

MISS SHUMWAY WAVES A WAND

JAMES HADLEY CHASE

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Panther

CHAPTER ONE

I HADN'T been In Manolo's Bar five minutes, when Paul Juden, head of Central News Agency, blew in.

"Well, I'll be damned!" I thought and tried to duck out of sight, but he was too quick for me. He came towards me like a herd of buffalo on the last lap home.

"Why, *hul-lo*, P.J.," I said, like I was glad to see him, "How are you? Sit down and rest your brains. You look as if I needed another drink."

"Never mind the funny stuff, Millan," he said, waving to the waiter. "I've been hunting all over the place for you. Where the hell have you been? I've got something for you."

He didn't have to tell me. When the boss of C.N.A. runs across a bar room floor, looking like he'd swallowed the overalls in Mrs. Murphy's chowder, it doesn't mean he's glad to see me, it means he wants me to work.

"You've got something for me?" I repeated bitterly. "That's what they say to a dog. Then they feed him poison."

The waiter came up and Juden ordered two large whisky sours.

"Now, listen, P.J.," I said, when the waiter had gone away, "I want a little peace. I've stuck around the Mexican desert for six months with a string of vultures waiting to pick my bones. I've had more cactus needles sticking in me than a porcupine has quills. Every time I blow my nose, sand flies out of my ears. Okay, I'm not squawking, but I want a little relaxation and, brother, am I going to have a little relaxation."

Juden wasn't even listening. He had taken out his wallet and was fiddling with a bunch of cables. "Maddox's has a job lined up for you, Millan," he said. "I had a cable this morning. It looks like a copy of 'Gone With The Wind.'"

"Maddox?" I sank further into my chair. "You don't have to worry about him. He's just a fallen arch in the march of time. Tell him I'm sick Tell him you can't contact me. Tell him anything, but give me a break, will you?"

Juden sorted out a bunch of flimsies as the waiter brought the drinks.

"Well, here's a clot in your bloodstream," I said and lowered two-thirds of the whisky sour.

"Here we are," Juden said, waving the flimsies at me. "It certainly looks like a swell assignment to me."

I waved them right back at him. "I don't want 'em," I said. "I want a little relaxation. I'm catching a train for New Orleans to-morrow. I've had enough of Mexico to last me a lifetime. Tell Maddox to send some other stooge out here."

“Not a chance,” Juden said. “This is a rush job. Now, don’t waste time, Millan. You know you’ve got to do *it*, so why make things difficult?”

Of course, he was right. Was I getting tired of this newspaper game, or was I? I’d been chasing bandit stories for six broiling months and in this country, bandits were a dime a dozen. Ever since Zapata had started the fashion, every damn Indian who could grow a six-inch moustache had turned bandit. It had taken all my time to coach them how to do the job so that I could give the great American public a story worth reading. Well, I had had enough of it. Besides, one of these amateur Dillingers had tried to shoot me. It got so I began to think some other punk would get the same idea.

But Maddox was my bread and butter. If I turned him down, he’d become a piece of toast. You couldn’t argue with Maddox. He had the kind of nature that made snakes cross the street when they saw him coming.

“What’s the story?” I said. “Don’t ask me to read those cables. I want the news broken gently.”

Juden dug into his whisky sour. Now, there’s a guy who’d landed a sweet job. All he had to do was to open envelopes and pass the baby to someone else.

“Okay, here it is,” he said. “The story is entitled ‘A Blonde Among Bandits,’ or ‘Get Up Them Stairs.’”

I finished my drink. “You don’t have to be funny,” I said, firmly. “All I want is the unvarnished truth. When I want to laugh, I’ll tune into the Bob Hope programme.”

“A fella named Hamish Shumway called in to see Maddox a couple of days ago,” Juden went on. “He’s lost his daughter, last heard of in Mexico City. She’s vanished into thin air. Shumway thinks she’s been kidnapped by bandits. Maddox wants you to find her.”

“Well, go on,” I said. “What does he want me to do?”

“He wants you to find her,” Juden repeated patiently.

“Well, all right, it’s a good gag. Remind me to laugh next time we meet. But, what’s the assignment?”

“Don’t start that stuff, Millan,” Juden said, looking like a hunk of chilled beef. “I’m telling you. He wants you to find this girl.”

“You mean he wants me to search the whole of Mexico for one particular girl who’s stupid enough to lose herself?” I said slowly, hardly believing my ear.

“Something like that. I don’t care how you do it so long as you find her.”

“You don’t care?”

“No ... I don’t care a damn.”

“Oh, well,” I stared at him thoughtfully. “You wouldn’t like to cut my throat and save a lot of time, I suppose?”

“Now, wait a minute. It’s not as bad as that. Let me explain,” Juden said hurriedly. “The stuff you’ve been turning in recently is enough to make a dog vomit.”

“Can I help it if your dog’s got a weak stomach?”

“Never mind about the dog. Maddox wants to cover your expenses, so he’s thought up this stunt. It’ll be a great newspaper story. Look at it this way. A poor old guy without a dime comes to the New York Reporter and asks their help. His daughter’s missing. He wants to know if they’ll find her for him. What does the Reporter do?”

“Kick the old guy’s teeth out and toss him down the elevator shaft after taking his socks off to make mittens for Maddox,” I replied promptly.

“The New York Reporter says, ‘All right, brother, we’ll find her,’” Juden went on, frowning at me. “They put the story on the front page with a photo of the girl. They print a photo of the old man as well, just to show there’s no catch in it: ‘Blonde Kidnapped by Mexican Bandits. 25,000 Dollars Reward. Father of Missing Girl Grief Stricken. New York Reporter Begins Nation-wide Search.’ Get the idea? Then you find the girl, write the story and bring the girl back to New York. Maddox has the father waiting at a civic reception and you hand the girl over to the father. The Reporter gets the credit. It’s a swell idea.”

“So poor old Maddox’s gone nuts at last,” I said, shaking my head sadly. “Well, it doesn’t surprise me. I always thought his rivets would shake loose in time. How’s Mrs. Maddox reacting? It must be a big shock for her. And his daughter. The nice looking one with the squint and pimples. That reminds me, has one of her best friends had a little chat with her yet?”

Juden finished his drink and lit a cigar. “Well, Millan, that’s the job. You can be as funny as you like, but there’re no two ways about it. Maddox says if you don’t find her within a week you’ll be working for someone else or not working at all.”

“He said that, did he, the puff adder,” I returned, sitting up. “Well, you can tell him what he can do with this job. If he thinks he can threaten me, he’s mistaken! Why, I could get any of the plum jobs in this game just by asking. I wouldn’t even have to ask. I only have to pass a newspaper office and the publishers come running after me. Maddox! Everyone knows the kind of rat he is. Telling me that I can quit! That’s a laugh! Where would he get another guy with my brains— well, how the hell do I find this girl, anyway?”

“It shouldn’t be difficult,” Juden said, grinning. “I’ve got a picture of her, she owns a big, dark green Cadillac, she is a magician by profession and swell looking. Her name is Myra Shumway and she was last heard of right here in this town.”

“Now look, P. J.,” I said earnestly. “There must be hundreds of girls in New York who’ve got themselves mislaid, why not let’s find one of them? I want to get back to Broadway.”

“Sorry, Millan,” he returned. “You’d better make up your mind about it. The story hit the front page this morning.”

I took out my notebook wearily. “Okay,” I said. “Let’s have it. Name, Myra Shumway. What did you say she did?”

“Magician,” Juden returned with a broad grin. “That’s unusual, isn’t it? She worked the Vaudeville circuit with her father until they quarrelled. Then she went off on her own. Now, she works night clubs so I understand. Her pa says she’s pretty good at the job.”

“I never believe what parents say about their children,” I returned coldly. I made a few more notes and then put my notebook away. “What makes Maddox think bandits have got hold of her?”

Juden shrugged. “That’s his story. You’ve got to play this properly, Millan, if they haven’t got hold of her, it’s up to you to see that they do. Haven’t you any tame bandit who’d do the job for a few bucks?”

“What do you mean?” I asked, stating at him.

“Well, she may be enjoying herself some place and forgotten to send her old man a line. We can’t afford to let this flop, you know. If she isn’t kidnapped, you’ve got to get her kidnapped. I don’t have to draw you a map, do I?”

This began to worry me. “If I thought you were serious, P. J.,” I said, “I’d have someone examine your head.”

“There’s nothing the matter with my head,” Juden said shortly. “But there’ll be a lot wrong with your job, if you don’t get some action and get it soon.”

“Do you honestly mean that if this girl’s just having a good time, I’ve got to fix some greaser to kidnap her?”

“Yep, that’s the way it is. It shouldn’t be difficult. We’ll cover the expenses.”

“You’ll do more than that,” I said. “You’ll send me a signed statement. If I get picked up there’s a bell of a rap tied to kidnapping.”

“You won’t get a statement, but someone’s got to win the 25,000 dollars reward.”

“You mean I stand to pick that up?” I asked, interested for the first time.

Juden closed one eye. “It depends if you claim it,” he said. “Maddox doesn’t expect you to, of course, but if you jumped him at the civic reception, I guess he couldn’t very well back out of it.”

And I was thinking Juden was a two-faced grafter and he turns out to be a real pal.

“I’ll remember that,” I said “Have another drink?” He shook his head, “I’m off home. It’s the children’s night out and I’ve got their nurse to look after.”

I laughed. It didn’t cost me anything and if the guy thought he was funny, who was I to discourage him?”

“Okay,” I said, “I’ll get after Myra Shumway. What kind of a name’s that, anyway? And, where’s her picture?”

He took a print from his briefcase and tossed it on the table. “If there was a fire in that dame’s bedroom,” he said, “We’d take a fireman five hours to put it out and five strong men to put the fireman out.”

I picked up the print. By the time I’d got my breath back, he’d gone.

CHAPTER TWO

BEFORE I go any further, I want you to know how Myra Shumway first met Doc Ansell and Sam Bogle, and as I wasn't there at the time, I'll just tell the story as I heard it later.

Doc Ansell and Bogle were in Lorencillo's café. Have you ever been there? It's a little place hidden behind immensely thick stone walls. The patio is a fine example of the old Mexican régime, so the guide book tells me. If that means nothing to you, it also means nothing to me, so what the hell?

In the centre of the patio is a carved stone fountain around which stand iron tables and benches. Overhead a canopy of leaves from the ancient cypresses and banana trees blot out the sky. You can imagine that it's a pretty nice spot. There are a number of wooden cages along the verandah which house various coloured parakeets who squawk and whistle at you and if you're new to the country you get a great kick out of the typical Mexican atmosphere.

Well, these two guys, Doc Ansell and Bogle, were sitting at a table drinking tepid beer when Bogle glanced up and spotted an egg-yolk blonde who had suddenly appeared from behind a bunch of Indian peddlers. He had one quick gander before she disappeared in the crowd again.

"Sam!" Doc Ansell said sharply. "Do I have to keep telling you women are poison!"

"Was that a mirage?" Bogle asked scrambling to his feet and gazing anxiously into the dimly lit shadows. "Did I see what I thought I saw?"

Doc Ansell laid down his knife and fork. He was a wizened little man with a shock of untidy white hair. "You've got to watch your glands, Bogle," he cautioned. "There's a time and place for everything."

"You're always shooting your mouth off about a time and place for everything. What time do I get? And when in hell do we stay in one place long enough to do anything?" Bogle returned, sitting down again.

"The trouble with you—" Ansell began, but Bogle raised his hand.

"You don't have to tell me," he said, pushing his plate away in sudden disgust. "I know. It's getting so I'm imagining things. How much longer are we stickin' in this country? I'm sick of it. What's the matter with grabbing a train and getting the hell out of here? Couldn't you do with the smell of Chicago for a change?"

"It's a little too soon yet for you to go home," Ansell reminded him gently.

Bogle frowned. He was a big, powerful man and his dirty drill suit fitted him badly. In the past, he had been a gunman, working for Little Bernie during the prohibition period. After repeal, he went to Chicago and tried to pick up a living as a heistman, but he was not smart enough to organize anything big enough to pay dividends. Then one night, he was involved in

a gun battle with the police. Two of the police officers were hurt and Bogle did a lam act. He did not stop running until he reached Mexico. There, he felt comparatively safe. For the past six months he had been working with Doc Ansell, selling patent medicines to the Maya Indians.

Ansell and Bogle made an incongruous couple. They lived in different worlds. Bogle was always yearning for the fleshpots of life. He found Mexico insufferably dull after Chicago. He hated the food, the dust and the heat. The native women appalled him. Both socially and financially the small colony of American and English women were out of his reach. Even the whisky was bad. He hated Mexico nearly as much as he hated the police.

On the other hand, Ansell was happy in any country. So long as he was able to sell his various remedies to the gullible he did not mind where he lived.

Before Bogle became his partner, Ansell often had trouble with his patients. Sometimes, he even found it dangerous to return to the same town. But with Bogle at his side, he had no qualms in facing irate patients or going to the lowest native quarters in the various towns he visited. Bogle was an excellent bodyguard, as Little Bernie had discovered.

One look at his massive fists and hard little eyes was enough to cool any hasty temper. So it was then, that Ansell and Bogle had worked together for six months. They drifted from place to place, spending their morning dispensing coloured water in mysterious looking green bottles and, in the afternoons, selling them by quickfire sales talk to anyone foolish enough to listen.

Ansell represented the brains of the concern and Bogle the brawn. It was Bogle who set up the small tent and the collapsible platform. It was Bogle who set out the green bottles in neat rows and beat a small drum to attract attention.

The drum was Bogle's own idea and in some districts it produced considerable dividends.

Ansell would sit inside the tent, smoking a battered pipe, until Bogle's hoarse whisper: "A big bunch of suckers waitin'" brought him to his feet. Then he would sweep majestically from the tent, his eyes blazing with fanatical enthusiasm and, cast spells over the bewildered audience.

Bogle would display his gigantic muscles, built entirely by Doctor Ansell's Virile Tablets (a box of fifty for three dollars). Pictures of a drearily scraggy woman would be passed round the crowd with a comparison picture of the same woman equipped with a figure that made the natives' eyes grow round. Doctor Ansell's Bust Developer (a box of twenty- five pills for two dollars fifty) was responsible for this attractive transformation.

Ansell and Bogle preferred Lorencillo's café to any other eating place. Few Americans came to the café and after the noise and bustle of the City, it was somewhere to pass a peaceful evening.

Bogle swished the last two inches of beer round in his glass. "The cops'll have forgotten me by now," he said. "It's nearly a year ago. That's a long time. Besides, you never saw those two guys. I was doing the State a service."

"Talk sense," Ansell returned. "How do you think we'd live? Can you imagine anyone buying my Virile pills in Chicago?"

Bogle was no longer listening. He was staring with eyes like organ-stops at the egg-yolk blonde who had come out of the café and was standing on the steps looking round the crowded

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said, clutching at the table. "Take a look at that!"

Ansell sighed, "She's certainly nice to look at, but she'd begin by stroking your hair and wind up with your scalp. You're moving out of your class, Bogle."

Bogle paid no attention. "Holy Moses!" he exploded suddenly. "She's on her own, Doc. Get her over here before some greaseball snaps her up."

Ansell regarded the girl doubtfully. She was slight. Her hard little face was full of character. Her eyes and mouth were large and her nose, Ansell decided, was her best feature. Her silky blonde hair fell to her shoulders and gleamed like burnished copper in the hard light of the acetylene flares. She was dressed in a neat white tailored suit over a dark red shirt.

Bogle was whispering with hoarse urgency in Ansell's ear, "Get after her, Doc. Didja ever see such an outline? It's like a blue print for Coney Island's roller coaster!"

Two well-dressed Spaniards, sitting near them, were also showing interest in the girl. They had been muttering to each other the moment they had seen her and *now* one of them pushed back his chair and stood up.

Bogle whipped round, "Don't get yourself in an uproar, pal," he snarled. "Repark your fanny! I gotta date with that dame ... so lay off!"

The Spaniard stared at him blankly, hesitated, then sat down again.

Ansell, anxious that there should be no trouble, rose to his feet.

"Watch your blood pressure," he said sharply.

"To hell with my blood pressure. Get after that dame before I wreck this joint."

Ansell approached the girl rather self-consciously. Everyone in the patio watched him.

The girl leaned against the verandah rail and watched him come. Her eyes were watchful, but friendly. As he came up to her, she suddenly smiled. The large crimson mouth showed white teeth.

Ansell was startled.

“Hello,” she said.

“You’ll pardon me,” Ansell said in his best manner, “But are you waiting for someone? This is a bad place for a young woman to be on her own.”

“That’s what the guide-book said,” she returned sadly, “but I’ve been here off and on for a week and nothing’s happened to me yet. I think the place’s a phoney.”

Ansell blinked. “I was going to ask you to join me until your escort arrives.”

She laughed. She had a full-throated, rich, infectious laugh with a hint of recklessness that quickened even Ansell’s thin blood. He looked at her sharply.

“What makes you think I’m expecting an escort, Poppa?” she asked. “Don’t you think I can take care of myself?”

Ansell experienced a rare feeling of embarrassment. “I beg your pardon,” he said stiffly. “You’re a little more worldly than I had supposed. You’ll excuse me.”

“Now, don’t get burned up,” she said quickly. “Let’s be friendly. After all, Stanley and Livingstone had to get used to each other. Doesn’t your boy friend want to meet me? Or is that a permanent leer he keeps on his face?” She walked down the steps and crossed over to where Bogle was sitting.

With a bewildered shrug of his shoulders, Ansell followed her.

Bogle had been watching this scene in astonishment. When she came up, he just sat there, blinking at her.

“Do you want a needle and thread?” she asked, putting slim brown hands on the table and leaning towards him. Bogle’s eyes were like marbles, “Huh?” he said.

“Never mind.” She sat down. “I thought maybe you’d lost a button because you didn’t get up to receive me. But, perhaps you belong to the modern school” She crossed her legs, adjusted her skirt over a slim silk-clad knee and regarded him thoughtfully. “I can see what you are now. You’re quite deceptive from a distance.” She put her head on one side and smiled at him. “Let me see. Definitely Chicago. I bet you carried a gun for one of the big shots. Tell me I’m right.”

Bogle blinked. He looked across at Ansell helplessly.

“You asked for it,” Ansell said, beginning to enjoy himself. “Don’t blame me. It was your idea.”

“That’s very interesting,” the girl went on. “So he has ideas? I shouldn’t have thought he was one of the World’s thinkers, but appearances are deceptive these days, aren’t they?”

“Are they?” Ansell said, a little bewildered himself.

“I think so.” She met Bogle’s unwavering stare coolly. “Have you a tendency to hernia?” she asked him abruptly.

Bogle screwed up his face. “What’s she talking about?” he asked feebly.

“Maybe I’m being too personal,” she said. “Let me put it this way. During an arboreal existence in the Miocene epoch of the Tertiary era, man, or I should say, pre-historic man lost his tail. He acquired an upright gait and a tendency to hernia. I just wanted to see how far you’d got. Think nothing of it. It’s only idle curiosity.”

Bogle’s face went a dull red and his eyes flashed viciously. “So you’re a smart dame, eh?” he snarled. “We had a flock of ‘em in Chicago. But, get ‘em in a corner and they yell murder.”

“I’m fussy who I take in corners,” the girl replied briskly. Then she smiled at him. “Don’t get mad. I was just fooling. What’s your name?”

Bogle looked at her suspiciously, but her frank smile disarmed him. “Sam Bogle,” he said. “And listen, sister ...”

“That’s a lovely name,” she broke in. “Was your mother Mrs. Bogle?”

Bogle blinked. “Yeah,” he said. “What of it? Who else do you think she’d be?”

“I just wanted to make sure. Some of the funniest things do happen.”

“Well, nothing funny happened to me,” Bogle said angrily. “So don’t go putting ideas into people’s heads.”

She laughed, raising her shoulders and glanced over at Ansell, “Never mind,” she said. “You mustn’t take me seriously. And who are you?” she went on to Ansell.

He introduced himself.

“A real doctor?” she-seemed quite impressed. “Well, I’m Myra Shumway. How do you do, Mr. Bogle? How do you do, Doctor Ansell?”

Bogle sat back heavily. “I don’t get this,” he said. “She must be crazy.”

“Don’t be a churl, Bogle,” she said sharply. “Just because you don’t understand my appeal, you don’t have to be rude. Who’s going to buy me a drink?”

“What would you like?” Ansell asked, slightly dazed.

“I think a Scotch might be nice.”

Ansell signalled a waiter. “Now, we’ve got to know each other,” he said, “suppose you tell me what you are doing here?”

The waiter came and took the order for drinks. He seemed to know Myra Shumway. They smiled and nodded to each other.

When he had gone, Myra opened her handbag and took out a silver cigarette case. She lit the cigarette, and leaned back, looking at them thoughtfully. “Would it interest you?” she said. “I wonder. Still, I am accepting your hospitality. I’ve no secrets. Until yesterday, I was foreign correspondent to the Chicago News. I’ve been cast aside like a worn-out glove.” She turned on Bogle. “Do I look like a worn out glove?”

“Not a glove,” Bogle said heavily.

Myra absorbed this. “I think I asked for that,” she said to Ansell, “I led with my chin.”

Bogle was pleased with himself. “I can be funny too, sister,” he said.

She nodded, “You can, but *you* don’t have to try.”

“All right, all right,” Bogle said hastily, “we won’t fight. I know something about newspaper guys. They’re poison if you cross ‘em. I recollect once I didn’t fix one of ‘em with a case of Scotch. Did that guy turn sour? He smeared my mug right across the front page. Got me into a helluva jam.” Bogle scratched his head mournfully, “Mind you, that’s some time ago, but these guys don’t change.”

“It could be that,” she returned. “My boss kept silk-worms. You wouldn’t believe the number of girls he interested. I guess they thought the silk-worms were going to give them silk stockings, but it turned out to be a modem version of the Etching gag.”

The waiter came with the drinks.

“He lost interest in me when I told him I was allergic to silk-worms. Maybe, that’s why I’ve been tossed out.” She picked up her drink, “Here’s gold in your bridge work!” she said and drank.

The others drank too.

“Well, you can’t be interested in me,” she went on. “What do you do for a living?”

Ansell fiddled thoughtfully with his glass. I’m a healer,” he said simply. “I’ve studied the secrets of herbal medicine for years and I have perfected several remarkable remedies. Bogle is my assistant.”

She looked at him admiringly, “Isn’t that cute,” she said. “And what are these remedies?”

Ansell had an uneasy suspicion that she was laughing at them. He looked at her sharply, but her admiration seemed genuine enough.

