away from hers, his face slacken while his brain raced to find a way out.

She got to her feet.

"All right, Harry," she said unsteadily. "Let's leave it at that. I don't think we should meet again, anyway not until you have brought Glorie back to Miami. If you can do that, then we might have another talk."

He knew this was the end between them. He could tell that by her expression, and he cursed Glorie and cursed himself for spoiling the only love in his lie. Defeated, he got slowly to his feet and followed her across the terrace, around the clubhouse to the car park.

She stopped by the car and faced him.

"Please get a taxi back," she said. He could see her lips were trembling and there were tears in her eyes. "I would rather you didn't come with me."

"That's okay," he said. "Look, Joan, I'm sorry about this. I am in a jam, but it's not what you're thinking. You may as well know the truth now. I've lied to you because I didn't want to lose you. But now it doesn't matter because I see I have already lost you. Glorie's dead. You guessed that, didn't you?"

She went very white, and for a moment he thought she was going to faint, but he was careful not to touch her.

"I'm mixed up with a mob of killers," he went on tonelessly.

"It was my fault, and I'm making no excuses. Glorie and I pulled a robbery together. You've read about it. I was the guy who took the diamonds from the Moonbeam aircraft. That's how I got the fifty thousand dollars. Up to then I hadn't been worth a nickel, and I would never have been worth a nickel if I hadn't pulled this job. I double crossed the mob, and one of them is tailing me. He killed Glorie out on the beach near Collier City. He now plans to kill me. If I have any luck, I may beat him to it, but maybe I won't have the luck. I may be dead by tomorrow, but I want you to know that I love you: you're the only woman I have ever known who has meant anything to me. Although we haven't known each other very long, the few hours I've spent with you have been the happiest I've ever known."

"Please don't tell me anymore," she said huskily. "I don't want to be involved in this. What a fool I've been to have had anything to do with you!"

She got into the car and started the engine.

He stepped back, his face pallid.

“So long, Joan. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done this to you, but I loved you and I still love you. I'd be glad if you wished me luck. I'll need it.”

She engaged gear and, without looking at him, she drove quickly away.

He stood staring after her, knowing the one precious thing in his life had gone now for good.

Borg, sitting in his car across the way, under the shade of the trees, inserted his thick finger into his ear and poked around absently. His fat, cruel face showed his surprised interest.

II

Harry remained at the club house until past two o'clock.

When Joan had driven away, he had walked back to the terrace and had sat staring blankly across the fairway, his mind numb and his thoughts bitter.

But he didn't blame Joan for leaving him. She had done the sensible thing, he told himself. A girl in her position couldn't be expected to associate with him now she knew the truth. He admired her courage to break away. He knew she loved him, and her decision couldn't have been an easy one. As he sat thinking about her, he suddenly realized what Glorie must have suffered during her life. He now realized what it meant to lose someone precious to him, and this had happened to Glorie not once, but several times.

Glorie was dead. He might be dead himself by tonight. He was surprised to find that he didn't care much whether he was or not. He knew he would have to kill Borg to save his own life, and he wondered if it wouldn't be better to let Borg go ahead and finish things for him instead of living out the rest of his life with Borg's murder on his conscience.

What was he going to do if he did succeed in killing Borg? He had about fifty thousand dollars which was quite a piece of money.

His enthusiasm to start an air-taxi business had gone now. He would have to think of something else to do. Perhaps his original plan to go to Europe, to have a look around in London, Paris and Rome might offer a solution. If he did kill Borg, he would be safer in Europe where he could lose himself.

After an hour of continuous brooding, he worked off his bitter mood and decided there was no point in weakly throwing up the sponge. There were plenty of other women in the world, he told himself. He still had a chance of happiness if he could only rid himself of Borg.

He went into the clubhouse and asked the steward to get him a taxi. While he waited, he had a sandwich and a whisky, and, when the taxi arrived, he told the driver to take him to his bank.

Borg, who had been dozing in his car, saw the taxi arrive. He followed it from the golf course to the centre of the town. He watched Harry go to his bank and come out with his brief case bulging. He saw Harry speak to the taxi driver and then walk down the road a few yards to the National

Californian Bank.

The taxi crawled after him and parked outside.

Knowing that Borg was tailing him, Harry had to make a pretence of drawing the ten thousand dollars he was supposed to be getting from Joan. He spent some minutes talking to the bank teller about opening an account, then, when he thought he had been in the bank long enough to allay Borg's suspicions, he told the bank teller he would come back later and went out on to the street again. He told the taxi driver to take him to the parking lot where he had left his car.

All the time Borg's car kept behind him. Borg made no attempt to keep out of sight.

As Harry was paying off his taxi outside the parking lot, Borg pulled up by him and leaned out of the window. The two men looked at each other. Neither of them spoke until the taxi had driven away, then Borg said, "You've had a busy day, palsy."

"Yeah," Harry said, his grip tightening on the briefcase.

Although he felt reasonably safe with the promenade crowded with people, he didn't intend to take any chances with Borg and he wished he hadn't left his gun in the cabin.

"Did you get the dough?" Borg asked, his hard little eyes going to the brief case.

"Yes, I got it."

"Did she part, palsy?"

"Yes."

"Was that her bank you've just come from?"

"That's right."

Borg nodded. He seemed satisfied.

"She didn't look too happy, did she? Didn't she like giving you the dough, palsy?"

"She wasn't overjoyed," Harry said, his voice tight and hard.

"Well, never mind, it's in a good cause. See you tonight at ten. Don't try anything funny, will you?"

"That goes for you too," Harry said and, turning his back, he walked over to his car.

Borg looked after him, his little eyes sleepy, then he set the car in motion and drove away. By the time Harry had manoeuvred his car out of the packed

parking lot, Borg was out of sight.

Harry returned to the motel. He went over to the office and asked the manager to put his brief case in his safe. As he walked over to his cabin, he saw Borg's car was parked outside Borg's cabin, and he guessed the fat killer was at his window, watching from behind the curtain.

Harry entered his cabin, shut and locked the door, then he unlocked the drawer in his chest where he had put the gun and box. He satisfied himself that nothing had been disturbed, relocking the drawer. He collected his swimming trunks and a towel and, leaving the cabin, he went down on to the beach.

He spent the next two hours swimming and lazing on the sand, determined to keep his mind empty and refusing to let himself think of what lay ahead of him. On his way back to the motel, he stopped in at a bar and spent half an hour over two whiskies and the evening paper. It was just after seven o'clock by the time he got back to his cabin. He noticed Borg's car had gone. He entered his cabin, shaved, showered and changed into a dark lounge suit. Then he went over to the restaurant, taking with him the tools he had borrowed, carefully wrapped in the napkin in case Borg happened to be still watching him. He had dinner, then he walked over to the manager's office and collected his brief case.

By then it was half-past eight, and growing dusk. He locked himself in the cabin, turned on the light and pulled down the blind. He took the box, containing the gun, from the drawer and set it on the table. He was now aware of a cold, sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. Up to this moment he had managed to keep his mind clear of what was to happen within the next two hours. But, as he looked at the gun in the box, the full force of his predicament hit him. He was going out to the beach alone where Borg would be waiting for him. One of them would survive the meeting; one of them would die. Borg had everything in his favour. He was an expert killer. All Harry had in his favour was the element of surprise and the hope that Borg wouldn't kill him until he was sure Harry had brought money with him.

Harry poured himself a shot of whisky which helped to steady his jumping nerves. He picked up the evening newspaper he had brought with him and tore it into two parts. He made two pads from the folded paper and wedged them into the box. He opened the brief case and took out a packet of \$100 bills. One of these he slid between the gun barrel and the hole-in the box,

masking the gun barrel. The rest of the bills he put on top of the box and fastened them with an elastic band. He stood away and examined the box. It looked as if it were packed tight with one-hundred dollar bills, and that was the way he wanted it to look.

There was no sign of the gun. Picking up the box, he again assured himself that he could get his finger through the hole in the bottom of the box and around the trigger.

He put the box back on the table, and then fastened the strap of the brief case. He would have preferred to have taken the case with him but he was determined that if anything went wrong with his plan and he was killed, the case shouldn't fall into Borg's hands. Not sure that Borg might still be watching the cabin, he decided against taking the case over to the manager's office. If Borg saw him, he would know at once that he was planning a double cross.

Lifting the mattress on the bed, he pushed the brief case under it and then straightened the bedspread.

It was now time to go. He put on his hat, lit a cigarette, picked up the box and left the cabin, locking the door after him.

He got into his car, put the box on the seat beside him and drove quickly along Bay Shore Drive, up Le Jeune Road towards Highway 27. It was dark by the time he reached Tamiami Canal. The broad highway was alive with traffic coming into Miami. He seemed to be the only one leaving town, and the continuous blaze of headlights coming towards him irritated him.