“Take my Virile tablets for instance,” he said. “If you’d seen Bogle before he had taken a course of these pills you wouldn’t have believed that he’d been alive to-day. He was thin, weak and depressed . . .”

She turned and regarded Bogle with interest. Bogle smirked. “Well, he certainly looks like he takes his daily dozen with a knife and fork now,” she said. “He’s a credit to you.”

Ansell pulled his nose thoughtfully. “Then there’s my bust developer,” he said and exchanged a quick glance with Bogle. “That in itself’s a remarkable invention. It’s brought happiness to hundreds of women.”

Myra looked at him in astonishment, “Psychologically, I suppose?”

“What’s she say, Doc?” Bogle asked, looking blank.

“In a way,” Ansell returned, ignoring Bogle. “But a good figure’s an asset to a woman in any country. I’ve some remarkable testimonials.”

Bogle leaned forward, “You ought to try a box, sister,” he said hoarsely. “Two bucks fifty. It’s dynamite!”

Ansell broke in hastily, “Now come, Bogle, that’s not complimentary. I’m sure Miss—er—Shumway’s a very nice figure.”

Bogle sneered, “She got tossed out of her job, didn’t she?”

“That would have nothing to do with it,” Ansell returned. “Of course, I’m not saying it wouldn’t make a big difference, but I’m sure Miss Shumway is quite satisfied with her figure as it is.”

Myra looked from Ansell to Bogle in bewilderment. “Up to now,” she said, “I thought it was pretty good . . .”

“Don’t be over confident,” Bogle said. “You can’t stand still these days. Progress, that’s what you gotta am for. Look at the way they’re developing the land.” He produced a pill box from his pocket and slapped it down in front of her.

“You’ve got to think and plan big, sister. Look at the pyramids. The guy who built them had a big mind. A box of this stuff and you’re way out front. You get confidence, see? The other dames get left in the cold. If you’ve got what it takes, it don’t matter if you have dandruff. You’re okay. And this is the stuff that’ll make you okay. It’ll take more than a silk-worm to louse up your job. Get figure conscious. Here, take the box. It’ll cost you two bucks. I’ll give you a fifty cent discount because I like you.”

Myra shook her head, “But I don’t want them,” she said.

“That’s what you think now,” Bogle persisted. “You’re young. Salt it away. It lasts for ever. You may never see us again. Wait ‘til you’re old. Wait ‘til some guy gives you the air.

Then you'll wish you had this by you. Lay it up for your old age, sister. Put it by for a rainy day."

Myra looked over at Ansell. "Why don't you call off this high pressure salesman?" she said, a spark of anger in her eyes.

Ansell said hurriedly, "You mustn't worry Miss Shumway. I know you've her interest at heart, but if she doesn't want ..."

"Aw, nuts," Bogle snapped. "She's got to have the stuff. She'll thank me later. I know what I'm doing. Remember the dame in Vera Cruz? Was she grateful? She spit in my eye at the time, but what a build up she gave us a month later! She beat a home-wrecker to it. Yeah—you know it's right, Doc."

Myra opened her bag, took out two dollars and gave them to Bogle. "I give In," she said, and put the pill box into her bag.

Bogle sat back with a delighted smile. This was his first sales attempt and it had worked. Even Ansell was pleased.

Myra looked from one to the other. "If you can do this to me," she said, "I'm sorry for the simple natives."

"You'll thank me," Bogle said earnestly. He had been taught always to leave a satisfied client. "You'll remember this as the luckiest day of your life."

"Now, suppose we forget my figure," Myra said. "It embarrasses me." There was a hard glint in her eyes and she leaned forward to pick up her glass. Her hand knocked Ansell's beer into his lap.

Before he could move, she was on her feet. She whipped out his handkerchief from his breast pocket and began mopping him. Her face was scarlet with mortification.

"I am sorry," she stammered. "I'm not really clumsy. Has it ruined your suit?"

Ansell took the handkerchief from her and dried himself. "Accidents will happen," he said, feeling sorry for her.

"Don't worry about a little thing like this."

She whirled on Bogle. "Did it splash you?" she asked, ruuning her hand down the front of his coat.

"No. It's all right."

She turned to Ansell again. "Will you forgive me?"

"Why, of course," he said, sitting down again. "It was an accident."

She lifted her hands to her nose and made a little grimace. “Mind if I wash?” she said. “I’m all over beer.” She smiled brightly at them and swept away to the café.

Bogle watched her go. “What do you make of her, Doc?” he asked. “She came over here as tough as rusty nails, then she fell for my line like, a stupid native dope. Think there’s anything to her?”

Ansell was puzzled. “I don’t know,” he said frankly. “She’s too nice looking to be on her own. That’s what makes me suspicious. She’s too good to be true.”

Bogle said: “I don’t think I’d make that dame. She’s got a tongue like a razor. Suppose we blow before she comes back? I know her type. A dame who turns a guy down with silkworms ain’t going to play with me.”

Ansell signalled a waiter. “You’re improving, Bogle,” he said, looking pleased. “There was a time a good looking young woman could tie you in knots. Yes, I think you’re right. I see no reason why we should stay here. Anyway, we have work to do.” He groped for his wallet. “I’m quite sure that she can look after herself—” he broke off and stared wildly at Bogle.

“What’s the matter?” Bogle asked sharply.

“My money!” Ansell spluttered, going through his pockets feverishly, “It’s gone!”

“Gone?” Bogle repeated stupidly. “What do you mean gone?”

His eyes suddenly darkened and he began to search in his own pockets. The two dollars that Myra had given him for the box of pills and the five dollar bill he had saved were no longer to be found.

The two men stared at each other.

“The oldest, hoariest trick in the world,” Ansell said, trembling with rage. “And we fell for it. She knocked beer over me and shook rne down for what I’d got. That wasn’t enough for her. She frisked you as well.”

“What the hell are we waiting for?” Bogle snarled, kicking back his chair. “We’ve gotta nail that dame.”

The waiter came up with the check. He glanced at Bogle’s congested face and a look of alarm came into his eyes. “Is anything wrong, tenors?” he asked.

“We’ve been robbed,” Bogle snarled. “Get out of the way.”

“But the Senorita has gone,” the waiter said. “She has never robbed our clients before they settled their check. That is very bad of her.”

Bogle and Ansell stared at each other. “What do you mean?” Ansell demanded. “Do you know this girl?”

“Why, yes.” The waiter smiled, “she is very beautiful and she has very clever fingers. She comes here often. It is good for her line of work.”

Bogle clenched his fists. “What about us?” he said furiously. “Don’t we get any protection?”

The waiter lifted apologetic shoulders, “But the tenors asked her to their table. I thought you knew her.”

“Let’s get out of here, Bogle,” Ansell said. “We asked for it.”

“But, there is the question of the check,” the waiter said, looking distressed.

“Take it off the blonde when she’s in next time,” Bogle said. “And tell her from me that if I ever meet her again I’ll take her apart and find out what makes her tick.”

The waiter’s face darkened. “That is bad business, senor, she may not come back.”

Bogle didn’t quite like the look in his eye. “I don’t want you to lose by it,” he said. “Tell me, buddy, have you a girl friend?”

The waiter’s face brightened. “I have a very fine girl,” he said, flashing his teeth. “There is no other woman like her in the country.”

Bogle took out a pill box and gave it to him. “Make sure of that,” he said. “That’s worth two bucks fifty. I’ll make you a present of it.”

The waiter examined the box. Then he sneered. “She has had them before,” he said disdainfully. “The last time she took them she came out in a rash.”

“So what?” Bogle said, pushing him aside. “It gave her something to do, didn’t it?” and he walked across the patio with Ansell out into the street.

CHAPTER THREE

BEFORE I tell you how I came to meet Myra Shumway, I'd better give you her background, then we can go straight ahead without interruption.

Myra Shumway had not been telling the truth when she described herself to Doc Ansell as a newspaper correspondent. For the past five years she had been a "dip." If you don't know what that means, just stand on any street corner and flash a fat bank-roll. Before long some dame will take it off you and you'll know nothing about it until hours later. That dame was a dip.

Myra's father was a magician who worked small-time vaudeville without much profit. Myra trailed along with him. When she reached the age of fifteen, her father decided that she should be his assistant. That was all right with Myra and she really worked at the job. By the end of the year there was no one on the Coast to touch her for speed, style and smoothness of execution. She could palm six cards with the speed of light. She could take a man's vest off his back without him knowing it. That went for his suspenders too. In other words, she was good.

One evening something happened which was to change her immediate future. As she was preparing to leave the theatre her father came with a young fellow who wanted to meet her.

He was a travelling salesman who had looked in on the town with the hope of drumming up some new business. In the evening he went to the theatre. He saw Myra, was dazzled by her looks and came round the back intending to dazzle her with his money.

Hamish Shumway was agreeable that this young man should take Myra out to dinner. He knew that she had her head screwed on the right way and that if there was to be any funny business she could take care of herself.

The young man's name was Joe Krurmm and he seemed a pleasant enough young fellow. Myra went with him to a restaurant and had an expensive dinner. During the dinner, Krumm did a fatal thing. He showed her the size of his bankroll. It measured an inch and a half round its waist. Myra had never seen so much money in her life. He bragged about it. He told her that he had stacks of dough in the bank. So Myra thought she'd give him a scare and she lifted his roll. It was the easiest job she had ever done. When the time came for him to pay the check, he found his roll had vanished. He nearly had a hemorrhage.

The manager of the restaurant and a couple of waiters stood around watching. They could see the price of an expensive dinner dissolving into smoke.

Myra got scared. People were staring at them. Krumm was nearly crazy and the manager was muttering about the police. She couldn't work up enough courage to produce the roll and tell everyone that it was a gag.

She sat there, her face the colour of a beet, praying that the ground would open and swallow her.

It never crossed Krumm's mind that he'd been whizzed. No one except the waiter had been near him. Myra's acute embarrassment established her alibi. He was too excited to reason that a magician would be just the person to lift his roll. Besides, a nice looking kid like Myra just wouldn't do such a thing.

Then an elderly man who was dining across the room got to his feet and came over. He had his eye on Myra the moment she had come into the restaurant. Egg-yolk blondes were his weakness and he couldn't let such an opportunity pass him by.

He had a few scathing words to say about young puppies who shook restaurant managers down for the price of a meal. He expressed his sorrow that the young lady should be subjected to such an embarrassing situation. Then he produced a bulky wallet and paid the check.

"My car's outside," he said to Myra. "Let me run you home. This young fella's no fit companion for a little girl like you."

Myra never knew to this day how she got out of the restaurant. It was only when the fresh night air was beating on her face as the big car swept her through the dark streets that she began to get over her scare.

The elderly guy introduced himself as Daniel Webster. He asked her who she was. Although Myra was only sixteen, she had kicked around. You don't work vaudeville for a year without learning *that* A.B.C. is invariably followed by D. She knew that she was going to have a little trouble with Daniel Webster. He hadn't parted with seven dollars just to make the restaurant happy. So she told him her name was Rose Carraway and that she was staying at the Denville Hotel Both statements were essentially untrue.

Since the Denville Hotel lay in the opposite direction to the one they were going she thought this would be an indication of Webster's intentions. If he stopped the car and turned around, then she was misjudging him. If he carried straight on, then she would know he was on the make. He carried straight on.

When Hamish Shumway realised he was going to have a very attractive daughter on his hands he decided to equip her with means for self-defence. He knew that in his profession attractive young girls wouldn't remain attractive for long unless they went around with their eyes wide open. At an early age Myra was told the facts of life and taught a trick or two. She was perfectly confident, as she sat by Webster's side, that she could handle anything that might come her way.

Daniel Webster saw no reason why he shouldn't extract payment for the restaurant bill at the earliest convenient moment. Once clear of the town, he ran the car on to the grass shoulder and stopped the engine.

Myra was in no way flustered. In fact, she was most anxious to find out whether the advice her father had drummed into her for the past four years really worked. As Webster eased himself away from the wheel and made a grab at her, she swung her arm and hit him squarely

under his nose with the side of her hand. She had been advised by her father never to pull a punch. The chopping blow she handed out to Webster had all her young strength and vigour behind it.

The side of her hand landed accurately. The blow broke Webster's bridge-work, made his eyes water and sent a thousand red-hot needles into his brain. He slumped back *in* his seat like an inflated balloon.

Myra opened the door of the car, stepped on to the grass shoulder and ran, without panic, into the darkness. It was only after several minutes, when she paused to look back, that she realized she was holding Webster's wallet tightly in her hand. She had no idea that she had taken it. It was obviously unwise to go back and return it, as Webster might not take kindly to such a gesture. So she added the contents of the wallet to Krumm's roll and began her long walk back to the town.

In the secrecy of her bedroom she went through Webster's wallet. She found that the evening's entertainment and car ride had netted her four hundred and seventy dollars.

She didn't sleep at all that night. There was much to think about. She made her plans before the cold dawn light filtered round the window blind.

Fortunately, they were to move on to another town that day so there was little chance either of Krumm or Webster ever seeing her again. She hid her first earnings as a dip in her suspender belt, assisted her parents to pack and caught an early train to Springville which was their next port of call.

For two more years she worked with her father. Then without any warning she packed her bag and left. She had no misgivings and no regrets. Myra Shumway was ready to carve her initials on opportunity's door.

During those two years she had not ceased to pilfer. She had been cautious but consistent. It had been ridiculously easy. That was the trouble. To acquire money so easily was too great a temptation.

She had made all the necessary plans. Her first move was to buy a second-hand Cadillac. She had fourteen hundred dollars in hand and the Cadillac didn't even dent the roll.

She left a note for her father. It was curt and to the point. She told him that she was tired of living the hard way and he wasn't to worry about her. She didn't think he would, but he'd worry plenty about himself.

She put her bag in the back of the car and headed south. She wanted to get as far away as she could from the dreary little towns they had been touring. She had seen pictures of Florida and she wanted to go there. Now, there was nothing to stop her.

For the next two years, she stood on her *own* feet. She travelled in the Cadillac. Sometimes she worked in night clubs, but most times she just travelled. Her bank was the wallets of

chance acquaintanceships. When she ran out of money, she found a sucker and picked his pocket. She was always careful. Her swift fingers were never detected. She could take a wallet, remove a few hundred dollars and put the wallet back without the owner noticing. More often than not the money was never missed.

She came to Mexico because she wanted a complete change of scenery. She liked variety. Mexico seemed to be the right place for her present mood. She had no roots. Her parents and her past were forgotten. The big Cadillac was her home.

When she left Lorencillo's café, she decided to head for Vera Cruz. She slipped out the backway where the Cadillac was parked and drove rapidly towards the centre of the town. When she felt that she had put enough space between herself and the café she drew up in a quiet side street, stopped the car and glanced in the mirror above her head.

Satisfied that no one was following her, she opened her bag and felt for a cigarette. When she had lit it, she leaned forward so that the light from the dashboard fell directly on her hands and bag. She took from the bag a small roll of money and counted it carefully. She had a hundred and twelve dollars.

"Not bad," she said, under her breath.

She separated the notes into two even packets. One packet she put back in her bag, the other she folded neatly and slid down the top of her stocking. Then she took a large scale road map from the dashboard locker and spread it on her knees.

And that was how I found her.

I left Manolo's a few minutes after Juden had gone with the idea of talking to the police. If they hadn't a record which way this Myra Shumway had headed, then I was going to have a tough job finding her.

I spotted a big Cadillac standing in the shadow of a building and noticed that it was painted dark green. All right, I admit that I jumped a hail a foot. It seemed almost like black magic. I crossed the street and approached the car quietly.

There she was, with her blonde hair hiding her face, staring at a road map. One look at that hair told me all I wanted to know. I didn't have to look any further for Myra Shumway. She was right here in front of me.

I didn't rush up and grab her like an amateur sleuth. I stood back and gave the problem a little thought. Here she was as free as a bird, not a bandit in sight, and ready to take a powder at any moment. She was no good to me unless she was kidnapped. I toyed with the idea of talking things over with her and getting things fixed the easy way. Then I thought if she heard about the reward, I should have to split it with her and 25,000 dollars doesn't look half as nice cut in half. Besides, maybe she was tired of her old man's face and wouldn't go back to New York anyway. No, there was only one way to play this. She had to be foxed.

I wandered up to the car and putting my arms on the door I leaned in. “Do you favour straw hats for race horses?” I said. “Or do you think they’d eat them?”

She looked up calmly, stared at me with big eyes and then returned to her map. “Go jump down a well,” she said. “If there isn’t one handy, anyone will help you dig it if you tell ‘em what it’s for.”

That set me back a trifle. I was never much good with a smooth wisecracker. Myra Shumway was that and then some.

I tried again, “I’m just trying to break the ice,” I said. “Seeing the car and the map I figured I could hitch a ride.”

She looked up again, “This isn’t a bus, brother,” she said. “I don’t take passengers.”

“You mean you don’t take strangers,” I corrected her. “Let me introduce myself. I’m Ross Millan.”

“You may be a power-house to your mother,” she said carefully, “but to me, you’re a blownout fuse. Good night,” and she turned back to her map.

I let my blood pressure settle down, then I wandered around to the other side of the car, opened the door and climbed in. “It’s a grand feeling to get the weight off one’s puppies, ain’t it?” I said.

She stiffened. “I hope for your sake that I’m not going to have any trouble from you,” she said, putting the map away with quiet determination.

“None at all,” I assured her. “All I need is a lift to wherever you’re going. I’m tired of Mexico City and I want a change of air. I always hitch hike because I’m mean about money.”

“Your repressions fascinate me,” she returned. I may be wrong but I fancied she sounded annoyed. “But if you don’t get out of this car, I’m going to surprise you.”

I made myself comfortable, but I kept an eye on her. I’ve been mixed up with a few tough babies in my time and I wasn’t taking any chances. “Before I came to Mexico,” I said, “I was a professional strong man. One of my favourite acts was carrying a dame across the stage in my teeth. That’s how tough I am.”

“Oh?” She seemed startled. “And you gave that up?”

“It gave me up,” I said sadly. “The dame was the trouble. You see she was just a dumb kid with a temper like a dentist’s drill. She got on my nerves. You know, I kept having to fight a temptation not to bite her. You can see how easy it’d have been. Well, one night I couldn’t stand her any longer.” I shrugged. “I only meant to nip her, but I guess I got carried away.”

Well, that held her for a moment. I could see she didn’t know what to make of me. Finally she decided to try a new line.

“I think you’d better go,” she said, at last. “Or else I’ll scream.”

“I wish you would,” I returned, twisting round so that I faced her. “It’d give me a chance to smack you. I’ve always wanted to smack a beautiful blonde, but I’ve never found an excuse for it.”

She suddenly leaned forward and jabbed the self-starter savagely. “I hope you’ll end up in jail,” she said and engaged the gear.

“Don’t get agitated,” I said. “It’s bad for the complexion. Where are you going . . . Vera Cruz?”

“I suppose so,” she returned, pushing the car down the dark, dusty road. “That is, if it suits you, of course.”

“Anywhere suits me just so long as it’s away from this dump,” I returned. “Just relax, sister. You don’t have to be scared of me. I wouldn’t do this only I want to get out of town and it’s nice to travel free. When we get to Vera Cruz I’ll leave you and you’ll just have your dreams to remember me by.”

“I’ll say you’ll leave me,” Myra returned. “What do you expect me to do? Marry you?”

“That depends on how old fashioned you are,” I said. “Me . . . I don’t make social gestures. Tell me, peach blossom, what did you say your name was again?”

“If you don’t remember what I told you, I can’t be bothered to tell you again.”

“So what do I call you?” I said. “Hi you or Hey, sister?”

“I wouldn’t lose weight if you didn’t call me anything,” she replied indifferently. “Just give your larynx a vacation and I’ll pretend you’re not here.”

I glanced at the clock on the dashboard. It showed 11.15.

“Before I accept those terms,” I said coldly, “tell me one thing. You’re not going to tackle the whole trip to Vera Cruz to-night, are you?”

“Chalco’s a few miles on,” she returned, “I’ll stop there, hand you over to the police and then find myself a hotel.”

“On the other hand, if we take turns driving,” I said carefully, “we could reach Orizaba first thing in the morning. I know a swell hotel in Orizaba where you’ll have every luxury in the world—if the world goes no further than Mexico.”

She thought about this. “Well,” she said at last, “I wouldn’t like to sleep in this car and let you drive. You might get ideas.”

“Well, of course, if you’re scared of me,” I said, shrugging.

“Who said I was scared of you?” That seemed to annoy her, “I haven’t met anything on two legs that could scare *me*.”

“That sounds like famous last words. But, if that’s how you feel, Apple pie, give me the wheel and take a nap,” I said grinning at her.

She hesitated for a second, then stopped the car. She looked at me hard and then a smile came into her eyes. This dame was certainly something to see. Apart from the fact that she represented 25,000 dollars to me, she looked good. When I say good I mean there wasn’t another woman in the country who could get within a mile of her. I like blondes. They may be a little dizzy, but they rest my eyes. That’s my only form of recreation.

“Listen, brother,” she said. “If there’s anything coming from you that’s not strictly off the top deck, I’ll cut your lights out.”

“Would you let me see them before I die?” I asked anxiously. “I’ve always wanted to make Ripley.”

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” she returned and got out of the car.

I slid over and took the wheel.

“There’s more room in the back for sleeping,” she said, getting in and leaving me by myself. “Besides, I’ve got a tyre lever here and I’ll bounce it on your head if you get off the main road. And I won’t send you a telegram before I do it.”

“To hear you talk,” I said, starting the car, “no one would know you had a sentimental streak. “But, seriously, Angel skin, you could trust me with your life.”

“If I did that,” she said, “I’d swap my girdle for a straight jacket.”

After a while, I guess she must have gone to sleep. I sent the Cadillac tearing into the night. It was certainly a fine bus and the miles kept clicking up on the dashboard. I expected her to wake up after an hour or so and take over, but she kept on sleeping. I guess the kid was tired. She didn’t wake up until I was bumping over the cobbles that led to the outskirts of Orizaba. Then I heard a little gasp and she said, “Why it’s daylight. Have I been sleeping all this time?”

“Well, someone’s been snoring in my ear,” I returned, as I swung the Cadillac into the main street. “If it wasn’t you, we’ve got a stranger on board.”

“I don’t snore,” she said coldly and I could hear her hunting in her bag for the inevitable powder and puff.

“Think nothing of it,” I said. “You don’t have to be shy with me.” I pulled up outside a small hotel in pink stone.

“I liked the sound. It made me homesick.”

“Homesick?” she asked as I twisted round to look at her.

“Sure,” I said. “At one time I used to live on a farm.” Then I got out of the car hurriedly. “Just wait here and I’ll fix things. Do you want a room or just a bath and coffee?”

“No room,” she said firmly.

It only crossed my mind after I had dug out the hotel manager and had introduced myself, that I was crazy to leave her out there in the car. But I need not have worked myself into a lather, because she was still there when I came out.

“I’ve got it all fixed,” I said, opening the car door. “Bath first and breakfast on the verandah. Eggs, fruit and coffee. That suit?”

She got out of the car with a small grip in her hand. “It certainly does,” she said, and for the first time she gave me a friendly smile.

I felt I might be getting somewhere with this dame. “Join me for breakfast down here in about half an hour,” I said.

“Then we’ll both let our hair down and confide in each other.”

She shook her head. “I enjoy my own company,” she returned. “I’ve given you a lift as we agreed, now I think I’ll say goodbye.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” I said, taking her firmly by the arm and leading her towards the hotel. “Who’s going to pay for my breakfast, if you run out on me?”

CHAPTER FOUR

As Mexican towns go, Orizaba could be worse. From Mexico City it is a long drop to Orizaba. In sixty odd miles you go down six thousand odd feet. That makes a lot of difference in atmosphere. The air thickens and the heat takes on a fiercer strength.

Sitting on the verandah overlooking the square where some small Indian soldiers in their grubby uniforms watched us with blank expressionless eyes, I felt pretty good. The bath had been just right and I was glad to get outside for some food.

On the far side of the square was the flower market. Although it was still early, Indian women were already at work, binding, sprinkling and sorting all kinds of flowers. The heavy scent came across the square and hung round us. "I'm glad we came here," I said. "I feel this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Myra was sitting with her feet on a chair. Her eyes were closed against the hot sun. She had changed into a simple, well-cut linen frock which fitted her figure like it was painted on her.

"We part at Vera Cruz," she said without any finality in her voice.

"Do we want to go there?" I asked. "Let's stay here. You can tell me a story every night and when I want a change you can dance for me."

"That sounds awfully nice of you," she said, stretching lazily. "But, I can see no future in it for myself."

"Don't you ever get away from your hard veneer?"

She opened her eyes and reached for the coffee. "No. It's much more than skin deep and it never cracks." She refilled her cup and then stared across at the mountains that seemed to press in on the town.

"That's an awful shame," I said, fumbling for a cigarette. I found I'd used my last *Chesterfield* and glanced hopefully at her. "You must miss a lot of fun that way, sister."

She gave me a cigarette from her case. "Oh no," she said, "I've no time for play. I've got ambitions."

"You certainly have," I said. "But you don't want to overdo it. What did you say your name was again?"

She laughed, "Myra Shumway," she returned.

I didn't need the confirmation. I knew I hadn't made a mistake, but all the same I was glad to know. Besides, we were getting on a more friendly footing and that was important.

"That's a beautiful name," I said.

A small party of Mexican labourers passed, carrying guitars. They crossed the little ruined square and sat down with their backs against the wall of an opposite building. Two of them began to play very softly.

“That’s nice,” Myra said. “Do you think they’ll sing?”

“They will if you ask them to,” I returned. “If you give them some money, God knows what they’ll do.”

While I was speaking, a truck came rumbling into the square, blotting out the thin music of the guitars. As it swept past the hotel, two men slid off the tailboard. A small wizened man and a big fat man.

Myra suddenly pushed back her chair, made to rise, then settled herself again.

“Something bite you?” I asked, watching the two men approach. “We’re going to have company. Americans by the look of them.”

“You ought to go into vaudeville,” Myra returned. Her voice was so acid that I glanced at her, surprised.

“Know ‘em?” I asked, wondering why her face had hardened. This kid could look tough when she was in the mood.

“My best friends,” she returned bitterly. “You’ll love them.” The two men came up to the verandah, mounted the steps and stood over us in silent hostility.

Myra said, “Hello. I’ve been wondering what happened to you?”

“I bet you have,” the fat man said between his teeth.

“This is Mr. Ross Millan,” she went on, waving her hand in my direction. “Doc Ansell and Mr. Samuel Bogle. Mr. Bogle’s the gentleman with the dirty face.”

“Sit down and have an egg,” I said, wondering why these two guys looked like a public disaster.

“I don’t want an egg,” Bogle said, stretching his thick fingers ominously.

“Maybe Mr. Bogle would like a drink?” Myra said, smiling.

“We’re going to have more than a drink,” Bogle returned viciously. “We’re collecting for charity—our own charity.”

“He’s got a very forceful personality, hasn’t he?” I said to Myra.

“Grape nuts for breakfast,” Myra said, shrugging. “You know what it does to some people.”

“Oh sure,” I said. “Perhaps he’d like some now.”

Bogle seemed to draw moss of the air around into his lungs. I took a menacing step forward.

Myra said quickly, “Do sit down and have a drink. It gives me a pain in the neck looking up at you.”

“Yeah?” Bogle said. “You’ll be getting more than a pain—and it won’t be in the neck either—if you don’t hand over my dough.”

Myra looked over at Ansell, “Has he been left out in the sun, do you think?”

Ansell’s small mouth tightened. “That line won’t get you anywhere,” he said firmly, “we want our money!”

I didn’t know what this was all about, but I did feel that two to one seemed pretty long odds.

“Listen fellas,” I said, easing back my chair. “If you can’t be civil, I must ask you to make a noise like an airplane and fly away.”

Bogle’s fists slowly knotted. “Did you hear what that punk said?” He turned slowly on me and pushed his great red face forward. “Open that big trap of yours again and I’ll tear your arm off and beat you to death with it.”

I smiled at him, not making any move. “Couldn’t you beat me to death with something else? The manager of the hotel would probably supply you with something. I don’t think I’d like to lose my arm.”

Ansell intervened just as Bogle got set to hand me one. “Not so fast, Sam,” he said. “Maybe, this gentleman doesn’t realize the facts.”

Bogle looked suspiciously at me and then at Ansell, “You mean he’s a sucker, too?” he asked.

“Why not? You and I were. He seems quite a respectable person,” Ansell returned.

I thanked him. “Of course, I don’t know what this’s about,” I said. “But, if I can lend you anything or help you, just say the word.” I looked at Myra who had been watching with alert eyes. “Do you know these two gentlemen?”

“We met at a café,” she said slowly. “But, it was just a hello and good-bye acquaintance. We had a drink and we parted.

“Yeah, we parted okay,” Bogle said, breathing heavily. “Our dough went with you.”

In spite of this guy's bulk, I wasn't standing for that. I stood up, "Are you calling her a thief?" I demanded angrily.

Bogle crowded me. It gave me the impression that a mountain was going to fall on me.

"Yeah," he said, showing his tobacco stained teeth. "Do you want to make anything of it?"

I decided that I'd be more use to Myra if I remained in one piece. The Bogle fella looked like he might be a little too much for me. Besides, I never like hitting anyone twice my size. I don't see any sense in it.

"No, that's all right, Bud," I said, stretching my leg and stamping. "I got a cramp?"

"Cramp?" he repeated, blinking at me.

"Yeah, nasty thing, cramp." I looked over at Myra. "Do you ever get cramp?"

"Only when I wear pink," she said. "It's a funny thing, but, pink cramps my style."

Bogle's blood pressure seemed to be troubling him. He tore his hat off his head and dashed it on to the ground. Then he began punching the air with his fists.

"Gently, Bogle," Ansell broke in. "There's no need to lose your temper."

"I want my dough!" Bogle howled, kicking his hat across the verandah. "I don't want a lot of talk. I just want my money and then I'm going to tear this dame into small pieces and feed her to the vultures."

Ansell drew up a chair. "We mustn't jump to conclusions," he said. "We have no proof that Miss Shurnway took our money."

"I've got proof," Bogle said savagely. "I'll get it if I have to turn her inside out."

Myra's blue eyes widened for an instant. Then I knew. She had lifted the money. That slaughtered me. It not only complicated matters, but it gave these two guys an opportunity to be really awkward if they felt that way.

"Don't get your truss in a knot," Myra said sharply. "I'll say this for the girl, she'd got plenty of nerve. "What are you talking about?"

Bogle seemed to be praying. But the words that came through his clenched teeth didn't quite line up with divine thought.

"We think you stole our money," Ansell said, looking at her steadily. "We both had small sums on us, but when you left, the money had gone. I don't like to accuse you, but you'll have to satisfy us that you didn't take it."

She whirled round on Bogle, "I bet this was your idea," she said. "I wish I had you at home. I'd use your head in my rock garden."

Bogle's muscles began to expand. "Iszatso!" he said. "Let me tell you something. You've shot your mouth off long enough. Now, it's my turn. Gimme that dough or I'll turn you upside down and shake it out of you. And if this punk thinks he can stop me, then let's see him do it. They'll have to hose him off the wall by the time I'm through with him!"

Maybe there are a few jaded people on the look-out for a new sensation, but I'm not like that. Being hosed off a wall didn't sound like a pleasant way to spend the morning.

"Myra," I said firmly, "Give these gentlemen their money and explain, as you explained to me, that it was just a gag. They'll appreciate it as much as I did—I hope."

Myra hesitated, then shrugged. She took a roll of notes from the top of her stocking and tossed it on the table. "There's your money," she said angrily. "I hope the rot-gut you buy with it poisons you."

Ansell picked up the money and counted it. He gave seven dollars to Bogle and put the rest in his pocket.

Bogle drew a deep breath, "And now," he said, hitching up his trousers, "I'm going to smack her one. Sister, am I going to bounce you off a wall!"

Ansell frowned. "Don't be so primitive, Bogle," he said. "You should never strike a woman."

"Not in public, anyway," I added.

"I'll take her some place quiet," Bogle pleaded.

"Certainly not," Ansell said. Now that he had got his money, he seemed to take a much more agreeable view of life. He turned to Myra, "Now, young lady," he said briskly, "I want to talk to you. I admire cleverness. That was a neat trick you pulled on us. A very neat trick. I deplore your ethics, of course," he added hastily, "but there can be no mistaking talent. You have great talent."

Myra seemed inclined to be sore. "Go boil your head, you old owl," she said and turned her back on him.

Ansell looked upset, "Pity," he muttered; then catching my eye, he went on, "And you, sir? Who may you be?"

"The name is Ross Millan," I said. "I'm a representative of the New York Reporter."

"New York Reporter?" Ansell's eyes opened. "That's one of America's greatest newspapers. I'm pleased to know you, Mr. Millan." He offered his hand, "I'm only sorry that we should meet under such distressing circumstances."

“That’s okay with me,” I said, shaking his hand. “You don’t have to worry about that. Miss Shumway has an advanced sense of humour. I know you boys can take a joke.”

“There’s too much talk,” Bogle growled. “You ain’t letting this dame get away with this, are you?”

Myra twisted round, “Why can’t you beat it? There’re enough rubbish dumps in this town without you adding to them. Take this big pickle-puss away and haunt houses with him.”

Bogle swelled with fury, “Did you hear what she said?” he demanded turning on Ansell. “I ain’t going to stand for it! I’ll —”

“Wait a minute,” Ansell said, as Bogle made to get to his feet. “Sit down, Sam. We won’t get anywhere like this. Now look, Miss Shumway, if I wanted to, I could hand you over to the police. But that won’t get us anywhere. You and I could be useful to each other.”

“How?”

“You’ve got very clever fingers,” Ansell told her, settling himself comfortably in the basket-chair. “Perhaps you can do other tricks besides—er—exploring people’s pockets.”

Myra frowned, “What if I can?” she said cautiously.

“Now look, my dear,” Ansell went on, “we can, if we forget our differences, be profitable to each other. On the other hand, if you don’t wish to be helpful, then I must hand you over to the police and work out my problems with Bogle.”

“That should be a problem in itself,” Myra said, looking at Bogle scornfully. “How you’ve got anywhere with that lump of cheese surprises me.”

Bogle closed his eyes. The strain of controlling himself was getting too much for him. “The things I’ll do to you when I get you alone,” he said in a strangled voice.

“Never mind that, Bogle,” Ansell said sharply. “We must stick to the point.” He turned back to Myra, “Please don’t irritate him. Are you going to be helpful or not?”

“Why, of course.” A mischievous gleam had come into her eyes. “You want to know if I can do tricks? Well, I think I could give you a little demonstration.” She looked at me, then at Bogle. “Ah! Now if Samuel will help me, I think I’ll— yes, the very thing!” She reached across the table and plucked a length of pink ribbon from one of Bogle’s ears. She pulled steadily and several yards of ribbon lay on the table before Bogle recovered from his astonishment and jerked away. The ribbon fell in a little pile to the ground and Bogle stared at it in horror.

“Why, Mr. Bogle,” I said, “you didn’t tell me you were that sort of a girl.”

“Did that come from me?” Bogle whispered.

“And to think I said you were empty headed,” Myra said sadly. “Why didn’t you tell me you used your head as a cupboard? I won’t take out the sawdust because your poor head might collapse, but I’m sure you’ll be glad to get rid of this,” and she removed a billiard ball from his other ear.

Bogle shivered and sprang to his feet. He dug his fingers into his ears feverishly.

“It’s all right, Bogle,” Ansell said kindly. “She was only demonstrating a trick. She’s a magician.” He turned to Myra, “I must say that was extremely expert.”

Myra shrugged. “If I had my apparatus here, I’d show you something really good. That’s just kid’s stuff.”

Bogle sat down again.

“Why don’t you two go off somewhere and get to know each other?” I said to Myra. “This fella Bogle’s got a nice face and maybe he just wants conversation. I’ll talk to Doc while you two enjoy yourselves.”

“Enjoy myself? With him?” Myra said, jerking her thumb at Bogle. “I’d rather walk around with a typhoid epidemic.”

I thought she had something there, but I kept my opinion to myself.

“What you need,” Bogle said, leaning across the table, “is a smack in the slats.”

If the slats were where I thought they were, I felt he had something, too.

“Quiet!” Ansell snapped. “We’re wasting too much time.” He looked at Myra severely, “Young lady, you’re deliberately aggravating him. I warn you, I’m not standing much more of this.”

Myra laughed. “I’ll be good, poppa, honest I will,” she said, and patted his hand. “Now, tell me all about it.”

Ansell looked at her suspiciously. “You seem to forget that you can’t afford to be funny,” he said.

“Aw, skip it, Doc,” I broke in. “Why don’t you say what you want to say and stop nagging the girl?”

Ansell looked a little surprised, “I’m trying to, but there’re so many interruptions.”

I turned on Bogle, “Don’t interrupt the Doctor any more, Bud,” I said. He’s getting tired of it.”

“Yes,” Myra joined in. “Give that big mouth of yours a rest. We’re sick of the sound of your voice.”

Bogle was so surprised that he just sat in a heap, his eyes starting out of his head.

“Okay, Doc,” I said quickly, before Bogle could recover. “The floor’s all yours.”

“Do either of you believe in witchcraft?” Ansell asked.

Myra held up her hand. “I do,” she said. “How else do you explain our Samuel away?”

Bogle took off his tie and tried to tear it in half. He was blue in the face with passion. He jerked and pulled at the tie, but it was too strong for him.

Myra said, “Let me,” and snatched the tie out of his hands. She cut it in half with a fruit knife and handed it back to him. “There you are, Sammy,” she said.

Bogle sat in a kind of stupor, staring at the tie. Then he dashed it to the ground.

“Miss Shumway!” Ansell exclaimed angrily. “Will you stop picking on Bogle?”

“Well, I was only trying to be helpful,” Myra said, her eyes wide in innocence. “He couldn’t manage to do it himself.”

“All right, all right,” I said hastily. “Why witchcraft? Who believes in witchcraft these days?”

Ansell looked at Bogle, satisfied himself that he was not going to have a fit and tried to collect his thoughts: “I don’t suppose you know much of the background of this country. I’ve lived here for over twenty years and I’ve seen some very odd things.”

“So have I,” Myra said, looking at Bogle.

“If you can’t stop this woman talking . . .” Ansell said to me furiously.

“Be good,” I said to Myra.

She lifted her shoulders.

“Go on,” I said. “Don’t worry about her.”

“If I’m to explain this at all,” Ansell said, rather hopelessly, “I wish you’d all listen. At one time there was a powerful secret society in this country who called themselves the Naguales. The members of this society were the witch doctors who bossed the Maya Indians. They are almost extinct now, but there’s a few of them who still practice in a little village not two hundred miles from here.”

“I’ve heard about ‘em,” I said. “Aren’t they supposed to produce rain at a moment’s notice and change themselves into animals? You don’t believe that junk, do you?”

Ansell shook his head, “No, I don’t. I believe they have certain supernatural powers such as mass hypnotism, and in some rare cases they practice levitation, but that really doesn’t concern us. What I’m interested in is their herbal medicines. Have you ever heard of teopatli?”

I shook my head. “What is it? A drink?”

“It’s a sure cure for snake bite.”

While we were talking, Bogle sat with his head in his hands, in a kind of stupefied daze. He wasn’t causing any trouble, so we ignored him.

“How do you mean . . . a sure cure?” I prompted.

“Listen, young man, I’ve seen men die of snake bite. It’s a pretty nasty business. I’ve seen men of this little village pick up a coral snake and let it strike at them, and then put this ointment on. They feel no effects at all.”

“Probably they’ve drawn the poison before demonstrating,” I said sceptically.

Ansell shook his head. “I’ve given them a pretty thorough test. Rattle snakes, scorpions and coral snakes. Teopatli fixes any of these bites like lightning.”

“All right, where do we go from there?”

“I want to get the recipe from this Indian fella and I think Miss Shumway can get it for me.”

Myra stared at him. “Someone’s been out in *the* sun without a nice, big, shady hat,” she said.

“Wouldn’t you like to put your feet up, poppa?”

“If you were a few years younger,” Ansell said, between his teeth, “I’d like to smack some manners into you!”

I knew just how he felt.

Myra giggled. “You’re not the only one who’s thought along those lines,” she said, shaking her head. “One of them did try it. They had to put four stitches in his face and give him a pension.”

“Take it easy,” I broke in. “What makes you think this baby could get the stuff and what would you do with it if you got it?”

Ansell calmed down. “People all over the world are getting bitten by snakes,” he explained.

“Teopatli really works. Properly marketed it’s worth a fortune. It would be an essential part of any traveller’s equipment. I could charge what I liked for it.”

I considered this. If the stuff was really a cure for any snake bite, then, of course, he had something. There was not only a fortune in it, but also a terrific news story.

“You’ve actually seen the stuff work?” I asked.

“Of course, I have.”

“What’s the difficulty? I mean why can’t you get hold of it.”

Ansell snorted. “Quinti won’t part. He’s this Indian fella I’m telling you about. For fifteen years I’ve been after him, but the old devil just grins at me.”

“Where do I come in on this?” Myra asked cautiously.

“I saw Quinti a couple of weeks ago,” Ansell said. “He tried to fox me as usual, but I put a lot of pressure on him and finally got him in a corner. He told me that soon he was going to die. But before he die, a Sun Virgin would come to him and take from him all his secrets. She would have great powers of magic, her hair would be like beaten gold and her skin like the frozen heights of Ixtacchiatl. It was just his way of putting me off, but now I’ve seen Miss Shumway, I guess we could frighten him into talking.”

Myra sat up. “You don’t want me to impersonate a Sun Virgin, do you?” she demanded.

“Why not?” Ansell asked, his eyes shining. “With your tricks, your looks and a little bluff, you could do it on your head.”

I leaned forward suddenly. “Where’s this village you’re talking about, Doc?” I asked.

“It’s ten miles from Pepoztlan.”

That gave me an idea, but I wanted time to think about it. “Listen, Doc,” I said. “Let Miss Shumway and me talk it over, will you? I think you’ve got an idea that’d make a great news story. It’d be fine publicity for you if you get the stuff, but I want to sort out the angles.”

Ansell got to his feet. “I’ll give you half an hour,” he said. “I take it that you won’t run out on me?”

“We’ll be here when you come back,” I told him.

“Hey!” Myra said. “Whose side are you on?”

I grinned at her. “Pipe down for a minute, will you?”

Bogle got to his feet after Ansell had shaken him. “Talk!” he said bitterly. “That’s all we do. We came out here so I could kick this dame’s teeth in and what happens? We sit around

and talk! Now, we go away so *they* can talk! Don't we ever do anything else, but talk in this gawdamn place?"

"Cheer up," I said. "You're getting so many wrinkles, before long you'll have to screw your hat on."

He glared at me, then turning on his heel, he slouched after Ansell. They crossed the square and disappeared into a beer parlour that stood at the corner.

I settled further, into my chair. "Well," I said, "you can never tell, can you. How do you like being a Sun Virgin?"

Myra's reply was unprintable.

CHAPTER FIVE

WELL, I talked her into it. It took a long time and it was as easy as cracking rock with a sponge.

Some men like strong-minded women. They say they know just where they are with them. Me . . . I give them away with a box of crackerjacks. The trouble with a girl who knows her own mind is she's one jump ahead of you all the time. If you want to fox her into anything, you've got to do a double jump, and like as not you end up by buying yourself a truss. Anyway, I sold her in the end. That's all that matters. I got her to see that for a couple of days' work, she'd save herself a stretch in jail and maybe make herself a load of jack. Why bother with details? It's action that counts. I had a lot to think about and a lot to do, but that's not your worry. All you want to know is how it worked out, not how *I* did it. Briefly then, the four of us agreed to put up at the hotel. It was as good a place as any, and until we had worked out the details of our campaign, it was no use us floating around the countryside like peas on a knife. We got ourselves rooms and we settled down. As soon as I was alone, I put a call through to Maddox. When I told him that I'd found the girl, I thought he was going to have a stroke. It seemed he hadn't got his story fixed and he wasn't nearly ready for me to bring her in. Then again, he was dead set on her being kidnapped by bandits because he'd worked out a swell story how she had been carried off from her hotel by thirty desperadoes.

I told him what I had in mind and that slackened the pressure on his arteries. I kept talking and I could hear his blood pressure going down. After a while, he said I was smart and finally he ended up by wanting to kiss me.

The set-up was this. I'd take the girl to Pezotlan and get the snake-bite angle fixed. That alone would make a swell story. On her way back from Pezotlan, Myra would be snatched by a bunch of greasers. I knew a little greaser who lived in the hills and who would be glad to do the job for a couple of hundred bucks. I'd take a few photos and then pull a rescue stunt.

The rest was plain sailing. The whole business was to be completed within a week. Maddox thought it was a swell idea. The snake-bite business excited him and he talked about buying himself in. I didn't discourage him, but I made up my mind that if any money was to be made out of this I was going to be the guy to cash in. I got him to let me spend anything within reason—my reason and not his—and then I hung up. That was that part fixed up.