The luminous hands of the dashboard clock showed twenty minutes after nine as he passed the wood where he and Glorie had stopped to argue and where the oil-truck driver had asked the way to the Denbridge service station.

Harry thought then of Glorie. He realized now that he should never have left her. She was his kind whereas Joan was way out of his class. Nothing he did would have ever shocked Glorie. If she had been alive now, she would have come with him to face Borg. She would never have let him do this drive alone.

He came to the intersection that led to Collier City, and he turned left. The time was now five minutes to ten. He was aware that his heart was pounding and his hands were cold and clammy.

After five minutes driving he saw on either side of the road the mounds of clam shells in his headlights. He pulled up just clear of the wall of shells. He

turned off the headlights and sat for a long moment staring through the windshield at the open beach and the sea glistening in the moonlight.

The moon rode in a cloudless sky like a shield of polished silver.

It's hard, white light made black shadows but lit up the beach so that Harry could see every piece of flotsam and even the crinkles in the sand as if they were pinpointed by a searchlight.

There was no sign of Borg.

Harry got out of his car, picked up the box and put it under his arm.

He walked slowly to the end of the road until he could see the whole length of the lonely beach. He could see the scattered seaweed that marked Glorie's grave. He turned away hurriedly, a chill of horror creeping over him.

As he stood listening, he fancied he heard a slight sound near him: so slight he wasn't sure if he had heard it. He stiffened, his nerves crawling. Very slowly he turned his head to look to his right.

Borg was there: a gross, black, shadowy figure, leaning against a tree, within ten yards of him.

Harry remained motionless, staring at Borg.

"Did you bring the dough, palsy?" Borg asked in his hoarse whisper.

"I've got it," Harry said. "Where's the wrench?"

"I've got that too," Borg said. He lifted his right hand and stepped forward two paces out of the shadows. The moonlight fell on the .38 he held in his hand and which he pointed at Harry. "Watch it, palsy," he went on. "No tricks. Let's see the dough."

It was going to work, Harry thought, his mouth dry, his heart hammering so violently he could scarcely breathe. He had guessed right. Borg wasn't going to kill him until he was sure he had the money.

"I've got it here," Harry said hoarsely. He let the box slide from under his arm into his right hand. His thumb and little finger gripped the sides of the box, his forefinger slid into the hole and around the trigger.

Borg suddenly turned on the powerful flashlight he held in his left hand. The beam of the flashlight dazzled Harry, but, by narrowing his eyes, he could just make out Borg's bulk as Borg moved a little to his left.

"Let's see it," Borg said.

Harry turned so he faced Borg. He moved the box around so that the hidden gun was pointing directly at Borg.

He heard Borg's wheezing breath pause as the beam of the flashlight fell

directly on the box in Harry's hand. Harry knew instinctively that Borg realized the box was a fake. The box had gone to Borg's eyes and to his brain and had given him a warning. Harry knew he had only that split second before Borg's brain sent an impulse to his trigger finger.

Harry squeezed the trigger of the hidden gun. The gun went off as Borg's gun spat fire. The two crashes of gunfire were simultaneous.

The dum-dum bullet hit Borg below his heart, dropping him in his tracks. He went down like a pole-axed bull. His gun spat fire again, then again, the bullets whistling away towards the night sky.

A fraction of a second after Harry had fired, he felt an agonizing shock in his right bicep. The box fell out of his paralysed fingers and he staggered back, his left hand clutching his right arm.

He recovered his balance, staring at Borg's fallen bulk. Then slowly and unsteadily he moved closer, picked up the flashlight in his left hand and turned the beam on Borg's dead face.

He stood looking down at Borg while blood dripped from his fingertips, then, satisfied Borg was dead, he moved away, still holding his arm, feeling the blood soaking through his coat.

Already he was feeling faint and light-headed. He knew he must stop the bleeding. His mind went to Joe Franks, remembering how he had been shot in the arm and how he had bled. He managed to get his coat off. The effort made him feel so sick and faint that he had to sit on the sand. Somehow he managed to roll up his shirtsleeve. He had been hit in the fleshy part of the arm and he was bleeding badly. He tied a handkerchief around the wound, knotted it tightly by holding one end of the handkerchief between his teeth. He rested for several minutes, his head on his unwounded arm.

Well, he had beaten Borg, he told himself. It had been a close thing, but he had done it. Had Borg brought the wrench with him? Harry thought it unlikely, but he had to make sure.