Then I put a call through to Paul Juden and wised him up on the deal. I told him where to send my bag, demanded some money, and asked him how he was making out with the nurse. He said he'd do everything I wanted and the nurse business was just a gag. He knew I knew his wife.

When I'd done all that, I thought I'd go along and have a talk with Myra. I wanted to know more about this girl. I wanted to take the corners off our friendship and find out just how strong her mind was. So I went along to her room, and put my head round the door. She wasn't there.

I found her messing around the Cadillac under the shade of a banana tree. She looked over her shoulder when she heard me coming and then lowered the hood of the car.

“Come on,” I said. “See those mountains? Well, let’s go out and look at ‘em. I want to stand in the open with the wind against my face and feel that I’m somebody.”

She gave me an old-fashioned look, but something must have caught at her imagination because she got into the car without a word. I sat by her side and we jolted gently over the cobbles, through the square on to the main road that led out of Orizaba.

We didn’t say anything until we reached the mountain road and when we began to climb, with a sheer drop down into the valley whizzing past our off-wheels, she said suddenly, “We could go on and on like this and we wouldn’t have to worry about anything. And when we’re tired of each other we could say good-bye and both of us would have still less to worry about.”

“And the world wouldn’t have any snake-bite ointment and you and I wouldn’t feel very happy about it,” I said.

“You don’t really believe that stuff, do you?”

“I guess I do,” I said. “Besides, didn’t you promise the old man that you’d play along with him?”

She laughed gaily. “You a newspaper man and you talk about promise,” she said. “That’s a laugh!”

I looked at her. “What do you want to do, double-cross the old geyser?”

“I’m nor even thinking about him,” she returned, slowing the car as we ran past a line of ancient, weatherbeaten houses and refreshment booths, with their awnings over the street. “No one dictates my life. I’m just saying we could go on from here and not go back.”

The Cadillac began to mount again, leaving the small town behind. I had no idea what the name of the town was and cared less. We were heading for the wooded country and signs of human life began to thin out. The few Indians, jogging along the roadside, straddling the rumps of their *burros*, became fewer as we went on. Then suddenly she slowed down, swerved off the road and pulled up under the shadow of the forest fringe.

“Let’s get out,” she said.

I followed her as she moved away from the car, and sank down beside her on the parched, brown grass. She looked up at the brilliant sky, screwing up her eyes against the brightness of the sun, then she heaved a little, contented sigh.

I found her disturbing. I don't know what it was, but her metallic hair, gleaming in the sun, the white column of her throat, the curve of her figure under the blood-red shirt, her small finely boned hands and the courage of her mouth and chin got me. I found myself groping back into the past to remember any one woman I had known who looked as good as this kid. Pale ghosts paraded in my mind, but none of them clicked.

"Look, sister . . ." I said.

"Just a minute," she interrupted, facing me. "Would you mind not calling me sister? I'm no sister of yours. I've got a name. Myra Shumway. We met. Remember?"

"You'd've been a better girl if you'd been my sister," I said grimly.

"All you tough guys think of is violence. That's your only reply to a woman, isn't it?"

"What do you expect, when they feed us hot tongue and cold shoulder?" I asked grinning. "Besides, a little violence works."

"Get me out of this," she said, suddenly turning so that she was close to me. "You can do it. I don't want to go on with it."

I thought, 'If you knew half what I've got lined up for you sweetheart, you'd be climbing trees.' But, I just shrugged. "Don't let's go over that again," I said. "You'll thank me in a week or so. You're not scared of this Quinn guy, are you?"

"I'm not scared of anything on two legs ..." she began.

"I remember, you told me."

"But, it's crazy," she went *on*. "It's all right to talk about it, but actually doing it . . . why, it's crazy! I can't speak the language. They'll know I'm a phoney."

"You leave it to Doc. He's got it all worked out," I said. "Why should you worry?"

She fumbled in her bag and took out a deck of cards. "There's something about you," she said, flipping the cards through her fingers so that they looked like an arc of a rainbow. "I wonder what it is?"

"When I was very young," I returned, lolling back on my elbow, "my mother used to rub me in bear fat. It built up my personality."

She leaned forward and took four aces out of my breast pocket. "Would you say I'm a serious young woman?"

I watched the cards flutter through her slim fingers. "Yeah," I said, feeling my throat thicken suddenly. "More than that. I'd say you were a remarkable young woman."

She looked at me with quick interest, "Really?"

“Hmm, I guess so. We’re going to know each other an awful lot better before we wave good-bye. Do you know that?”

She reached over to take the King of Spades from my cuff. I could smell the scent in her hair. It reminded me of a summer spent in England in an old country garden full of lilac trees. “Are we?” she said.

I caught her hand and pulled her close to me. She didn’t resist, but let me pull her across the small space that divided us. “I think so,” I said, sliding my arm under her shoulders. “An awful lot better.”

We lay like that, close to each other, and I could see the overhead clouds reflected in her eyes.

“Will you like that?” she asked, her lips close to mine.

“Maybe—I don’t know.” Then I kissed her, pressing my mouth hard on hers.

She lay still. I wished she would close her eyes and relax, but she didn’t. I could feel the hard muscles in her back resisting me. Her lips felt hard, tight and child-like against mine.

She made no effort to push me away. Kissing her like that was as good as kissing the back of my hand. I dropped onto my elbow again, releasing her. “All right,” I said. “Forget it.”

She shifted away from me. Her fingers touched her lips carefully, “You meant that to be something, didn’t you?” she asked, curling her legs under her and adjusting her skirt.

“Sure,” I said. “But what of it? Sometimes it’s all right, but not this time. The trick is not to rush this kind of thing.”

“No,” she said, looking at me seriously. “The trick is not to do it at all.”

Then I thought what’s wrong with me? What am I trying to do? I’d got a job on my hands. I’d got 25,000 dollars just around the corner with my name on it, and here I am gumming up my chance trying to neck a kid that meant as much to me as last year’s income tax return. I guess it was her hair. I was always a sucker for blondes.

“Changed your mind about knowing me awfully well?” she said, watching me intently.

“I guess not,” I said. “I’ll keep trying. Did I tell you about the red head I met in New Orleans?”

“You don’t have to,” she said, scrambling to her feet, “I can imagine it,”

“Not this red head,” I returned, looking up at her. “She had a figure like an hour glass. Boy! Did she make every minute count!”

She began moving slowly towards the Cadillac. “So you’re not going to help me?” she said.

“Not after I’ve been nice to you?”

“What’s wrong?” I got to my feet and we both walked towards the Cadillac. “You were feeling fine about it this morning.”

“I’ve thought about it,” she said, getting into the car. “I don’t like the idea any more.”

“Give it a chance,” I urged, feeling the heat coming at me from off the dusty road. “Be big minded about it.”

“What are you getting out of it?” she said, starting the engine “You’re selling it too hard to be disinterested.”

“A story,” I said. “And, Pie-crust, if you were a newspaper man you’d know just what that meant. It’s going to be a beautiful story, with lots of publicity, and they’ll even print my picture.”

“You never give a thought to those folk who have their meat wrapped in your newspaper, do you?” Myra returned, driving slowly back the way we came.

I winced. “I wish you wouldn’t,” I said. “Wisecracks spoil your romantic appeal.”

She slightly increased the speed of the car as we began to descend the steep winding road. Just ahead of us was the little mountain town we had already passed on our way up.

“Let’s stop and buy some beer,” I said. “My tonsils are dusty.”

We entered the town, drove along the cobbled main mad, ignored the group of Indians, lounging behind heaps of van-coloured flowers which they stretched towards us, and pulled up outside a little beershop. There was a long wrought-iron table and bench outside the shop, shaded by a gaily covered awning. A smell of beer and stale bodies came through the doorway.

“We won’t go in,” I said, sitting at the table. “That smell reminds me of a newspaper office.”

She came and sat by my side and pulled off her wide straw hat, which she laid carefully on the table.

A thin, elderly Mexican came out of the shop and bowed to us. There was an odd, worried look in his eyes that made me wonder if he was in trouble.

I ordered beer and he went away without saying anything. “Now, there’s a guy who looks like he’s got more than his hat on his mind,” I said, opening my coat and picking the front of my shirt carefully off my chest.

“These greasers are all alike,” Myra returned, indifferently. “They worry over which way a flea will jump. At one time I was sorry for them, but now, I don’t worry—” She broke off and looked past me, her eyes widening.

I glanced over my shoulder.

Standing in the doorway of the shop was the fattest man I’d ever seen. He was not only fat, but he was big with it. I guess he must have been seven inches over six foot. He was wearing the usual straw sombrero, a *sarape* hung over his great shoulders, but I could see his neat black suit and his soft Mexican riding boots ornamented with silver inlay.

He leaned against the doorway, a cigarette banging from his thick lips and his black eyes on Myra.

I particularly noticed his eyes. They were flat like the eyes of a snake. I didn’t like the look of this party. He didn’t belong to the town. I was sure of that. There was too much class about him. I didn’t like the leer he cast as telegraphing to Myra.

“Isn’t he cute?” Myra said to me. “I bet he was twins before his mother cooked him in a too hot bath.”

“Listen, Apple blossom,” I said, keeping my voice low, “keep your funny stuff for me, will you? That hombre won’t like it.”

The fat man picked his cigarette out of his mouth and flicked it across at me. It landed on the table between us.

If any other greaser had done that, I’d have pinned his ears back, but I’ve got a superstition about hitting a guy twice my size. I’ve been over that with you before. But when that guy gets so that he’s three times *my* size, I’ll take an awful lot from him before I go into action.

Myra didn’t mind pushing me into a fight. That’s like a woman. They think uneven odds is a sign of chivalry.

“Why don’t you poke that fat boy in his pantry?” she asked.

Maybe the guy couldn’t speak anything but his own language, but how was I to know? The most unlikely people get educated these days.

“What do you want me to do?” I whispered. “Commit suicide?”

“You’re not going to let a pail of lard insult me?” Myra said, her eyes suddenly flashing. “Didn’t you see what he did?” She pointed to the cigarette end that smouldered near her hand.

“That little thing?” I said, hastily. “Why, that was an accident. He didn’t mean anything. You pipe down. It’s dames like you who cause revolutions.”

Just then the thin Mexican came out of the shop. He edged round the fat party as if he were passing close to a black widow. Then he set two beers in front of us and faded back to the shop fast.

The fat party was smoking again and he took his cigarette out and flipped it once more. I had my hand over my glass as the smoking cigarette curled through the air, but it dropped into Myra's glass.

I took her glass before she could say anything and gave her mine. "There you are, sweetheart, and for the love of Mike don't make anything of it."

Myra's face scared me. She'd gone a little white and her eyes looked like those of a cat in the dark.

The fat party suddenly laughed. It was a high tinny sound that went with his sideboards and pencilled moustache. "The senor has milk in his veins," he said, slapping his thick thigh and looking as if he was having the time of his life.

I considered getting up and giving him one, but something warned me off. I've knocked around this country for some time and *I've* seen plenty of tough greasers, but this party was something special. If I was going to do anything, *I'd* have to do it with a gun. That was the kind of guy he was and I didn't have a gun with me

That didn't put Myra off. She gave him a look that would have stopped a runaway horse and said, "Go jump into a lake, you fat sissy; if one won't hold you, jump into two."

You could have heard a feather settle on the ground.

The fat party stopped laughing. "You've got a very big mouth, little rabbit," he said. "You should be careful how you use it."

Boy! Could that guy look mean?

"Get out of the sun, fat boy," Myra said. "Before your dome melts. Take the air—drift—scram—dust off."

The fat party put one hand under his *sarape*. I guess he was going after his arsenal, so I said quickly, "We don't want any trouble, pal, we're just going."

But, he wasn't looking at me. He wasn't even moving any more. He just stood like a great block of granite with his eyes sticking out of his head like long-stemmed toadstools.

I looked at Myra. She had her hands on the table and between her cupped fingers was the head of a little green snake. It darted its spade-shaped head in a striking movement and its forked tongue flickered in and out in a way that gave me the heebies. Then she opened her hands and the snake wasn't there any more and she smiled at the fat party as if they'd known each other for a long time.

I wish you could have seen his face. One minute he was all brag, meanness and confidence and then, in a moment, he was a deflated bag of wind. He covered his eyes with his hand and then shook his head. He seemed to hitch himself together with an effort.

“Didn’t you hear me the first time?” she said to him. “Beat it. You’re using too much air.”

Then the thin elderly Mexican came out quickly and said something to the fat party. He looked sick as he pointed down the road.

The fat party followed his trembling finger and then glared over at us. “We meet again,” he said. “Especially will I meet the *senorita*. She has too big a mouth. I put a hornet in it and sew her lips together,” and he went quickly into the shop, leaving the thin elderly Mexican watching a cloud of dust that was coming up the road at a pretty fast lick towards us.

I eased my collar. “Did you get that line about the hornet?” I said. “And you had to crack wise with a guy like that.”

She picked up her hat. “Skip It,” she said. “He was as yellow as a canary.”

“I know. And I loved the way he sang,” I returned. “Come on, we’ll beat it too. I have a feeling that there’s a cloud of trouble heading our way.”

We hardly got to the car before a bunch of Federal soldiers came galloping up.

A little guy with a complexion like stale cream cheese pulled his horse over to us and slid to the ground. He was an officer by the look of his dirty uniform and he seemed excited.

I said, “Hello,” and automatically felt for my papers. But, he wasn’t interested in me. He asked if we had seen a big fat guy anywhere around.

Myra opened her mouth, but I stumbled against her. My elbow hit her in the wind and that held her.

“No one around here,” I said. “Maybe some one else has seen him. Have you asked?”

The officer spat in the dust. “They said he was here. Not five minutes ago,” he said, fiddling with his revolver butt.

“Well, a lot can happen in five minutes,” I said. “Maybe he was in a hurry. Who was he anyway?”

But the officer had lost interest in me and went over to the thin, elderly Mexican. I shoved Myra into the car and got in myself. I wanted to put a lot of space between me and likely trouble.

Myra had got her breath back. “Why didn’t you tell him?” she demanded. “You’re riot scared of him, are you?”

“It’s not a matter of being scared,” I said starting the engine and throwing in the clutch. “I’ve been around in this country long enough never to interfere with anyone. It’s paid me pretty well up to now, and I’m seeing that it continues to do so.”

I sent the car snarling towards Orizaba.

Myra began to laugh. “Did you see that fat boy’s face when I did the snake trick?”

“I did,” I said grimly. “And I heard what he said about the hornet.”

“So what? You don’t think that means anything, do you?”

“I know it does,” I replied. “A guy like that would do just that little thing and think nothing of it. The next time we meet, I’m going to shoot him first and apologize after.”

The idea seemed to shock her and we went back to the hotel without saying another word.

Bogle was sitting on the verandah drinking beer and he waved to us as we came up the steps. “Where’ve you been?” he asked, putting his mug on the table and getting up. “Doc’s worried sick. He thought you’d walked out on him.”

Myra said, “Hello, Samuel. You ought to keep in the shade. The light’s a little too hard on you.”

Bogle watched her disappear into the hotel. He scowled at me. “One of these days she’ll shoot her mouth off once too often,” he said darkly. “Don’t that prove you can’t be too careful in picking a blonde? I knew a dame once with hair just like hers. Got the nicest mouth I’ve ever listened to. You oughta hear the drippy names she used to call me. You’d’ve been surprised.”

It surprised me that Bogle had a sentimental streak in his make-up, but I didn’t tell him so.

“Your love life bores me,” I said, grinning at him. “Never mind about the drippy names. They won’t get you any place. Where’s Doc?”

Bogle sniffed. “Oh, he’s feeding his face. I didn’t feel hungry, but maybe I’d better do something about it now.”

“Come and feed with me,” I said. “No sense in eating alone”

Bogle brooded darkly. “I’d rather eat alone than with that blonde wise guy,” he said at last.

“I’ll wait. When I sit down to a meal I like to enjoy myself.”

“If that’s how you feel,” I returned and moved towards the lounge.

Just then a kid came quietly up the verandah steps. He was a little Indian boy, very dirty, wearing a dirty white shirt and a pair of ragged trousers. He carried a small wooden box in one of his grubby hands and he looked at Bogle with a calculating eye.

Bogle smirked at him. "Hullo, son," he said. "Coming to have a talk with old Uncle Sam?"

The kid stared at him thoughtfully with his head on one side and shuffled his bare feet on the verandah floor.

Bogle looked over at me. "I like kids," he said simply, exploring his teeth with his fingernail. "This little punk's all right, ain't he?"

The kid shuffled a few paces nearer. "Shine, Johnny?" he said, hopefully.

"You don't have to be scared of me," Bogle said, leering at him. "Come and tell Uncle Sam all about it."

The kid didn't seem full of confidence, but he put his box down and said again, "Shine, Johnny?"

Bogle stared at him. "Wadger mean . . . shine?"

"He wants to shine your shoes, you dope," I said, grinning. "He's got beyond Uncle Samuel's bedside chats for kiddies."

Bogle looked disappointed. "Gee! I thought the kid was lonely."

"Shine, Johnny?" the kid repeated monotonously.

"He's got a one-track mind, ain't he?" Bogle said, then seeing the kid was a bit restless, he waved his hand grandly. "Sure, help yourself, son," and he stretched forward one of his great feet.

The kid flopped on the floor and began turning up Bogle's trouser ends.

"Well, I'm hungry," I said. "I'll tell 'em to leave you something."

"What'll I give the little punk?" Bogle asked, watching the kid polishing away at his shoe.

"What you like," I returned. "These kids ain't particular."

Another kid in a dirty red shirt came sidling up the steps. He took one look at Bogle and ran over and shoved White Shirt out of the way.

Bogle blinked. "What do you think you're doing?" he demanded, as Red Shirt began to lay out his shining materials.

“You’ve got competition,” I said, feeling that I might enjoy this. I leaned against the wall and prepared to watch. From past experience I knew what leeches these kids were, once you encouraged them.

Bogle looked quite gratified. “I told you kids liked me,” he said, smirking. “They’ll even fight over me.”

He’d got something because White Shirt recovering from his surprise grabbed Red Shirt by the throat and put on squeeze.

Bogle was quite shocked. He dragged them apart and held them, one in each great fist. “Hey!” he said. “This ain’t the way to behave. Now, listen, you two . . .”

Red Shirt kicked out at White Shirt and succeeded in landing a bone shattering smack on Bogle’s leg. Bogle let the kids go like they were red hot and clasped his leg with a grunt of anguish.

The two kids began to mix it all over the verandah.

“Holy Moses!” Bogle gasped. “Can’t you stop ‘em?”

“Don’t bring me into It,” I said, watching the kids with interest. “I’ll just be the historian.”

Bogle got to his feet and managed to separate the kids. “Shut up, you two!” he said fiercely. “No fighting! Now, listen, you can do a shoe apiece. How’s that?”

Neither of them understood what he was saying, but they quieted down and looked at him with bright, intent eyes.

Bogle seemed pleased with his tactics. “See that?” he said, sitting down again. “I can handle kids. All you’ve got to do is reason with ‘em.”

He was hardly in his seat when the two kids streaked at him and grabbed his right leg. They began thumping each other and dragging his leg backwards and forwards. Bogle hung on to the table, his eyes popping in alarm.

They struggled first one way and then another, worrying at his leg like a couple of bull terriers.

“Reason with ‘em, Sam,” I said, weak with laughter.

He beat them off finally with his hat and they stood back, breathing heavily. If he’d’ve been a nice juicy pork chop with a little frill at the end of it, they couldn’t have eyed him with more interest.

As they edged towards him again, he raised his hat threateningly. “Keep off, you punks,” he growled, then catching my eye, what the hell do you find funny in this? Tell ‘em to behave themselves.”

I came over and explained to the kids that they could each clean one of Bogle's shoes and there was no need to fight about it.

They considered this for a moment, then they wanted to know if the payment would also be divided.

I referred this to Bogle.

"Aw, the hell with it" he said, losing patience. "Tell 'em to dust. I thought they were nice kids. Money's all these brats think of. I don't want to be bothered with 'em."

"Hey! Where's all this stuff about liking kids?" I said severely. "You'll disappoint 'em, you know."

Bogle fanned himself with his hat. "Iszatso?" he said violently. "What about me? They nearly broke my gawdamn leg."

"Have it your own way," I said and explained to the kids that Bogle had changed his mind. When it had sunk in, they started howling at the tops of their voices.

They even put my teeth on edge.

"Now, do you see what you've done?" I said.

"Get 'em out of here," Bogle said, confused. "They'll raise the whole neighbourhood."

Myra and Doc Ansell came running out.

"What's going on?" Ansell asked, looking over the top of his sun glasses in surprise.

"Notin'," Bogle said between his teeth. "Just a couple of kids bawling. That ain't anything, is it?"

Myra looked at him with withering scorn. "So you even bully children, you big cheese," she said indignantly. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Bogle closed his eyes. "You again?" he said, tapping ominously on the table. "Every time I open my mouth, I get a broadcast from you. Listen, these kids want to shine my shoes. Well, I don't want my shoes shined see? Does that call for anything from you?"

The kids stopped howling and looked at Myra hopefully. They sensed that she was on their side.

"And why don't you want them shined?" Myra demanded. "Just look at them! They're like exhumed coffins."

Bogle loosened his collar. "I don't care what they look like. I don't want them shined," he said, furiously. "If I want them shined, I'll shine 'em myself."

“How ridiculous!” Myra said. “I think you’re just being mean. You don’t want to pay these kids to shine your shoes. You want them to do it for nothing.”

Bogle picked up his pewter mug and flattened it between his hands. “I’ve changed my mind about having my shoes shined,” he said with a hiss.

“Changed your mind?” Myra repeated. “Who did you find crazy enough to swap with you?”

Bogle flexed his fingers. He seemed to have developed acute asthma.

“There’s no need to lose our tempers,” Ansell joined in, soothingly. “If Bogle doesn’t want his shoes shined, then there’s nothing more to be said. We came out because we thought someone was being hurt. Come along, Myra, well go back to our meal.”

“You might do those kids a lot of harm if you frustrate them,” Myra said warmly. “Haven’t you ever heard of repression?”

Bogle blinked at her.

“I wouldn’t have it on toy conscience,” Myra went on. “All for the sake of a peso. Don’t tell me you can’t afford it or have you a hole in your sock?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Bogle said, becoming dazed. “Why don’t I let ‘em shine them? What do I care? Let ‘em do anything.”

“There now,” Myra said. “After all this fuss.” She smiled at the two kids and pointed to Bogle’s shoes.

They were on him like terriers on a rat. I’ve never seen anything like it. Bogle, the two kids and the chair went over with a bang that made Bogle’s teeth rattle. The two kids fought Bogle, fought each other and went back and fought Bogle again. They pulled off one of his shoes and threw it into the Square. Then they twisted his toes.

Bogle just lay on his back making a humming noise like he had swallowed a bee.

The kids fastened onto his other shoe. They smeared blacking on themselves, on the floor and on Bogle. White Shirt got so excited that he jumped up and down on Bogle’s chest.

Myra and I just clung together and wept.

Ansell took off his glasses. “I do hope they’ll be careful,” he said mildly. “They’ll hurt him in a moment.”

As soon as White Shirt had got his breath back, he seized Bogle’s other leg. When he found the shoe was missing, he threw it down and rushed at Red Shirt.

Red Shirt didn't like the look in his eye, and tucking Bogle's foot under his arm, he tore off in a circle, spinning Bogle round like a top.

Then quite suddenly they both seemed to lose interest in their work and they quit. Maybe, they thought they were giving too much value for money. They stopped rushing round in circles, looked at each other, nodded, regarded Bogle without interest and then put their shining materials away. They stood over Bogle, smiling at him, with two grubby hands held out for payment.

"You'd better pay 'em," I said weakly. "Or they might start all over again."

Hastily he dug out a few coins which he threw at the kids. While they were chasing the money, he got painfully to his feet and inspected a long tear in his trousers.

"Don't worry about that, Samuel," Myra said. "It was time you got yourself a new suit anyway."

Bogle gave her a blank look. Then he limped painfully across the verandah, into the Square and collected his other shoe. He put it on and regarded his feet with a sour eye. Before, his shoes certainly had looked dusty. Now they looked ready for the ash can.

"I hope you're all satisfied," he said, in a low, strangled voice.

"Just look at those kids," Myra said, wiping her eyes. "They're as happy as larks."

"Yeah," Bogle said, creeping back slowly on to the verandah. "As happy as larks."

Myra heaved a contented sigh. "Well, I enjoyed that," she said. "I wouldn't have missed it for anything. You ought to be pleased you made those kids happy, Samuel. You're quite a nice piece of cheese after all."

She waved to the two kids who were standing watching with bright eyes and then she turned to go back into the lounge.

Bogle took out a silver peso and held it up so the kids could see it, then with a tired but triumphant gleam in his eyes he pointed to Myra's shoes.

They were off the mark like a streak of lightning. Myra hadn't even time to run for it. She gave a wail of terror and then her legs flew up and she came down on the floor with a jar that sounded like music in Bogle's ears.

She disappeared under the two kids.

Bogle sat down and relaxed. There was a sharp, ripping sound of tearing linen. It seemed to do Bogle a power of good. For the first time, since I met him, he looked happy.

"Make a good job of it," he said airily, and then catching my eye, he added, "Didn't I tell you they were all right little punks?"

CHAPTER SIX

THE next two days kept me pretty busy. We had decided to go to Pepoztlan on the following Thursday which was just three days ahead of us. There was a lot to arrange. We had to get Myra a dress that would make her look like a Sun Virgin. That had to come from Mexico City and after some trouble Juden got it for us. I reckon his nurse friend had a hand in getting it, because I'm sure Juden would never have found such a humdinger by himself. Even Myra was pleased.

The dress was a cross between a nightgown and an Aimee McPherson surplice. It was simple, but it fitted her and she looked swell in it. There's nothing like white silk to set off blonde hair and Myra looked like she had never said a bad word or done a bad deed when she got it on.

"That kid looks like a saint," Doc said to me when she had gone to take it off. The old guy was nearly crying. "She looks like a saint."

"If you mean a Saint Bernard, I'm with you," Bogle grunted. "That camouflage don't pull wool over my eyes."

I didn't worry what Bogle thought. He didn't count. Ansell was right. Myra looked the part and if she didn't startle this Indian fella then I'd give up.

Apart from fixing her up, rehearsing her in the part and choosing a few good showy tricks out of her repertoire, I had to fix the kidnapping angle.

This wasn't so easy. I wasn't going to let either Ansell or Bogle in on this. I had to find an excuse so that I could get into touch with this Mexican I knew and wise him up what was wanted.

Once I got hold of him, it was easy. He jumped at the idea. I'd known him for some time. His name was Bastino and he was lust a small-time bandit who got nowhere. I'd done him a good turn once and I knew I could trust him. All he had to do was to kidnap Myra from the inn where I had arranged for us to stay at Pepoztlan after she had returned from her trip to Quinti. I fixed everything and promised to let him know just when to pull it off. I gave him a hundred bucks as a down payment and promised him another three hundred if he pulled it off.

The set-up looked sweet to me. But, on the morning that we were to move to Pepoztlan, something happened t6t altered the whole plan.

We were just getting into the car when a guy from the Post Office came running over with his eyes popping out of his head.

"Now, what's the trouble?" I said, going halfway to meet him.

He gave me a telegram and stood back, watching my face with excited interest. I shoved a half a buck into his hand and returned to the car, opening the telegram as I walked.

It was from Juden. When I read what he had to say, I cursed softly under my breath. The other three watched me.

“This tears it,” I said, leaning into the car. “Revolution’s broken out in the hills and I’ve got to cover it.”

“What do you mean . . . revolution?” Ansell said, sharply.

“Another uprising,” I said in disgust. “Can’t these guys keep the peace for five minutes? A bunch of bandits swooped on some Federal troops and cut their heads off. Federal troops are on their way from the capital to deal with them. I’ve got to get over there and give a report on the battle. It may last a week.” “You can’t do that,” Ansell protested. “I’ve fixed everything with Quintl. If we don’t loose Myra on him now, we’ll never do it.”

I thought for a moment. He was right. But, on the other hand, I’d got to look after the *Recorder*. The great American public would want to hear more about these Federal soldiers who had had their heads cut off. You don’t read about a little thing like that every day.

“Well, I’m sorry,” I said. “But you’ll have to do this without me. It’s simple enough and I think I ought to be through in a few days. I’ll meet you at Pepoztlan. Get Myra to see this Quintl and then wait at the inn for me. Okay?”

Myra said, “So you’re going to walk out on me after all?”

“Now, don’t make it difficult,” I pleaded. “You’ll do fine. I know you will.” I put my hand on hers, “And wait for me, kid, I want to see you again.”

“If you ain’t in a hurry, I’ll get out and heave up,” Bogle said, grimacing in disgust. “This sloppy talk gives me a pain.”

That seemed to settle it. Myra, her face hardening, started the Cadillac. “Okay,” she said. “Run after your stupid little revolution. Do you think I care?” and she drove away fast, leaving a cloud of dust behind her.

That was that.

As I might have expected, the Federal troops made a mess of it. When they got to the place where their comrades had been decapitated there was no sign of the bandits and no sign of any bodies. I wasted a couple of days riding around with them, and then they got sick of it and gave up. All I got out of it was a photograph of the place and a dreary report of the unsuccessful hunt. I sent those off, said good-bye to the Captain of the troop who seemed glad to see me go and rode over to Pepoztlan as fast as I could go.

Pepoztlan was a tiny village on the mountain side. The main road had been hewn out of the mountain itself and the few houses of pink stone overlooked the exposed plateau beyond which lay the Indian settlement.

I found Ansell and Bogle resting in the shade at the inn. It wasn't much of a place, but the wine was good and they did manage to carve up an occasional chicken. I'd been there before, so I knew more or less what I was in for.

I arrived on Saturday afternoon. Since Myra was to see Quintl on the previous Thursday, I thought the whole thing had been settled. My next immediate job was to get in touch with Bastino and fix the kidnapping.

It came as a surprise when I rode into the patio to find only Ansell and Bogle there.

I slid off my horse, tossed the reins to an Indian and went over to them.

"Where's Myra?" I asked and I admit I felt anxious.

Both Ansell and Bogle looked a little sheepish. It was Ansell who did the talking. "She's still there," he said. "Sit down and have a drink."

"Yeah, this is real tiger's breath," Bogle said, filling a horn mug and shoving it into my hand.

"What do you mean . . . she's still there?"

"She's made a hit with Quintl," Ansell said uneasily. "They wanted her to stay."

I looked from one to the other, "I don't get it. How long do you think she's going to stay there?"

Bogle took off his hat and scratched his head, "Brother," he said, "them Indians scared the pants off me. I didn't want to argue with them."

"Quiet, Bogle," Ansell said sharply. "Let me explain."

"You'd better," I said, feeling mad. "What the hell's been happening?"

"The truth is, she overdid it!" Ansell said. "I warned her, but she kept pulling tricks and I guess the Indians fell for her. They think she's a reincarnated goddess."

"So what?"

"They won't let her go," Ansell said miserably. "We tried to get her away, but they got nasty about it."

"Knives," Bogle said, with a little shiver. "Great big knives as long as my arm. I tell you, Bud, they scared me."

“So you left her, eh?” I said, feeling blood pounding in my ears. “That was a swell thing to do. What sort of men are you—you yellow-gutted monkeys!”

Ansell mopped his face with his handkerchief. “I was waiting for you to come and then I thought we’d turn out the Federal troops,” he explained.

“They’ll take a month to get going,” I said angrily. “I thought you knew this Indian. Why didn’t you tell me you couldn’t trust him?”

“It’s not that,” Ansell said quickly. “I’d trust him with my life. It was her fault. You ought to have seen the tricks she did. They were remarkable. I’ve never seen . . .”

I got to my feet. “We’re getting guns and we’re going right over there and we’ll bring her back. Do you get it?”

Bogle’s eyes popped. “Just the three of us?” he said faintly.

“Just the three of us,” I returned. “Get horses, while I get the guns.”

“You heard what I said about the knives?” Bogle said. “Great big stickers, as long as my arm.”

“I heard,” I returned. “We got this girl into the mess. We’ll get her out of it.”

I left them and dug out the innkeeper. “What have you got in the way of guns, pal?” I asked, after we had shaken hands and patted each other.

“Guns?” His little eyes widened, then seeing my look, he grinned. “More trouble, senor?” he said. “Always trouble with the white senor.”

“Slow up on the chatter and give me some action,” I said shoving him towards the house.

I got action and I got three express rifles and three .38 automatics.

By the time I got back the other two had found horses. I gave them a gun and automatic each and then climbed on to my horse.

“You wouldn’t like to put it off until to-morrow?” Ansell said hopefully. “It’s going to be hot on the plateau right now.”

“It’ll be hot all right,” I said and rode out of the patio. The way to the Indian settlement lay across the exposed plateau which was broken only by patches of forest. There was hardly any shade.

After an hour of heat and flies we came to the Indian village. The sordid settlement shocked me. There were six mud huts, thatched with banana leaves. They stood forlornly in the bright sunlight and the whole place seemed deserted.

I jerked my horse to a standstill and sat staring at the huts. Doc and Bogle came up and halted their animals by my side.

“Is this it?” I said. “Are you sure this is the place?”

“Yeah,” Bogle said, wrinkling his nose. “Not like Palm Beach, is it?” He rested his arms on the saddle and leaned forward. “Not the kind of glamour parlour Goldlocks is used to.”

“Button up!” I said, feeling furious with Ansell for even bringing Myra to such a dump, let alone leaving her here. If I’d gone with them, we wouldn’t have gone through with it.

Ansell slid off his horse and walked slowly down the beaten path between the huts. Neither Bogle nor I moved. We sat, with our rifles forward, watching him.

“No one about,” Ansell said, coming back. “Maybe they’re hunting or something.”

In spite of the heat, I suddenly felt my flesh creep, as if a cold hand had touched me. “You’d better find her,” I said quietly.

“Quintl’s got a place further in the forest,” Ansell said, urging his horse forward.

We followed him.

At the edge of the forest, amid scrub and stones, stood a solid little building made of grey rock.

“This is it,” Ansell said, dismounting.

Bogle looked round. “This ain’t a country to live in,” he said uneasily. “There’s something about this dump I don’t like. Do you feel it, Bud?”

“Don’t be a damned baby,” I said sharply, although I, too, disliked the dank atmosphere of the settlement. I guess it was the complete stillness and the silence that gave me the jumps. Even the trees were motionless.

I dismounted and walked up to the rotten wooden door of the building and thumped on it with my clenched fist. The heavy silence was broken only by the sound of my fist.

I stopped and listened. Sweat ran down my face with the exertion of beating on the door. Ansell and Bogle stood a few yards behind me, watching.

“There’s no one there,” I said, stepping back. “They’ve taken her away.”

“I can smell something like a dead horse,” Bogle said suddenly, and he began drawing great breaths of air through his nose.

Ansell said: “For God’s sake, keep quiet.” He joined me at the door. “There must be someone there,” he went on, pressing against the door. “There’s no lock. It’s bolted on the

inside.”

I drew back and aimed a kick at the door. It shivered but held firm. I don't know why it was, but I suddenly felt scared. I felt that something was going to happen over which I had no control, but in spite of this I was going to get into that hut.

I turned to Bogle, “Get off that damned horse and help me, you useless punk.”

Glad to have something to do, Bogle hurriedly dismounted and came over. He examined the door and then drawing back, he crashed his shoulder against it. The door creaked loudly and Bogle's second charge shattered the bolt and the door crashed open.

A violent, nauseating smell seeped out of the hut. We staggered back before it.

“What is it?” I said, holding my hand over my mouth and nose.

“Someone's been dead in there for quite a time,” Ansell said, his face going pale.

Bogle turned green, “I gotta weak stomach,” he wailed, sitting down abruptly on the grass. “I can't stand this. I'm going to heave.”

I glared round at Ansell. “She's not dead, is she?” I said.

“Don't get excited,” Ansell said, struggling with his own nausea. “You wait here. I'll go in.” He drew a deep breath and peered timidly into the darkness. His eyes, dazzled by the bright sunlight, could see nothing.

I shoved him aside. “Get out of my way,” I said, and walked into the awful, stinking oven of darkness.

I stood just inside the room, breathing through my mouth, feeling the sweat running from me. At first, I couldn't see anything, then as my eyes became accustomed to the gloom I made out a figure sitting on the floor, propped up against the wall. It was Quintl.

The old Indian was wrapped in a dirty blanket. His head was sunk low on his chest and his hands lay stiffly on the mud floor. I fumbled for a match and with a shaky hand, I scratched a light from the rock wall. Moving forward, I peered down at the Indian, holding the little flame high above my head.

The whole of Quintl's face moved in putrefaction. Even the hair on his head seethed with putrefying life.

I started back, dropped the match and half blundered to the door. I had never seen such a disgusting, sickening sight and it seemed to draw my nerves into tight, writhing wires.

I stood gulping in the doorway, too sick even to speak. Ansell shook my arm. “What is it?” he said, his voice was high pitched. “What are you looking like that for?”

“It’s the Indian,” I said, trying to control my heaving fluttering stomach. “He’s dead. Don’t look at him. It’s the filthiest thing I’ve seen.” I looked back into the darkness, my heart pounding against my side. “Where’s Myra? There’s no one in there—just the old Indian.”

“There’s another room,” Ansell said, “Look, over to the right.”

I fumbled for another match, struck it and went into the room again. I didn’t look at the Indian. I could just see a dark opening at the far end of the room and I walked slowly towards it. Ansell followed me.

I paused at the doorway and peered in. The light from the match pierced the thick darkness for a few feet. I moved forward slowly and I stopped just by the door. The flame of the match flickered and went out.

I had a sudden feeling that this wasn’t real. It was like a nightmare of ghostly unknown things that pressed round me in the darkness. If I had been alone, I should have run away. I should have turned and stumbled into the bright sunlight and I would never have gone back into that ghastly, frightening darkness. But Ansell was behind me. I could feel his hand on my arm and somehow I felt I could stand there with him so close to me.

“Do you hear anything?” he whispered.

I listened. The silence was so complete that all I could hear was the pounding of my heart and the little hurried gasps from Ansell.

I fumbled for a match and the bright flame lit the mom for a moment, then it died down and the shadows closed in on me again.

In that moment of light I had seen a long starved shadow glide away from the light of the match. It was soundless, like a frightened spirit, and when the flame flickered and went out I was scared.

“There’s someone in here,” I said. “Doc, where are you?”

“Take it easy,” Ansell said, again touching my arm. “I’m right behind you. Who was it?”

“I don’t know.” I found my hands were shaking so violently that I couldn’t strike another match. I pressed the box into Ansell’s fingers. “Get a light. There’s someone or something in here.”

“An animal?” Ansell whispered, his voice quavered.

“I don’t know,” I said between my teeth and drew the .38. The match flared up. For a brief second, we again had a clear view of the room. Myra lay on a stretcher bed. Her eyes were closed and she was quite still. Something black and shapeless moved above her head, but as I stepped forward, it dissolved into dancing shadows made by the light of the match.

“Hold it higher,” I said.

I could see now. There was no one else in the room except ourselves and Myra.

I shall never forget that brief glimpse I had of her. In the white, sparkling dress, her hair draped over her shoulders, and her cold, bard little face uptilted towards the roof of the rock building, she looked like a beautiful Greek goddess.

But, right now, I hadn't eyes for that. Fear had seized me and dug into my brain with chilly, steel fingers.

"There was someone in here," I said, gripping Ansell's arm. "I know there was. Where did he go? Doc, hold that match up. He must be somewhere here."

Ansell paid no attention. He bent over Myra. "She's all right," he said in a dazed voice. "She's asleep! Asleep in this stink." He shook her gently, but she did not open her eyes. "Wake up!" he said, shaking her more roughly. "Wake up!"

I blundered over and pushed him away. Feverishly, I pulled Myra into a sitting position. Putting my arm under her knees, I swung her off the bed.

As I did so, something happened that I can never forget. Even now, I sit up in bed sometimes in a cold sweat when I dream about it. It had all the qualities of a bad nightmare.

As I pulled Myra off the bed, I felt something trying to get her away from me. It was as if Myra had become suddenly heavy and I couldn't quite hold her any more. It was as if two long arms were holding my legs so that it was difficult to walk.

But, I struggled on somehow and yelling to Bogle to get the horses, I came reeling out into the sunshine holding Myra tightly against me.

Bogle had scrambled to his feet. His eyes, like poached eggs, showed his panic "What's the matter?" he croaked.

Ansell shot out of the hut, white to the lips. He came running over to me and when he could get his breath he stammered: "Let me look at her."

"You leave her alone," I said. "You've done enough already. Here, Bogle, hold her while I mount." I climbed up on to my horse and Bogle hoisted Myra on to the saddle.

"What's the matter with her?" Bogle said. There was a note of anxiety in his voice.

"I don't know," I said, wheeling away from him. "Let's get out of here. If I have any more of this stink, I'll go crazy."

Kicking my horse into a canter, I rode out across the broad plateau. Ansell and Bogle followed closely behind me.

Once clear of the Indian village, I pulled up in the last of the shade before crossing the plateau. I slid to the ground, supporting Myra and made her as comfortable as I could under a tree.

“Take a look at her, Doc,” I said uneasily, holding her warm hand in mine.

Ansell came and knelt beside me, while Bogle gathered the bridles of our horses and stood uneasily, shifting from one foot to the other.

“What’s the matter with her?” I asked. “Do something, will you?”

Ansell took her pulse, raised her eyelid and sat back on his heels. “She’s in some kind of trance,” he said slowly. “We’ll have to get her to bed as quickly as we can. There’s nothing I can do here.” He looked at her again and scratched his chin. “She’s quite normal. Pulse good, breathing regular.” He shook his head. “We’ll have to go on. The risk of sunstroke’s too great out here.”

“What’s been happening?” I said. “Why is she like this? What’s the explanation?”

Ansell stood up. “I don’t know. It’s no use talking now. We’ve got to get her back to the inn.”

I picked her up again. “Do you think she’ll stand the journey?”

“Don’t worry, man. I tell you there’s nothing the matter with her. She’s in a hypnotic trance. She’ll wake up in a few hours.”

I looked at him searchingly, saw the worried look in his eyes and I felt a chill of despair. “I hope you’re right,” I said and gave her to him to hold while I mounted.

The journey across the plateau was hard going. The beat cut into us and I found Myra’s weight exhausting, but we made it at last.

Myra was still unconscious when we reached the inn.

Bogle said uneasily: “I don’t like seeing her like that even though she’s a sour puss. It don’t seem natural.”

While he was helping me dismount, Ansell went on in and called the innkeeper. He came out in a few minutes. “They’re getting a room ready for her,” he said. “Bring her up. I’ll show you where it is.”

The innkeeper’s wife was waiting in a small, quiet room which was cool and shady and flowers stood on a table by the window.

I put Myra gently on the bed. “Look after her,” I said to the woman. “Get her to bed.”

Leaving Ansell to help the woman, I went downstairs and joined Bogle on the verandah. I ordered two large beers and then sat down a little wearily on the iron bench by Bogle's side.

"Think she'll be all right?" Bogle asked.

I was surprised at the concern in his voice.

"I guess so," I said, not feeling much like talking. "I don't know."

There was a pause, then Bogle said: "What do you think was in that hut?"

I mopped my face and neck with my handkerchief. "I haven't thought about it," I returned shortly, because I didn't want to think about it.

He fidgeted for a moment. "You don't believe that witchcraft stuff Doc was talking about, do you?"

"Hell, no!"

He seemed relieved. "Do you think she's got the snake-bite dope?"

I'd forgotten all about that. I sat up with a jerk. I remembered that I'd have Bastino on my hands to-morrow. He would be coming down from the hills to discuss the final move for the kidnapping. Thinking of Myra up there in that little room and seeing in my mind her white, strained face made the kidnapping impossible. I couldn't submit her to another shock. Then, on the other hand, there was the 25,000 dollars I'd have to pass up and maybe get fired for queering Maddox's stunt.

It seemed to me that I was in a sweet jam, all of a sudden.

Before I could begin to think about it, Ansell came down.

"How is she?" I asked, hurriedly getting to my feet.

"There's nothing to worry about," Ansell said, sitting down. He snapped his fingers at the little Mexican girl who acted as waiter and pointed to my half-finished beer. "She'll be okay in a couple of hours. She's beginning to recover now." He shook his head, "I can't make this out. How did Quintl die? Was he wounded or anything?"

I grimaced. "I don't even want to think about him," I said. "How long do you think he's been dead?"

"I don't know. In that heat, without ventilation, he need not have been dead very long."

"Do you realize that this might affect her mind?" I said suddenly. "We've done a hell of a thing to that girl. There was something filthy in that hut. I swear there was someone in there when I looked into the room where she was lying."

“It’s easy to imagine a thing like that in the light of a match,” Ansell said, quietly. “There was no one there except Myra. I looked. There was no place for anyone to hide.”