He got slowly to his feet, taking up the flashlight. He went over to Borg and, kneeling beside him, he ran his hand over the gross body, but he didn't find the wrench. Picking up the box, containing his gun, he set off into the wood. After a few minutes' walk, he came upon Borg's car, but the wrench wasn't in it. Had Borg sent the wrench to the police or had he left it in his cabin?

Harry thought it was more likely that Borg had left it in his cabin.

He walked unsteadily to the opening of the road, and paused to look back at the place where he had buried Glorie.

“So long, Glorie,” he said. “I hate leaving you here, but there's nothing else I can do.”

Then he turned and made his way back to his car.

III

The drive back to Biscayne Avenue motel was like a nightmare to Harry. When he got on to the highway, his arm began to burn, and very soon he felt as if his flesh had caught fire. He drove slowly riding the pain, feeling light-headed and faint. He kept telling himself he had to get to Borg's cabin before Borg's body was found. He must find the wrench. It was only this urge of danger that kept him going. He realized now how Joe Franks had suffered, and he flinched when he remembered how he had left him to bleed to death in the desert.

The traffic bothered him. He was afraid he would run off the road if he went faster than twenty miles an hour, and the other cars kept flashing past him with a blast from their horns. The constant noise and the glare in his driving mirror from the headlights of the cars coming up behind him confused his mind and he drove badly, zigzagging about the road.

Once he felt he was losing consciousness. It was only with an effort that made him break out in a cold sweat that he pulled himself together and crushed down the cold sick feeling of faintness that threatened to engulf him. He kept on, his right arm stiff and burning, his left hand on the steering wheel.

How he managed to negotiate the traffic on Bay Shore Drive he never knew. From time to time, drivers shouted at him, once he saw a car appear in his headlights, coming straight at him, but he had no will nor strength left to swerve. It was the other driver, with a screaming of tyres, who managed to avoid a head—on collision. Harry kept on, hunched down in his seat, his teeth gritted against the pain in his arm, forcing himself to keep conscious until he saw ahead of him the red-and-green neon lights over the entrance to the motel.

He drove slowly up the dark drive to the parking lot, cut the engine and groped for the parking brake. Then he sat motionless, his breath hissing between his clenched teeth, cold sweat on his face. When at last he felt capable of making a move, he opened the car door and dragged himself out. He stood unsteadily, his hand on the car door for some moments before he could trust himself to cross over to Borg's cabin.

He got there somehow, and, surprisingly, the cabin door swung open when he turned the handle, and he stepped into darkness.

His left hand groped for the light switch, found it and turned it on. He stood looking around the empty room, then he saw a long, thin brown-paper parcel lying on the table. He went over to it and picked it up. He knew by its hardness and its weight that it was the car wrench, and his lips came off his teeth in a mirthless grin.

Well, he was getting the breaks, he thought as he leaned on the table. He shut his eyes against the sudden feeling of faintness that made the room spin and the light darken. He hung on to the table until the faintness receded. He had now to get back to his own cabin, he told himself. He would have to steel himself to fix his arm and then get some sleep. With any luck, by tomorrow morning, he would be fit enough to move on. It wouldn't do to stay for long at the motel. Someone might find Borg. He must be away from the motel before he was found.

He staggered across the room and into the bathroom. Filling the toilet basin with cold water, he plunged his face into it. The shock of the water revived him. He wiped his face on a towel, then filled a glass with water and drank it thirstily. He now felt capable of reaching his cabin. He went into the outer room, picked up the brown-paper parcel, crossed to the door and turned off the light.

He stepped out into the cool night air. For a long moment he paused, leaning against the door, looking at the other cabins that formed a semi-circle around Borg's cabin.

There was something wrong, he thought uneasily. No one seemed to be about. No lights showed in the cabins. No sound came to him. It was as if everyone had left the motel. When he had driven away to meet Borg, the place had been ablaze with lights and the strident noise of radios had blasted the night air.

Now the place was dark and silent.

If he hadn't been only half conscious, he would have been more on his guard, but the burning pain in his arm dulled his senses.

He set off slowly across the grass to his cabin. He reached it, and paused while he groped in his pocket for the key. He unlocked the door, pushed it open and stepped into darkness.

As he reached for the light switch, he had a sudden feeling that he was not

alone in the cabin. He felt certain someone was in the room, hidden by the darkness.