“I’m not explaining it, I’m telling you,” I said angrily. “I don’t like any of it. Do you know what? I feel we’re butting into something we don’t understand.”

The Mexican girl brought Ansell his beer and he took a long pull at it. “You’re on edge,” he said. “We’re not butting into anything. That’s no way to talk.”

I looked at him, but he wouldn’t meet my eyes. “You’re lying, Doc,” I said evenly. “You’re as scared as I am. Only you haven’t got the guts to admit it. Something happened in that hut that killed the old Indian. Some power of evil’s loose. I felt it behind me all across the plateau. Just like someone was trying to get her away from me. Just like someone’s hands were pulling her out of the saddle.”

Bogle dropped his glass. “Wadjer mean?” he gasped, his eyes bolting out of his head.

“I wish I knew,” I said, kicking back my chair. “I’m going up to see her.”

I found Myra lying in bed. A small electric fan whirred busily just above her head and the blind was drawn against the hot afternoon sun.

I drew up a chair. As I sat down, she opened her eyes and blinked lazily.

I said: “Hello.”

A puzzled frown knitted her brow and she raised her head, looking at me. “Hello,” she said.

“What are you doing in here?”

“Oh, I just looked in,” I said, smiling at her. “You feeling all right?”

She pushed down the sheet and raised herself on her elbows. She was wearing a pair of Ansell’s pyjamas. They were a lot too big for her.

“Am I supposed to be ill?” she asked, then she caught sight of the pyjamas. “What in the world . . .?”

The puzzled expression changed to alarm. “How did I get into these? What’s been happening?”

“Don’t get excited,” I said. “You’re back in the inn again. We came and took you away from Quintl. You remember him?”

“Why, of course. Why did you take me away? Why didn’t I wake up?” She ran her slim fingers through her hair. What’s been happening? Don’t sit there looking like a tired sardine. Tell me.”

“We found you asleep and we couldn’t wake you. So we just carried you off.”

“You couldn’t wake me?”

“Suppose you tell me what happened to you. Then I’ll know where we are.”

She frowned, “Why, nothing happened to me,” she said. “At least, I don’t think so.” She pressed her eyelids with her fingers and frowned. “You know I really can’t remember. Isn’t that stupid? The old Indian rather frightened me. He liked my tricks. Oh, I gave him the show of my life. I was never better. I wish you could have seen his face. I was a tremendous success. Then he took me to a little rock building. I thought Doc and Samuel were following, but I didn’t see them again. He left me in this place and I was lonely. I really hated it, especially when it got dark. I lay on a kind of bed and went to sleep. I don’t remember anything else.”

I found a little trickle of sweat running down into my collar and I patted my neck with my handkerchief. “What happened the next day?” I asked.

“To-day, you mean? I’m telling you. I went to sleep and here I am.”

“I see. You don’t remember anything?”

She shook her head. “Nothing happened,” she repeated with a frown. “I just went to sleep.”

“You’ve been asleep for two days,” I said, watching her.

“Two days? Why, you’re crazy!”

Then seeing the way I looked at her she went on, “You wouldn’t kid me, would you?”

“No. I wouldn’t kid you,” I said.

She suddenly laughed. “Well, maybe I was tired. I feel kind of weak now. Will you leave me for a little while? I want to think and then I’d like something to eat.”

I got up. “Sure,” I said. “You take it easy.”

Ansell and Bogle looked at me anxiously when I got downstairs. “It’s no good,” I said. “She doesn’t remember anything.”

“You don’t mean to say she just slept all the time?” Ansell demanded. “But what about the snake-bite remedy? What happened to that?”

“Aw, quit asking questions,” I said, suddenly sore, and I went into the kitchen to order her a meal.

When it was ready, Bogle met me in the passage as I came from the kitchen with a tray in my hands.

“Can I take that up to her?” he said, scowling at me fiercely.

“You?” I nearly dropped the tray.

“Why shouldn’t I?” Bogle demanded fiercely. “You and Dee’s been up, ain’t you? Why can’t I have a look?”

I grinned at him. “She’s not a bad kid, is she?” I said.

“Bad?” Bogle snatched the tray out of my hands. “That ain’t the word for it.” But he tip-toed up the stairs as if they were made of paper.

As I turned into the lounge, there was a sudden wild yell from upstairs and a crash of broken china.

Doc and I looked at each other in alarm and then we dashed for the stairs.

Bogle came blundering down the passage, his face white and his eyes bolting out of his head. He tried to pass us, but I grabbed him and spun him round.

“What the hell’s the matter with you?” I demanded, shaking him.

“Don’t go in there,” he quavered, sweat running down his fat face. “She’s floating round the room. Floating up to the ceiling,” and shoving me aside, he continued his mad flight.

“He’s gone crazy,” I said, staring after him. “What’s he mean, floating round the room?”

Ansell didn’t say anything, but I could see by his eyes, he was scared.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“FLOATING in the air,” Myra said scornfully. “What kind of an imagination is that?” She was lying full length in a basket chair with her feet up. She still looked pale, but there was a sparkle in her eyes that I was glad to see.

The evening sun had sunk below the mountains and in the fading light, the verandah was quiet and restful. A cool wind rustled the scorched leaves of the overhead cypresses and the square was deserted. Ansell and I lolled in our chairs near Myra, while Bogle sat at the table, fondling a bottle half-filled with whisky.

“Drink’s going to be Samuel’s downfall,” Myra went on. “He can’t have his D.T.’s like an ordinary decent citizen. He has to be different. So he sees floating women instead of pink snakes.”

I looked across at Bogle. He worried me. Sitting in a heap, drinking whisky steadily, he looked like a man embarking on a long and serious illness. He kept shaking his head and muttering to himself and every now and then a muscle would flutter in his cheek and his eyes would twitch.

“Now, wait a minute,” I said. “He must have seen something to get him in that condition. A man doesn’t go to pieces like that for fun.”

“Phooey!” Myra snapped. “He’s trying to be temperamental. You came in two minutes after he’d rushed out. You didn’t see me floating in the air, did you?”

“I wouldn’t be sitting here, if I had,” I said with a grin. “I’d be running somewhere in the desert.”

“Well, there you are,” Myra said. “He’s suffering from delusions.”

“Suppose you go over your story again, Sam?” Ansell said kindly.

Bogle gave a little shiver and poured himself out another drink “I’ll go screwy if I even think about it,” he said in husky voice.

“You don’t have to worry about that,” Myra told him. “You’re as far gone as you ever will be. After all, there is a limit even to lunacy.”

Bogle screwed up his fists and faced us. “I don’t care what you punks say,” he snarled. “I believe my own peepers. I went into that room and there she was lying on the bed. I didn’t even have time to ask her how she was when she suddenly rose off the bed with the blanket over her and floated up to the ceiling, stiff, like she was held up by wires.”

We all exchanged glances.

“She just floated off the bed, eh?” I said. “You’ve never seen anyone else just float off a bed before, have you?”

Bogle shook his head. “No,” he said simply, “I ain’t and what’s more, I don’t ever want to see it again.”

Ansell said in a low voice to me: “Sun stroke.”

I nodded. “Now, look pal,” I said. “We’ve had a pretty hard day. Suppose you go to bed? You’ll be fine to-morrow.”

Bogle groaned. “Do you think I’ll ever be able to sleep again?” he said, pouring himself out another whisky.

Myra swung her feet to the ground and stood up. She was wearing a dark blue shirt and a pair of grey flannel trousers. The outfit certainly suited her neat little figure. She walked over to Bogle and took the whisky away from him.

“Go on,” she said. “Get off to bed or I’ll do more than float over you.”

Bogle shrank away from her. “Don’t come near me,” he said in horror.

“Leave him alone,” Ansell said. “It looks to me as if he were suffering from delayed shock.”

Myra hesitated, then keeping the whisky bottle she moved back to her chair.

I snapped the bottle out of her hand as she passed. “I’ll have what’s left,” I said and took a long pull from the bottle.

Myra sat down again. “Well, we’re right where we started, aren’t we?” she said. “We’ve spent the best part of an hour listening to Samuel’s drivel about floating women.”

“Yeah,” I said. “This isn’t getting us anywhere.”

“What I want to know,” Ansell said, sitting up, “is what happened in that hut? Did you or did you not get anything out of Quintl?”

“Of course, I didn’t,” Myra said. “I’ve told you over and over again. He put me in a hut and I went to sleep. I don’t remember a thing.”

“Well, that’s that,” I said dismally. “You can kiss your snake-bite remedy good-bye. Now Quintl’s dead no one will have it.”

“It looks like it,” Ansell said. “And yet . . . why was he in the hut with her? She was alone when she went to sleep, yet we find Quintl with her when we break in. There’s something behind all this.” He scratched his chin, staring at Myra with questioning eyes. “You don’t feel any different, do you?” he asked cautiously.

“You mean do I want to start floating or something like that?” Myra asked tartly. “Are you going nuts, too?”

“Maybe there’s something in what Bogle said,” Ansell went on. “Maybe he wasn’t mistaken.”

“A pair of them,” Myra said to me. “Good Lord! Put them in strait jackets.”

I stared at Ansell in alarm. “What are you getting at?”

Before he could reply a party of horsemen rode into the Square, scattering dust and breaking the stillness of the evening.

“What’s this?” Myra asked, looking over her shoulder at the dark group of horsemen. “A rodeo?”

I sat up in alarm. One of the horsemen was immensely tall and fat. That was enough for me. “Quick, Doc,” I said. “Get inside and phone for the Federal troops. These guys are bandits.”

Ansell stiffened in alarm. “What do you mean?” he asked, sitting like a paralysed rabbit.

“Okay, okay, stay where you are. They’ve seen us.”

Myra looked at me blankly. “What are you talking about?”

“Hornets, my pet,” I said grimly, and she caught her breath in a little gasp.

From the group of sixteen men, three detached themselves and walked towards the verandah steps. The others remained with the horses, watching. One of the three men was immensely fat and tall. He walked just ahead of the other two. He came up the verandah steps that creaked under his weight.

It was the fat party we had met on the mountain road and he had a mean look on his dark greasy face as he stood under the lamp, looking at us. Particularly he looked at Myra. Then he took out a pale silk handkerchief and blew his nose. While he was doing this, his eyes remained on Myra’s face.

Myra eyed him up and down. She was in no way disturbed to meet him again.

“Haven’t we seen that fat boy before?” Myra said to me.

The fat party moved a little nearer. His companions remained in the shadows.

Bogle, suddenly feeling the hostile atmosphere, decided that he ought to assert himself. “Lookin’ for anyone, pal?”

The fat party felt in his pocket. “Somewhere I had a very interesting notice,” he said. “Now, where did I put it?” He fumbled again, frowning slightly.

“Try your paunch,” Myra said, lighting a cigarette and flipping the match into the darkness.

I tapped her arm. “Would you mind keeping quiet?” I said pleadingly. “It’s not much to ask in these days of acute crisis.”

The fat man pulled out a crumpled newspaper and began smoothing it between his great hands. He peered at it and then at Myra. Then his face lit up and he actually smiled. It didn’t reassure me. You know how it would be if you met a snake and it smiled at you, it wouldn’t reassure you.

“Yes,” he said, “here it is. Very interesting. Very interesting indeed.”

“He seems happy enough talking to himself,” Myra said, yawning. “Don’t you think we can go to bed?”

“I have a sneaking idea that before very long we’ll get involved in his monologue,” I said helplessly. “I think we ought to be as cautious as possible.”

Bogle blinked at the fat party, muttered to himself and then eased his great muscles. “I don’t get it,” he said. “Who’s this guy, anyway?”

“I am Pablo,” the fat party returned with a furtive look at Myra. “You are strangers to this country, you would not know me.”

Ansell started as if he’d been stung.

“Pablo,” Myra repeated. “Sounds like something to rub on your chest.”

The fat party smiled again. “The little man has heard of me. Is it not so, señor?”

I’d heard of him, too, and when Ansell said “Yes” very feebly, I sympathized with him.

“Then tell your friends who I am,” Pablo went on. “Tell them that Pancho Villa and Zapata finished where I began. Tell them about my fortress in the mountains and of the men that have been bricked up in its walls. Tell them of the excellent fellows that work under me, and of the trains we have dynamited. Come, señor, where is your tongue?”

Ansell looked round at us and nodded his head. “That’s the boy,” he said nervously.

“If Samuel will play the harmonica, we’ll give him a civic reception,” Myra said lightly. “After which he’ll be presented with a little flag and a string beg to keep his silly looking hat in and then, with luck, we’ll all go to bed.”

I felt she wasn’t being exactly helpful.

Pablo played with his handkerchief. “It is Myra Shumway ... that is the name, yes?”

“Fame at last,” Myra said, a little surprised. “How are you, Doctor Livingstone?”

“And you, señor, Ross Millan?”

Bogle sat up. “I’m Sam Bogle,” he said. “Please to meet you.”

“Shut your mouth, you dog,” Pablo said, his eyes boring holes into Bogle, “or I will cut your tongue out.”

Bogle gaped at him. “Well, I’ll be . . .!” he gasped.

I kicked his chin under the table and told him to take it easy.

Pablo wandered over to the table, drew up a chair and sat down near Myra. He moved very lightly for his bulk.

Myra drew away from him.

“There is much to talk about,” he said, reaching for the jar of wine that stood on the table. He poured the sour red wine into Myra’s glass, then held the glass up to the light of the lamp. “Your pretty mouth leaves marks,” he said smiling at Myra. “Your kisses could be dangerous,” and he shook with a spasm of laughter.

“Mind you don’t bust your corset,” Myra said, alarmed.

Pablo crushed the glass in his hand. The wine and glass splinters splattered the table. Bogle half started from his chair, but I again touched him under the table. I could have smacked Myra. Either she was being the dumbest of all blondes or else she had more guts than I and the rest of us put together. Whichever way it was, she was making things bad for us all.

The men in the Square made a move forward. Several of them dropped their hands to their gun butts.

Pablo wiped his hand on his handkerchief and looked with interest at the cut on his palm. “That was careless of me,” he said, looking at Myra.

“Don’t apologize,” Myra returned. “I had a cousin who was also a mental defective. He had to have cast-iron feeding utensils. I dare say I could arrange the same thing for you at a cut rate.”

“When my women are insolent,” Pablo said dreamily, “I peg them out in the hot sun on an ant-hill.”

Myra twisted round, facing him. “But, I’m not your woman, fat boy,” she said. “You can take your little bandits out of here and feed them through a sausage machine.”

I said quickly: “Don’t mind her. That’s just her sense of humour.”

Pablo wrapped his handkerchief round his hand. “Very interesting sense of humour. If my woman talks like that I cut her tongue out. She loses her sense of humour very quick then.”

I felt it was time to take a more active part in the conversation. “Tell me, señor, is there something particular that you wish to discuss with us?” I asked, offering him a cigarette from my case.

“Yes,” he said, waving away the cigarette. “Something very important” He picked up the newspaper which he had dropped on the floor. I recognized the Recorder. “You will see why I am interested in the señorita,” and he spread the newspaper on the table.

I knew what was coming, but even then I hardly dared to look at the splash headlines that were smeared across the front page. Somehow, this thug had got hold of the issue containing Maddox’s story of the kidnapped blonde. There was a big shot of Myra and in the biggest type of all was the announcement about the 25,000-dollars reward.

“Brother,’ I thought. “Have you got to be smart to talk yourself out of this?”

Before I could stop her, Myra had snatched up the paper, while Bogle and Ansell crowded round her.

“That’s quite a good likeness of you they’ve got there,” I said carelessly. “I always thought the *Recorder* was unreliable, but this is the end. Kidnapped by bandits indeed. That is a laugh.”

Myra looked at me over the top of the paper. There was a disagreeable look in her eye. “Isn’t it?” she said, between her teeth. “I’m suffocating with mirth.”

There was a long silence while the three of them went through the article, then Myra folded the paper with slow deliberation and put it on the table.

“Twenty-five thousand dollars,” she said gently. “And I was going to call you by your first name!”

“But there is’ more,” Pablo said, picking at his great white teeth with his thumb nail. “There is a man called Bastino who lives in the mountains. He is a good friend of mine. He tells me that he is to kidnap this young woman. Later it has been arranged for Señor Millan to rescue her, but Señor Millan says nothing to Bastino about the reward. He pays Bastino a mere three hundred dollars and Bastino feels sore about it. He comes to me and shows me the paper, so I think I had better do something about it.” He waved his fat hand. “So here I am.”

Myra looked at me. “What a lovely little serpent you’ve turned out to be,” she said with terrifying restraint. “You must let me know when your parents marry, I’ll send them a wreath.”

Even Ansell was looking at me with hurt eyes.

I eased my collar which threatened to strangle me. “It’s all a mistake,” I said hurriedly. “If you’ll just let me explain. . . .”

“There is nothing to explain,” Pablo said. “I do the talking now.”

Myra turned on him furiously. “You keep your snout out of this. I’ve got something to say to this two-faced, double-crossing rattle-snake.”

“Now, don’t let us quarrel,” I said hastily. “You wouldn’t have come to any harm and I was keeping the reward as a surprise for you. Just think of all that money and how nice it’ll be to spend.”

“I’m thinking,” Myra said, tapping on the table. “I’m thinking what I’m going to do to you.”

Ansell broke in: “And what about us?” he demanded. “We weren’t going to be in this either.”

I drew myself up. “This is becoming sordid,” I said. “Here am I, trying to give the great American public an epic story and all you can do is to yap about money.”

“So you were not even interested in the reward?” Myra said, smiling at me. “You just wanted to give the great American public an epic story?”

“That’s all,” I said. “Why should I worry about a little thing like 25,000 dollars? I’m a newspaper man.”

“A minute,” Pablo said, “I have not finished. I take the señorita now. Señor Millan writes of the kidnapping. Then we discuss the reward.”

We all four stared at him. “You take the señorita?” I said, suddenly realizing the spot we were in.

“Certainly,” Pablo returned, smiling at Myra. “The newspaper says she has been kidnapped, therefore I kidnap her. I shall hold her for ransom. I shall demand 50,000 dollars and you will pay. If there is much delay, I will send you her right ear and after three days I send you her left ear and then if I do not get the money, I send you a finger every day.”

Myra went a little pale. “That’ll make a swell headline in your rag,” she said to rue. “High rates for piecework or Blonde mailed in installments.”

I said: “I don’t think you’d better do that. It would mean U.S. reprisals. Maybe we’ll send troops as we did a few years ago when we chased Pancho into the mountains.”

Pablo laughed. “I go now,” he said, and reached out, taking Myra’s arm in his great hand.

She spun round. “Take your greasy paw off me!” she flared. “Who do you think you are? You can’t scare me, you over-filled sausage!”

Pablo quaked with laughter. “Such spirit,” he said and hit her across her face with the side of his hand.

She and the chair she was sitting on went over backwards. She sprawled on the ground.

The two Mexicans who had remained in the shadows, now pulled their guns and stepped forward. "Sit still," one of them said to me. The other threatened Bogle and Ansell who had stiffened when Myra went over.

I felt myself go white and ignoring the gunmen I bent over Myra.

Pablo hit me on the back of my neck with the jar of wine. The jar splintered and the wine splashed Myra's shirt. I found myself on my hands and knees and white hot lights seemed to be exploding in my head.

I heard Pablo laughing a long way away and then I shook my head clear and got to my feet.

Myra clutched at me. "Are you hurt?" she asked anxiously.

Before I could assure her, Pablo reached out and jerked her round to face him. "Never, mind him, my little rabbit," he said, drawing her towards him. "Now I am here, I like to have all your attention."

Myra caught her breath sharply. She moved in quickly and drove her clenched fist into the middle of his face.

One of the Mexican gunmen kicked her legs from under her. She hit the wooden floor of the verandah with a thud that shook the breath out of her body.

Pablo started to his feet, hissing like a snake. A patch of split skin just by his thick nose showed where Myra had hit him.

"Go for 'em, Sam," I bawled. And we both went into action together.

With a roar, Bogle tossed the table at the nearest gunman who was covering him. The gun went off; the slug shearing a furrow in the table. I jumped the gunman who had tripped Myra before he could regain his balance. We crashed over, almost on top of Myra.

Ansell who dodged into a neutral corner said afterwards that it was a pretty good scrap. While I was trying to pin my greaser, Pablo got hurriedly to his feet, tittering with excitement. "Come," he shouted to the other Mexicans in the Square. "They want to fight."

Sam had closed with the other gunman. Grabbing him round his waist he tossed him into the middle of the surging Mexicans below.

I got a grip on my man's hair and hammered his head on the boards. He seemed to have a soft head because he went out like a light. As I got up, I heard Myra scream. The Mexicans were pouring up on to the verandah.

Pablo grabbed Myra. She fought him, kicking and scratching like a wild cat, but he handled her effortlessly. He didn't even get up from his chair. He captured her hands in one of his,

grinding and squeezing her fingers. White and furious, she dragged away from him, kicking at him wildly.

Giggling with excitement, he suddenly gave her a jerk. She came forward as if she had been shot from a cannon and thudded against him. With his free hand, he twined his great fingers, in her hair and pulled her head back steadily until Doc thought he was going to break her neck.

“If you had longer ears, I would pull them for you, too, little rabbit,” he said, grinning at her. “Go down on your knees,” and he forced her on to the boards.

Sam suddenly emerged from the heap of men. He looked like a massive bear attacked by wolves. He hadn’t had a fight like this in years. With three men clinging to his legs, and a little greaser on his back, he stared round, looking for Myra. When he saw what Pablo was doing, he gave a great roar of fury. Bending down, he clubbed at the men holding his legs. His great fists, like two rocks, smashed down on their upturned faces. The greaser on his back redoubled his efforts, biting, scratching and thumping. Bogle didn’t even notice him. He freed his legs, kicked the men clear and charged down on Pablo.

The little greaser shifted his hands and drove his fist into Bogle. Bogle bellowed like a wounded bull. One of his hands groped behind him and closed over the greaser’s face. His thick fingers began to squeeze. The greaser clawed at the steel fingers: Then Bogle suddenly threw him away. He crashed against the verandah rail and went limp.

In the meantime, I was under a pile of Mexicans and one of them caught me a smack under the chin and I went out like a light.

These Mexicans scrambled to their feet and made for Bogle, but they were a little late.

Pablo found this immensely exciting and amusing. He dodged Bogle’s first charge, then as he came in again, Pablo snatched Myra up by her shirt-front, gripping her ankles in his other hand, he slammed her at Bogle like a battering rain. Bogle went over with a thud, clinging to Myra. By holding her close to him, he saved her the shock of landing on the wooden floor.

“Go for him, you dogs,” Pablo exclaimed, waving his men to Bogle.

The Mexicans piled on top of them.

Pablo skipped round the struggling mass of men, laughing until tears ran down his fat cheeks. He saw a leg and snatched at it. Pulling steadily he drew Myra out of the mass of kicking, flaying limbs. Before he could get her out, he had to drag away two Mexicans. This he did by seizing them one after the other by their hair and tossing them away as if they were kittens.

Myra came out of this struggling pile of men, more dead than alive. Leaving her on the floor, Pablo skipped back to the struggling men, ploughed his way down to Bogle.

The Mexicans got to their feet and drew off.

Pablo stirred Myra with his foot. She opened her eyes and stared at him. “You were nearly skinned that time, little rabbit,” he said, quaking with laughter. “Ho! Ho! What excitement! What an evening! What beautiful fighting!”

He bent suddenly and knotted his fist in her shirt, then he heaved her to her feet. Holding her lightly, he walked across the verandah, straightened a chair and sat down. All the fight had gone out of Myra. He pulled her down on his knees. She just sat there limply, her head down and her face hidden by her hair.

The Mexicans gathered in a little bunch at the top of the steps. They talked excitedly together in whispers.

Bogle and I were still counting stars. Ansell edged further into his corner and hoped no one could notice him.

Myra suddenly began to struggle again. “Let me go, you fat toad,” she gasped.

Pablo giggled. “Of course, little rabbit,” he said and set her on her feet.

Without his supporting hand, her legs buckled and she nearly fell. He caught her as she was going over. “Come, come,” he jeered at her. “Where is your strength?”

Making an effort, she pushed him away and tottered over to me. As she came, I began to sit up. I saw her through a dazed mist.

“How are we doing?” I asked feebly as she sank down on her knees beside me. “Did we win or do we start fighting again?”

“We lost, you dope,” Myra said savagely. “Now, what do you think we’re going to do?”

I looked round, spotted the bunch of greasers standing on the verandah steps, blocking our exit, looked sadly at Bogle who was beginning to move and then over at Pablo.

“As soon as I get my second wind,” I said hurriedly, “we’ll start another little session. But you’ve got to beat it. Make for the woods. Once you’re there, you ought to be able to hide from them. Do you understand?”

“You don’t think I’m going to run out on you three, do you?” Myra demanded fiercely. “We’re all in this together.”

“Famous last words,” I said, thinking it was pretty fine of her. “You get out and don’t be a little fool. They’ll give you hell when they start on you and besides who’s going to pay 50,000 dollars for you?”

“Why, you big drip!” Myra said angrily. “Wouldn’t you pay that for me?”

“Look out behind,” I said and tried to struggle to my feet. Pablo, losing patience, was coming over like an express train. He caught Myra before she could even begin to move.

“Now,” he said, shaking her, “we talk no more and we go!”

“Take your hands off me!” she said furiously. “Do you hear? Get back into your skin, you fat sausage!”

Then it happened.

There was a sudden puff of white smoke that enveloped Pablo and when it had cleared away, he had vanished.

I had been watching the whole time. Pablo hadn’t run into the lounge. He hadn’t darted into the shadows. He had simply dissolved into smoke. It was the most terrifying thing I’ve ever seen.

Myra backed away with a little cry, then she spun on her heel and ran to me. I held her while I watched the wisp of smoke trail slowly into the darkness.

You ought to have seen those Mexicans. They gave one look at us and then they stampeded for their horses. And what a stampede! The bigger greasers trampled on the smaller greasers in their mad panic to get off the verandah. In under four seconds, they and their horses were pounding out of Orizaba. The Square was deserted.

“What happened?” I asked, holding Myra tightly. In spite of my scare, I liked holding her tightly. She was the kind of girl to be held tightly and I was doing a swell job. “What in Pete’s name happened?”

Of course, Bogle had seen it all. “I can’t stand it,” he wailed, beating the floor with his fists. “First, she floats in the air and now he disappears into smoke. I tell you, I can’t stand any more of it. I’m going nuts! Lemme get out of here. I wanta go home!”

“Quiet!” Ansell said, coming out of his corner. “Hold your noise!” He came over to Myra and me. “I saw what happened,” he went on in a low voice. “Now do you believe in witchcraft? He just vanished into smoke, didn’t he? You both saw it.” He looked at Myra searchingly. “What did you do?”

Myra shivered. “Do?” she said. “You’re not trying to pin this on me?”

“Of course, it’s you,” Ansell returned sharply. “I suspected it when Sam saw you floating. You’ve become a Naguale. Don’t you understand? Quintl did pass on his secrets to you without you knowing it. You have the Nagualism power of witchcraft.”

Myra backed away from him. Her eyes wide in horror. “I don’t believe it!” she said, then turning on me “Tell him he’s crazy! I won’t believe it!”

“Then what happened to him?” Ansell persisted. “Men don’t just vanish into smoke.”

“Maybe he’s hiding somewhere,” I said, looking round, but knowing that it was a waste of time. Then I suddenly saw something on the floor and I moved forward. “What’s this?” I said.

Under the table was the longest and most appetizing sausage I had ever seen. I picked it up. “Where the devil did that come from?”

Myra took one look at it, gave a little moan and fell at my feet in a faint.

Ansell clutched my arm. “Didn’t you hear what she said?” he gasped, pointing a trembling finger at the sausage. “That’s Pablo. That’s all that’s left of Pablo.”

I dropped the sausage as if it had bitten me. “Am I going nutty or are you?” I demanded.

“She told him to get back into a sausage skin,” Ansell screamed, his eyes bolting out of his head. “She’s got the power to do it!”

“You’re mad!” I said backing away. “Such things can’t happen.”

Bogle came limping over and gaped at Doc. “What the hell are you squealing about?” he said, then looking down at Myra. “What she think she’s doing?”

I jerked my attention from the sausage to Myra. “I’ll take her inside,” I said, and picking her up I carried her into the lounge. When I had laid her on a couch, I yelled for Doc. “Come on,” I shouted. “Help me, will you?”

Ansell came in white and trembling. “I can’t believe it! It’s the most fantastic . . .”

“Aw, shut up!” I said roughly. “There’s plenty of time to talk when we’ve taken care of this kid. After all, we were in a damn tight spot before this happened. We should be grateful.”

It took some little time to bring Myra round. She opened her eyes at last and blinked unhappily up at me. “I’ve had such an awful dream,” he said sleepily. “Such an awful dream.”

“That’s all right,” I said soothingly. “You go to sleep. I’m right by your side, so there’s nothing to be soared about.”

She smiled at me and then closed her eyes again. In a moment she was breathing regularly.

“I’d be a hit as a father,” I said, pleased. “Did you see that piece of technique?”

Bogle came in. “How’s she doing?” he asked.

“She’s okay,” I said abruptly. “What have you done with the sausage? I want it in here.”

“I’ve given it to the innkeeper’s dawg,” Bogle said indifferently. “He’s a good dawg and I’ve been promising him something ...”

“Given it to a dog?” I shouted, grabbing him by the arm.

“Why not?” Bogle said, on the offensive. “Want to make anything of it? Do you think it’s too good for a dawg?”

“Listen, you fat jerk,” I exclaimed. “That wasn’t a sausage. It was Pablo.”

Bogle’s eyes opened. “What was that?” he asked, starting.

“That sausage wasn’t a sausage at all. It was Pablo turned into a sausage,” I explained, trying to keep my voice down.

“The sausage wasn’t a sausage, it was Pablo?” Bogle repeated in a dazed voice. “Was that what you said?”

“Yes, you fat fool!”

“Iszatso? Well, it certainly looked like a sausage to me.”

“I don’t care what it looked like to you! It’s Pablo done up like a sausage.”

“Done up like a sausage?” Bogle’s eyes looked scared. “*I see.*”

“No, you don’t,” I said savagely. “You don’t see at all. Where is the dog? Tell me that and we won’t argue.”

“You’d better take a look at this guy, Doc,” Bogle said to Ansell. “Something’s got loose in his dome.”

“Try to understand,” Ansell said. “Myra has turned Pablo into a sausage.”

A look of horror came into Bogle’s eyes. “You, too?” he whispered, backing away. “Don’t you think you guys ought to sit down or something?”

“I tell you Pablo’s in that sausage!” Ansell snapped. “You’ve got to get it back at once.”

Bogle shivered. “Maybe I’m going bats, too,” he said hoarsely. “Maybe it ain’t you two but me. Maybe I’m just hearing voices in my brain.”

“What are you drivelling about?” I stormed at him.

“Someone keeps telling me that Pablo’s a sausage,” Bogle wailed. “I’ve gone nuts! I knew I’d go nuts and by God I’ve gone nuts!”

“I tell you, Pablo has been turned into a sausage,” Ansell hissed, pushing his face into Bogle’s. “Now will you do something about it, you large lump of useless blubber!”

Bogle closed his eyes and sat abruptly on the floor. “This is going to be a pretty sad day for my old lady,” he said, as if to himself. “I wouldn’t like to be the guy to tell her her only son’s gone bugs,” and he lay flat on his back and began making humming noises.

“Come on, Doc,” I said. “We’ve got to find the dog by ourselves.”

We didn’t have to go far. Just outside on the verandah there was an enormous wolfhound lying on the floor who glanced up with bored overfed eyes as we came out. There was no sign of the sausage. As we stood staring, the wolfhound dosed his eyes luxuriously and licked his chops.

“He’s eaten Pablo,” I said in a hushed, horrified voice. “That’s something I wouldn’t wish on my worst enemy.”

Doc took off his hat and lowered his head.

Then a sudden thought struck me and I gripped his arm in alarm. “Doc!” I gasped. “Do you realize what this means? She’s got the whip hand over us all. We won’t be able to open our mouths.”

Doc put on his hat again and blinked at me. “What do you mean?” he asked, bewildered.

“Can’t you see what she can do if she decides she doesn’t like any of us?” I looked furtively over my shoulder, then lowering my face close to his, I whispered: “She might even turn you into a pork pie and give you to me for my lunch. How would you like that?”

Doc just fainted away in ray arms.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I WOKE the next morning to see the sun streaming through the grass blinds. I could hear the sing-song chatter of the Mexican waiters preparing breakfast in the patio below. I glanced at my wrist-watch. It was 6.40.

Not much use going to sleep again, so I reached for my cigarette case. Then I propped myself up in the hard little bed and brooded.

Once I got to thinking, I realized just how much there was to think about. It was terrific. In twenty-four hours the whole set-up had so completely changed that I was up the creek without a paddle. When planning a newspaper campaign, a modern newspaperman can't take miracles into consideration. But, on the face of it, that was what I had to do. The kidnapped blonde story was as dead as a mummy. The blonde who could work miracles was front-page news. But how would Maddox react? I thought gloomily that he'd can me before I could give him a demonstration. On the other hand, of course, I might be able to persuade Myra to give him a little scare and get my job back.

What about Myra anyway? I couldn't imagine either Ansell or myself persuading her against her will. It'd, take all my time, anyway, to keep on the right side of her. It wasn't as if she were a soft cookie. She'd always been difficult and now with powers such as she possessed, she was going to be a definite menace.

I came out in a cold sweat when I thought of Pablo. His was a story that could never be written. There was no proof and no one would believe it. If I even hinted to Maddox what had happened he would have sent me to the booby-hatch. I wouldn't blame him at that. So the Pablo episode had to be forgotten.

The next point was to find another approach to the kidnapping angle. How to make Maddox and Myra happy at the same time. Not easy. The 25,000-dollars reward complicated matters. I regretfully decided that I wasn't going to see much of that. Knowing Myra, I was pretty certain that she'd grab all of it. I couldn't see myself arguing about it either. What was 25,000 dollars if I were turned into a hamburger or a breast of chicken?

I ran my fingers through my hair. This was driving me screwy. I played with the idea of getting up, packing quietly and sneaking off to Mexico City. I'd lose my job, but at least, I'd be clear of the whole thing. The thought tempted me.

Then there was a light tap on my door and Myra came in. She was in flame-coloured pyjamas and a scarlet dressing gown. And as she stood in the diffused light, with the little bolts of sunlight in her hair, I thought she was the loveliest thing I'd seen for a long time.

She closed the door gently and leaned against it.

We looked at each other as if we had met for the first time and I was conscious of a new feeling for her. Up to now, she had been a subject to write about. But, seeing her there, her big eyes serious, the sun in her hair, the way she held her head, well, I guess she sent a tingle

through my veins. At that moment, she came alive and looking back, now that it is all over, I guess that this was the time I really fell for her in a big way.

“I’m scared,” she said. “Something’s happened to me.”

I sat up on my elbow. “Come here,” I said. “What’s happened to you?” I didn’t like the bewildered look in her eyes and she seemed to have lost a lot of her confidence.

“I don’t know what it is,” she said, sitting on the end of the bed. “I feel—oh, I guess you’ll think I’m crazy.”

“I won’t,” I said, reaching for the cigarettes and offering her one.

We didn’t say anything for a while. Smoke haze drifted in the sunbeams and the Mexican waiters chattered outside. Then she said: “It wasn’t a dream last night, was it?”

I shook my head. “No.”

“I hoped it was,” she went on, tapping ashes on the floor. “I wish it all was a dream. It’s frightening.”

“I can’t tell you there’s nothing to be scared about,” I said, “All I can say is I’m sorry we got you into this mess.”

“I’ve been trying to remember what happened,” she said. “I’m putting it together, but it still doesn’t make sense. I can remember the old Indian more clearly. I can remember sitting in that little hut with him. We didn’t speak. We read each other’s minds. That was frightening. I couldn’t lie to him, you see. Not talking like that. I just had to keep my mind blank when I felt he was finding out too much about me. I still don’t know how far I succeeded. We talked with our minds for a long time. He told me a lot of things. I know that, but I can’t remember what they were. He gave me some horrible stuff to drink and after I’d got it down I remember seeing some black smoke coming from the corner of the hut. It was quite terrifying. There was no fire or anything, just the black smoke building up into a shadow. I thought at the time it looked like the shadow of a woman, but it was dark in the hut and I couldn’t be sure. But all the time we talked, the shadow was there, hovering close to me.”

I lit another cigarette. I felt there wasn’t much I could say, so I just lay there and listened.

“The shadow was behind Pablo, just before it happened,” she shuddered. “I’m scared even to think of anything now, in case something happens.”

“Snap out of it, kid,” I said reaching out and pulling her to me. I put my arm round her and she stretched out with her head on my shoulder. I liked the smell of her hair and the feel of it against my face.

“But there’s something else,” she said in a small voice.

I wondered what was coming. “Tell me,” I said.

“I don’t think you’ll understand,” she returned speaking reluctantly. “I don’t understand it myself. But, last night, when I got into bed, something happened to me. I thought I saw a shadowy figure get up from my bed and go out of the room. It—seemed to come from me. It—it looked like me, and when it had gone I felt different.”

“You were dreaming,” I said, patting her arm. “You’ve been through enough to have series of nightmares.”

“But, I feel different,” she repeated. “Oh, Ross, what is happening to me?”

“But, how different?” I turned so that I could look into her troubled eyes. “Don’t get in a panic, kid. What do you mean . . . different?”

“Oh, lighter, happier—as if I’d been through a mental bath and become clean. Oh, I don’t know how to tell you.”

“Well, if you feel happier, why worry?” I said, and kissed her.

She drew away quickly. “If you’re not going to concentrate, I’ll have to leave you,” she said severely.

“But, I am concentrating,” I said, with my mouth against her hair.

She pulled away, “No, you mustn’t,” she said. “I wish all this hadn’t happened.”

“You wait until you get that reward,” I said. “You’ll think differently then.”

“But, I don’t want it,” she returned emphatically. “That’s another thing I can’t understand. Yesterday, I was furious with you, but now—well, I just don’t want it. I can get along without it and besides, it’s not really honest.”

This shocked me. Something *had* happened to her.

“Not honest?” I repeated stupidly. “What’s the idea?”

“You know as well as I do,” she said impatiently, “I wasn’t rescued and you have no right to try to claim the reward.”

“This is too much for me,” I said, lying back. “Coming from you, that’s rich!”

Just then Bogle opened the verandah door and stuck his head round. “Don’t mind me, if you’re busy,” he said, leering at Myra. “I’m scared of my own company, this morning.”

“Come in, Sam,” I said wearily. “If you’ve any friends, bring ‘em in too. I always work best when I’ve a room full of people.”

“There ain’t no one but me and Whisky,” Bogle said, coming in. He was followed by the wolfhound “Whisky’s taken a liking to me.”

Myra and I looked at the wolfhound uneasily. The dog clicked its teeth in an absent-minded kind of way and lay down near the bed. It eyed us with sleepy insolence and then stretched out with its head on Bogle's boot.

"Whisky?" I repeated. "Is that its name?"

"That's what I call him," Bogle said. "He seems to like it and it's the sort of name I wouldn't easily forget. Nice dawg, ain't he?"

"I don't know," I said, with some feeling. "Perhaps he is. I can't forget that he ate Pablo. That rather preys on my mind."

Bogle sneered, "Ate Pablo?" he said. "You're nuts! He ate a sausage. You and Doc ought to have your ears blown out!"

I considered this. I thought if that was the only thing necessary how absurdly simple everything would be.

"Never mind, Sam," I said. "You aren't the only one who won't believe it."

While I was speaking, Whisky turned over on his back and folded his legs across his chest like a crab. His tail straightened and he closed his eyes.

Myra said quietly, "I don't like that dog's attitude. It's unhealthy."

"I wouldn't say that," I returned, pulling the bedclothes a little higher. "But, it's disturbing, if that's what you mean."

Bogle unfolded Whisky's legs gently and turned him on his side. "Relax, fella," he said. "You can't rest that way."

Whisky opened one eye and looked at Bogle. Then he turned on his back and folded his legs over his chest again.

"Gawdamn it," Bogle said. "Did you ever see such a dawg?" and he bustled forward to unfold Whisky's legs again.

I suppose Whisky decided not to tolerate this interference. Opening one eye sharply, he regarded Bogle's hands with a sour look and then thrusting his nose forward he clicked his teeth with a snap like a mouse-trap.

I guess Bogle thought he'd lost his hand. He didn't dare look, but sat on the floor, breathing heavily until I had assured him that Whisky had missed him by an eighth of an inch. Then he removed himself to the far end of the room, where he sat in a chair and scowled at the dog.

"Listen," I said. "Don't think I'm unsociable. I'm not. I've always been sociable. I'm the guy they laughed at when I sat down at the piano. But, right now, my nerves are on edge and I'd like you and Whisky to take a little walk. I don't want you to go far. I'd even stand for

seeing you at a distance, but I can't stand much more of your heavy breathing and the dog's affected attitude. So, would you drift. . . the pair of you?"

"Every time you open your trap, you write a book," Bogle said. "I'm waiting for Ansell. He's coming to have a talk. Besides, I've ordered breakfast to be sent up. You've got the best room, ain't you?"

"Well, Precious, you see how it is," I said to Myra. "We'll have to postpone our little talk. I just can't keep my mind on anything so long as Whisky's with us."

Myra got off the bed and stretched. "I don't think we would have got anywhere," she said, a little wearily. "I'm afraid talking won't help me."

"Did you say you'd ordered breakfast?" I asked Bogle.

"Yeah," Bogle's face lit up. "Eggs and fruit and cawfee. I didn't get much to eat last night. There was so much talking and shouting and people going off into faints."

"You wouldn't like to cover up Whisky, would you?" I said. "He really is getting on my nerves."

"Maybe he ain't well," Bogle said, looking at the dog with puzzled eyes."

"With Pablo inside him, I don't wonder at it."

Whisky rolled over on his side and looked at me. There was something strangely human about the expression in his eyes. "How right you are, old dog," he said in a deep, guttural voice. "He lies like a rock on my stomach."

"There you are," I said to Sam. "I knew he couldn't be well." Then I clutched my pillow and looked at the dog in horror.

Myra stifled a scream and stood petrified, but Bogle didn't seem to be moved.

"You know it sounded almost as if that dog spoke," I said a little feverishly.

"Sure," Sam returned. "What of it? He's been talking to me half the night."

"What of it?" I repeated, stupefied. "Have you ever heard a dog talk before?"

"Well, no, but then anything can happen in this country, can't it? What I mean is if a parrot talks, why not a Mexican dog? "That's the way I've been reasoning." He suddenly noticed my strained expression and fear came into his eyes. "It ain't possible? Dawgs don't talk? Is that what you're trying to tell me? This is another of these freak things . . . floating women . . . disappearing men . . . now talking dawgs?"

"Yeah, along those lines."

“My Gawd! And I talked to it half the night!” Bogle shivered edging back in his chair and half raising his hand to protect himself.

“And a lot of rot you talked too,” the dog snapped. “Of all the illiterate, prissy-mouthed, dyed-in-the-wool nincompoops I’ve had to listen to, you take the biscuit.”

Myra said in a low voice, “I think I’ll go now. Somehow, I don’t feel like breakfast.”

“For goodness sake stay where you are,” Whisky said peevishly “There’s so much yapping in this hotel, I’m leading a dog’s life.”

“It wouldn’t be someone practising ventriloquism, I suppose?” I asked hopefully, feeling that any second I’d have to run out into the desert and keep running for some time. “Someone wouldn’t be trying to make fools of us?”

Whisky yawned. He had the most astonishing collection of fangs I’d ever seen. “To improve on your mothers’ efforts would be a difficult task,” he observed. “Just because I happen to talk your horrible language, there’s no need for you to behave like dolts.”

“Look, old fellow,” I said nervously. “Would you mind going away? It’s not that I don’t like you, but I’ve had all I can stand for one morning. Come back later on, will you? Maybe I’ll be adjusted to the idea by then.”

Whisky shook himself. “As a matter of fact I have something rather important to do,” he said, getting to his feet. “And besides, it’s time for my own breakfast.” He walked to the verandah door, his nails clicking on the polished floor. “I’ve got to see a dog about a man, if you’ll pardon the cliché,” and he strolled out on to the verandah and then disappeared out of sight.

There was a long silence while we endeavoured to recover.

“Like a nightmare, isn’t it?” I said, at last. “Maybe we’ll wake up and have a good laugh over this in a little while.”

“Naw,” Bogle said, mopping his face with his handkerchief, “I wouldn’t laugh at it even if it was a dream.”

“I’d rather have a disappearing man and a floating woman to a talking dog,” I said reflectively. “Do you think if we packed our bags and skipped, we’d be able to shake him off?”

“That dawg wants to stay with us,” Bogle said gloomily. “Anyway, that’s what he said last night.”

“Then I think you had better take him away and leave us to mourn for you,” Myra put in. “I don’t see why we should all be driven mad.”