Sick, cold fear gripped him. He leaned against the wall, his left hand gripping the handle of the wrench through the brown paper, sweat on his face, his breath coming in hard, short gasps.

Then he lifted his hand, still holding the wrench, and his finger touched the light switch. He turned it down.

As the light came on, his heart gave a lurch with the shock of seeing the big, thickset man sitting on the bed facing him.

For a moment Harry didn't recognize him, then, when he did, his mouth turned dry and the wrench slipped out of his hand.

"Hello, Green," DetectiveSergeant Hammerstock said quietly. "Don't start anything. You can't get away," and he lifted the .45 he had been holding by his side. The gun pointed at Harry.

The bathroom door opened and another plainclothes detective came out, gun in hand.

"Green?" Harry said stupidly. "My name's Griffin."

"You're Harry Green," Hammerstock said, getting to his feet. "Take it easy. Stay just as you are. What's the matter with your arm?"

"I hurt it," Harry said.

Then suddenly the room lurched, and he staggered forward and went down on hands and knees, dark faintness creeping over him. He felt hands take hold of him and lift him. He felt himself laid on the bed, then he didn't care anymore. He swam off into a lonely darkness that he no longer had the will to fight against.

He had no idea how long he remained unconscious. He became aware of the hard light from the overhead lamp, and a hand gently shaking him. He opened his eyes and looked blankly up at Hammerstock, who was bending over him.

"Wake up," Hammerstock said. "The wagon's on its way. How are you feeling?"

Harry lifted his head. There was no one except Hammerstock in the room. He found himself on the bed and looking at his arm he saw his shirt and coat sleeves had been cut off and his arm had been neatly bandaged. He felt weak and hotheaded, but the burning pain had gone.

"I'm all right," he said. "What are you doing here?"

Hammerstock grinned.

“Getting a promotion,” he said. “If I don't get upgraded for this job I'm going to chuck my hand in and become a farmer.” He took out a pack of cigarettes. “Want to smoke?”

“No,” Harry said, feeling a cold chill of fear gripping him as he looked at Hammerstock's smug, grinning face.

“Yeah, getting a promotion,” Hammerstock repeated as he lit a cigarette. “You owe me fifty bucks, but never mind. It was worth that to me to nail you. My sister isn't the birdbrain I made her out to be. If it hadn't been for her, I wouldn't have caught you. One of the occupants of a cabin near yours called her up and told her you two were shouting at each other. She thought she had better see what it was all about. She went around to the back of your cabin because she spotted a fat guy listening outside your front window. You were yelling your head off. Then your girlfriend started sounding off. My sister heard her say she didn't care if she went to prison, and the police wouldn't put her in the death cell as they would you. My sister went back to the office and tried to get hold of me, but I was out on an assignment. By the time she did get hold of me, you two had packed up and gone. I thought you might stand investigating. I traced you here and told you the phony tale about the fifty bucks. That's a laugh. You don't know my sister. She's never made a mistake in her life. I had a specially prepared piece of paper ready for you to handle, and you handled it when you gave me the receipt for the dough. I got a fine set of your prints. I had them checked and guess what? Harry Griffin turns out to be Harry Green the boy wonder who pinched the diamonds off the Moonbeam and who is also wanted for murder.”

Harry didn't say anything. He was thinking of Glorie. She had tried so hard to make him safe. He was glad now she was dead. It was better for her not to know all her careful planning had failed.

“Then there's this,” Hammerstock went on. He produced the bloodstained car wrench which he held carefully at the extreme end between finger and thumb. “Who have you killed? Was it her?”

“No, I didn't kill her,” Harry said. “You can't pin that on me.”

Hammerstock grinned.

“We can try,” he said and got to his feet. “That sounds like the wagon. Come on; get up. You and me've got work to do.”

He went over to the cabin door and opened it. The headlights of an

approaching car fell directly on him. He turned his head to look at Harry.

“Of course you killed her,” he said. “She never reached Collier City. The boys are searching the beach now. That's where you planted her, isn't it? We found the shovel in the boot of your car. There's sand on it.”

“I didn't kill her,” Harry said, getting slowly to his feet. “She was everything to me. I wouldn't kill her. I loved her.”

Hammerstock shrugged.

“From what my sister told me, you loved her like a rat loves poison.”

“I didn't kill her,” Harry repeated.

“Okay, tell that to the jury,” Hammerstock said, “but don't expect them to believe you. Come on. Let's go.”

With slow, unsteady steps, Harry crossed the room and went out to where the police car was waiting.