Doc Ansell came in. He was looking a little tired, but there was a light of battle in his eye. "There you are," he said.

"Breakfast is on its way up. I want to talk to you all this morning. We've got to make plans."

"Have you heard about the dog?" I asked.

Ansell sat down. "What dog?"

"The dog that ate Pablo," I said. "He's befriended Samuel."

"Well, that's all right," Ansell looked at me sharply. "There's nothing like a good dog to keep one company. You don't object I hope?"

"No, no, nothing like that. But the dog talks. He's just been in. He even makes little jokes like going to see a dog about a man. Whimsy stuff and he clicks his teeth."

Ansell looked at me closely. "Talks," he said. "What do you mean . . . talks?"

"Just that," I returned, stretching out and making myself comfortable. "I thought you might have an explanation. I wish you could have heard him. At the moment, I'm suffering from general collapse."

"I see," Ansell said thoughtfully. "Well, maybe I will hear him. Actually, of course, I'm not at all surprised. I've been thinking things over and I've come to the conclusion that we mustn't be surprised at whatever happens. You see Myra has now the full powers of Nagualism concentrated around her. It is likely to set off the most unlikely things."

I smiled, "Oh, so Myra's at the bottom of it, is she?"

"Why, certainly," Doc returned. "None of you would believe me when I told you about the powers of the Naguales, you're seeing for yourselves. The great thing, of course, is to try to control it. That's really what I want to talk to Myra about."

The little Mexican girl came in with a tray and put it on the table by my bed. It was quite a relief to see someone who looked completely normal and who hadn't fear lurking in her eye.

When she had gone, and Myra had poured out the coffee, Ansell picked up his threads. "Now look, young woman, I am perfectly convinced that you have unlimited powers. It's no use your trying not to believe this. You've got to face it. Rather than let those powers control you, you've got to try to control them. I know a little about this business. I've studied it and I know that you can't do things unless you're in the right frame of mind. For instance, as you are now, relaxed and worried, you'll never be able to evoke the powers. But, last night, when those bandits arrived you were frightened and without knowing it, you were in the right atmosphere to perform. There are no limits to what you can do. I don't think you ought to waste your talents."

Myra put down her coffee cup with sudden determination. “All I want is to get back to my normal life. And more than anything, I want to have some peace and quiet.”

Ansell sighed, “Disappointing,” he said, half to himself. “You don’t seem to realize that with your powers you could become mistress of the world. Haven’t you any ambition?”

“Not that kind of ambition, thank you,” Myra said shortly. “It’s no use talking. I’m just not going to do anything about it.”

“I think she’s right,” I said. “The whole thing doesn’t bear thinking about. How long are these powers likely to last?”

Ansell scratched his ear thoughtfully, “I’m not quite sure,” he said. “The Naguales used to begin their rituals at the beginning of the full moon. It may be that the power is influenced by the moon. If that’s so, she’s got to the end of the month before she returns to normal. Why not make hay until then? It’s not long. She’ll never be able to regain the power now that Quintl’s dead.”

“And a good thing too,” Myra said firmly. “I’m going to be very careful of how I act for the next few weeks. If I can get through that time without anything more happening, I’m g to be quite contented.”

I threw up his hands in disgust. “What about my snake-bite remedy?” he demanded. “Am I to get nothing out of this?”

“I’m sorry, Doc,” Myra returned, “but I don’t want anything more to do with this business. It’s all very well for you, but . . .”

“Can’t you do something?” Ansell appealed to me.

I was already racking my brains, “I don’t think so,” I said at last. “You see, she ain’t interested in the reward any more.”

“What?” Bogle said, sitting up. “What about us? Ain’t we considered?”

“That’s up to you, Myra,” I said, looking over at her. “Don’t you see we can’t claim the reward?” she said. “We’re not entitled to it.”

“It wouldn’t be honest,” I said, grinning at Bogle.

“Wouldn’t be what?” he snarled, growing red in the face. “What’s this . . . a gag?”

“I’m afraid our Myra’s become honest overnight,” I said. “A girl’s got to have her conscience, you know.”

“Yeah?” Bogle bellowed, “I’ll tell you something. She’s trying to gyp us!”

“You can believe what you like,” Myra said quietly, “but I’m not having anything to do with it. I want to go somewhere quiet and wait until the end of the month.”

I thought of all the publicity I’d lose and I thought of Maddox. What he’d do to me if I didn’t get this kid back to New York would be nobody’s business.

“Now, for the love of mike, don’t be in such a hurry,” I said. “Here, you two, get out. I want to talk to her.”

“It’s no good,” Myra said firmly, “I’ve made up my mind,” and she turned to the door.

“Can’t one, of you think of something?” I demanded.

“Really, Ross, I mean it,” she said over her shoulder. As she opened the door, the little Mexican girl came bustling in. She had a telegram which she handed to me. I took it and then waved her away. She seemed glad to go.

“Hold on until I’ve read this,” I said to Myra. “It might be important.”

“Hurry,” Myra said, standing by the door. “I want to change.”

I was staring at the telegram in astonishment. It was from Paul Juden:

Maddox cables girl has been found stop. What are you diddling with stop Civic reception to be held today stop Girl’s father claims reward stop Maddox loves you stop Juden.

“Well, fan me with a plate of soup!” I said and offered the telegram to Myra.

Bogle and Ansell crowded round her and read over her shoulder. There was a moment’s silence which was immediately after exploded by a general uproar.

“What does this mean?” Myra demanded. “Is this something you’ve hatched up?”

“Now don’t set yourself on fire,” I said hastily, “I don’t know any more about this than you do.”

“Yeah?” Bogle said, jerking Myra round. “So you don’t want the money, huh? You double-crossing little hooker! How the hell did you manage it?”

“Don’t be a damn fool!” I said. “She’s got nothing to do with it. It’s her *father* trying to pull a fast one over Maddox. It sticks out a yard.” I turned to Myra, “What kind of a man is your father?”

She hesitated “He—he’s a bit of a crook,” she said reluctantly. “But there’s no vice in him. He was just born that way.”

“Well, it looks to me like your father’s trying to gyp Maddox. What’s to stop him palming off some other girl as his daughter? You know, precious, that’s about what he’s doing.”

She stared at me, “But the photograph in the paper. They’ll know she’s a fake.”

“Maybe he’s found someone who looks like you.”

“Yeah, that wouldn’t be hard,” Sam put in. “Any one with a Veronica Lake hair-cut would do.”

This seemed to annoy Myra. “So I look like any one, do I?” she said angrily.

“Now don’t get up in the air,” Ansell said hastily.

I suppose it was the association of ideas. I don’t really know, but thinking about it afterwards, I guess that was what it was. Myra left the ground.

It was an unnerving sight. One minute she was sitting on the bed and the next she was sitting on nothing, about three feet above the bed.

The most astonished person in the room was Myra herself. “Now, see what you’ve done,” she said in alarm, “Don’t stare at me, do something.”

But we all just sat and stared.

“I don’t think I’ll be able to stand a great deal more of this,” I finally jerked out. “Will you calm down, Myra, and stop messing around?”

The first initial shock over, Myra reached for the bed rail and anchored herself. Then she pulled herself back to the bed. She settled on the bed with the lightness and instability of a thistle down.

“Levitation,” Ansell said. “It’ll pass off if you don’t excite yourself.”

“It’s rather fun,” Myra said, still looking a little scared. “Would any of you mind if I cast off?”

“Don’t do it,” Bogle pleaded. “Please don’t do it.”

“Oh, nuts!” Myra snapped. “Why shouldn’t I enjoy myself,” and she very cautiously pushed herself away from the bed.

She immediately rose in the air in a sitting position and then she overbalanced and turned upside down. Her feet shot up towards the ceiling and she hung suspended a few feet from the floor.

“Help!” she cried. “What am I going to do now?”

Ansell went to her rescue and got her straightened out. After a little balancing, she managed to float, lying full length.

“This is rather fun,” she said. “But it’s an effort to keep straight. Pull my feet down, Doc, I want to see if I can walk.”

“I can’t and won’t stand it,” Bogle said, closing his eyes and screwing up his fists.

“You shut up!” Ansell said, pushing Myra’s feet down and helping her upright. “She’s doing very well.”

Myra took a few hesitating steps and managed to cross the room some three feet above the floor. It was a shocking sight and I could hardly bring myself to watch her.

“I think I’d prefer to lie out,” she said, drawing up her feet and stretching out.

“I’ll give you a push,” Doc said and he did so, sending her floating across the room where she bumped gently against the wall. She was like a toy balloon and she bounced off the wall and came floating back to me. I reached out and dragged her back on the bed.

“Please stop,” I pleaded. “You’ll drive me crazy.”

“But, it’s marvellous,” Myra said, her face alight with pleasure. “You’re only jealous. Let me go once more across the room and then I promise I won’t do it again.”

“Well, if it means so much to you,” I said and shoved her off into space again. I must have given her too hard a push because she shot across the room narrowly missing Doc who threw himself on the floor with a squeal of fear. She banged against the wall, ricocheted like a billiard ball and whizzed over Bogle, who cowered down in his chair. Then the power that held her up seemed to be snatched away, for she came down on the end of her spine with a thud that made the coffee cups rattle.

Ansell hurried over to her and helped her up.

“Ooch!” she said, limping across to the bed. “There’s nothing for you to laugh at.”

“If you could have seen yourself,” I said, wiping the tears from my eyes. “You’d have laughed too.”

“Next time I take to flying, I’ll pad my undercarriage,” she said feelingly, as she sat down on the bed.

Bogle peered at her between his fingers. When he assured himself that she was sitting quietly, he took his hand away and sucked his teeth noisily. “Don’t ever do that again,” he said. “A sight like that doesn’t belong anywhere.”

“Think of the shoe leather I’ll save,” Myra said, smiling happily. “That was really something to experience.”

“Can’t we get our minds down to business?” I asked. “Not that I can think clearly. This’s about the craziest moment of my life, but we’ve still to settle about your father. Can you discuss him without becoming inflated?”

Myra’s face clouded, “I was forgetting him,” she said. “There’s nothing to discuss. I’m going to see him.”

“Now, don’t be in too great a rush,” I said. “The first thing to do is to get hold of Juden. He’ll have details. Then we can decide what to do. We’ll get packed up and go to Mexico City as quickly as we can. We ought to get there by to-night. Then we can talk things over with him, make plans and see what it’s all about.”

“Sam and I are coining,” Ansell said firmly. “Don’t you get any ideas about stopping us.”

I looked questioningly at Myra. She shrugged. “Oh, well,” she said, “I suppose they’d better.”

Just then the verandah door pushed open, and Whisky came in. “Mexico City?” he growled. “I haven’t been there since I was a pup. I’ll come along too.”

I shook my head. “Listen,” I said firmly. “I’m not interested in your puppy life. We haven’t room for you and none of us like dogs. If you want to go to Mexico City you make your own arrangements.”

Ansell was staring at the dog in delight. “My goodness! He’s worth a fortune. Of course, he must come with us,” he said.

Whisky eyed him suspiciously. “If you’ve got any ideas of exploiting me,” he snapped, “forget them I’m against any form of sweatshop labour. I’m coming with you because I’m tired of the other dogs in this town. A change will do me good.”

“He talks like a real gentleman, doesn’t he?” Bogle said in awe.

Myra went to the door. “I think I’m going mad,” she said in a firm voice.

Whisky eyed her thoughtfully, “Upon my word that’s a pretty trull,” he said. “Whoever gets her *will* be a lucky dog.”

Myra looked at him, her eyes wide with horror, then she disappeared, slamming the door behind her.

CHAPTER NINE

WE reached Mexico City at dusk and had an argument outside the *Plaza* Hotel. I wanted to go straight to Juden while Myra wanted to stop off at the hotel, change and get Juden to come down to us.

Myra got her way in the end. So we trooped into the *Plaza*, registered for rooms and had another argument about Whisky. At first, the reception clerk wouldn't hear of him coming into the hotel, but Bogle managed to persuade him.

Whisky got restive while Bogle and the clerk were wrangling, and I was scared that he was going to open his mouth. I knew that if he talked out of turn we'd all be tossed into the Street. I guess he was smart enough to realize that too. In the end, it was agreed that Bogle should have a double room and it would be okay for Whisky to share it with him.

Going up in the elevator, there was a further argument about who was going to pay the hotel bill. The only person—if you can call him a person—who didn't get excited was Whisky. We were still arguing when we reached the third floor and examined our rooms.

It was finally decided that Juden should be invited to meet the bill and since the others didn't know Juden this made them happy. I knew that to get money out of Juden was as easy as getting a running commentary on the Santiago handicap from a Tibetan deaf-mute. Anyway, I was tired of arguing.

"I'll get Juden on the 'phone," I said. "Suppose we all meet downstairs for dinner, say in half an hour?"

"Make it an hour," Myra said. "I'm not going to be rushed. I haven't been in a decent hotel for months and I'm going to make the most of it." She turned on Bogle. "And for goodness sake, dress yourself up, Samuel, right now you look like something put out for salvage."

"You don't look so hot yourself," Bogle snapped. "There's nothing about you that'd give a scarecrow an inferiority complex."

"Break it up," I said hastily. "We'll meet downstairs in an hour."

As soon as I had shut myself in my room, I had a bath, changed and then grabbed the telephone.

Juden didn't sound glad to hear me. "What the hell have you been doing?" he demanded. "Maddox's as mad as a hornet."

"Never mind about Maddox," I said. "Get your car and come over to the Plaza fast. I've got a sweet surprise package for you. No, don't ask questions, just come down."

"Okay," Juden replied crossly. "But it's got to be good."

I laughed. "If only you knew just how good it is," I said and hung up.

I met Juden in the bar a half an hour later. He came in with the light of battle in his eye and a scowl on his face. "There's a load of grief piling up for you," he said, shaking hands in a half-hearted sort of way. "What's the matter with you? Do you realize that you've set Maddox back 25 grand? Right now, he's spitting rust and steel filings."

"Take it easy," I said. "Sit down and reduce steam. Let's have a drink and be reasonable."

He sat down, but I could see that he'd got a lot on his mind. "Make it a double Scotch," he said. "I've done a full day's work and I'm not feeling so good."

When the drinks came, I hitched my chair close to his. "So the girl's been found, eh?" I said. "And Maddox has had to fork up?"

"That's it," Juden said. "The poor old geyser didn't stand a chance. I tell you parting with all that dough's broken his heart."

"He never had a heart," I said grimly. "The thing that gets his blood circulating is a rock wrapped up in gristle. How did it happen?"

"Well, as far as I know," Juden returned. "It seems this Shumway bird bounced into Maddox's office with his daughter early this morning. His story is that she was rescued by a guy called Law Kelly. They brought Kelly with them."

"Maddox wouldn't play at first, but Kelly seems to be a tough egg. He'd seen the story about the reward and he remembers seeing this Shumway girl with a greaser. He set off right away and didn't have any difficulty in getting her away from the greaser. Then he grabbed a 'plane and reached New York this morning. He took her to her father and the trio turned up to collect."

"As I say, Maddox was wild, but Kelly persuaded him to pert. So Maddox's blaming you for the whole thing."

"Who's Kelly?" I asked.

"Why, I guess he's one of those guys who's always around when someone's giving away 25 grand. You know how it is."

"Meaning you don't know?"

"Well, I can't know everyone, can I?"

"Swell," I lowered half my drink. "Now, we're getting places. Let me tell you, Kelly's yarn is a damn lie from soup to nuts."

"You ask Maddox," Juden returned grimly. "He'll tell you whether it's a lie or not in twenty different languages . . . all of 'em bad."

“You may be interested to hear that Myra Shumway’s upstairs right at this very minute,” I said, emphasising each word by stabbing the air with my finger.

Juden finished his drink and snapped his fingers for the barman. “The girl gets around,” was all he said.

“She hasn’t been to New York,” I said patiently. “She’s been right by my side from the time I told you I’d found her.”

“Has it ever occurred to you that some young woman is kidding the pants off you?”

I thought about this, then I shook my head. “The girl’s Myra Shumway,” I said. “You gave me her picture. Remember?”

Juden opened a brief case, lying by his feet and produced a full plate glossy print. “Take a gander at that,” he said, handing it to me.

There was Maddox looking like a well-fed turtle, another oldish man I hadn’t seen before and Myra. They were standing in Maddox’s office and Maddox was handing Myra a slip of paper. By the glassy smile that Maddox had hitched to his face, there could be no doubt that the slip of paper was the cheque for the 25,000-dollars reward.

I stared at the girl in the photograph. If I hadn’t known that Myra hadn’t been out of Mexico for the past week, I’d have been prepared to take an oath that the girl in the picture was indeed Myra Shumway. There were the same obvious points of similarity. The blonde hair down to her shoulders, half hiding her left eye. The same way of standing and the same way of tilting her head. The features were the same although the expression was a little puzzling. There was a look on her face I had never seen before, but then I’d never seen her receiving a cheque for twenty-five grand and that amount of money is enough to change anyone’s expression.

I handed it back to Juden in bewilderment. “Something’s wrong here,” I said. “I don’t know what it is.” I shrugged helplessly. “When was this photo taken?”

“Eleven o’clock this morning,” Juden said promptly. “It was flown out and I got it this afternoon.”

“At eleven o’clock this morning, Myra Shumway was with me,” I said firmly.

It was Juden’s time to look startled. “Are you drunk?”

“Not with you handling my expense sheet,” I returned bitterly. The berman came over at this moment and Juden ordered a second round. When he had gone away, Juden said, “So she was with you, was she?”

I nodded.

“Yeah,” he said. “But who’s going to believe it? Look, why don’t you admit that you slipped up? Maybe, I can put things right with Maddox. I’m not promising, but . . .”

“Hold everything,” I said waving my hand to the door.

“Snatch a peep at that.”

Myra was standing by the bar waiting for me to spot her. I’ve told you from time to time that this kid was a looker. I don’t want to keep on at it or you’ll think I’ve got something to sell. But I’ll put this on record. She made anything that Earl Carrol had ever put up to dazzle the tired U.S. business men look like a wallflower in red flannel.

Maybe it was the dress. It was gold lamé and the full skirt was lined with scarlet so that as she moved the scarlet showed in sudden unexpected flashes, making the dress look as if it were on fire. From the knees up, it clung to her curves like a nervous mountaineer.

She practically caused a riot. The men sitting around paused in their conversation like someone had jabbed them with a skewer, while the women radioed hate on a short wave length.

Myra didn’t care. She came over, took the seat I offered her and settled herself with all the self-assurance in the world.

I said, “I’d like you to meet Paul Juden of the Central News Agency. Miss Myra Shumway,” I went on to Juden.

He was like a man cut off at the knees. He managed to get to his feet and when Myra sat down, he collapsed into his chair. But he didn’t seem able to say anything.

“He’s not always like this,” I said to Myra. “As a matter of fact he has a pretty good head on him.”

“So have some umbrellas,” Myra said. “But, it doesn’t mean anything.”

“Now, look, sunshine, don’t let us have any unpleasantness, Juden is suffering from delayed shock He thought you were in New York.”

“I hope we’re not going to have all that all over again,” Myra said.

The barman came over and stood admiring her.

“Something that would resurrect a corpse, please,” Myra said, smiling at him. “Nothing small. Serve it in a brandy glass.”

The barman blinked. “Yes, madam,” he said, and went away.

“I’m going to get tight,” she went on to me in a confidential undertone. “I haven’t been in a decent hotel for months and I haven’t been tight for years. I am pandering to my whims tonight.”

By this time, Juden began making croaking noises. “Twins,” he said feebly. “Twins.”

Myra looked at him with interest. “No wonder you look like such a sad man,” she said.

“Should I congratulate you or buy you a wreath?”

Before I could stop him, he gave her the photograph. There was a long electric silence while she looked at it. Then she turned to me. “Who’s this delightful little blonde trollop?” she asked, pointing with a trembling finger at the girl in the photograph.

“To all intents and purposes,” I said as gently as possible, “it’s you.”

Myra drew a deep breath. “Have you ever seen me wear such an expression on my face as this over-dressed, sex-ridden, over-ripe, two-face hag is wearing?” she demanded, furiously rattling the photograph under my nose.

Even Juden shrank away from her fury.

But like all women, she had hit the nail on the thumb. That was the difference between this girl in the photograph and Myra. Whereas Myra had character, this girl had none. She had that loose, cruel expression on her face that you so often see in the face of a wanton woman. Make no mistake about it, this girl was bad right through, but it wasn’t until it was pointed out to me, that I realized it.

“Take it easy,” I said. “The red light’s showing on your pressure gauge.”

“So this is the hooker who’s impersonating me,” Myra said, controlling herself with an effort.

She studied the photograph intently. “And look at that smug, I’ve-got-the-bone expression on my dear parent’s face. This is some of his work. I’ll make him suffer for this!”

Juden was clawing at his collar nervously. He quite expected that she would turn on him at any moment.

“Well, P. J.,” I said. “Do you see how Maddox’s been fooled now?”

“What can we say to him?” Juden groaned. “You know Maddox. The other papers would rib him for weeks. Besides, he wouldn’t believe it.”

“He wouldn’t?” Myra twisted round in her chair so that she faced Juden, who shrank as far away as he could from her. “Don’t you think I could persuade him?”

“You might,” Juden returned feebly. “Yes, I guess with your character you could do pretty near anything.”

“And that’s what I think,” Myra said ominously.

“It’s going to be difficult,” I said, finishing my drink. “If your father says she’s you, you’ll have a hard job convincing anyone.”

The barman brought Myra’s cocktail. There was a lot of it in a large brandy glass. He put it on the table beside her. “It is my own invention, madam,” he said.

Myra picked up the balloon glass and took a long pull from the blue-green liquor. Then she shut her eyes, held her breath and her feet traced quick little patterns on the carpet. When she could speak, she said faintly, “Any smoke escaping from me?”

“You like it, madam?” the barman asked anxiously.

“That is the wrong word,” Myra said, putting the glass on the table and staring at it. “You don’t like a thing like that. A corpse doesn’t like embalming fluid, but it does it good. What do you call it?”

“The breath of a Tiger,” the barman said, not knowing whether to be complimented or not.

Myra shuddered. “I’m glad it’s only his breath,” she said. “Somehow, I don’t think I could have managed the tiger itself.”

“If madam does not like it, I will bring her something else,” the barman said, looking hurt. “I have another specialty which I call the Panther’s spit.”

Myra waved him away. “Some other time perhaps,” she said, and he returned behind his bar with a puzzled expression on his face.

Doc Ansell and Bogle came into the bar. They were wearing tuxedos. Bogle looked like an Eastside waiter.

“There you are,” Ansell said, drawing up a chair. “We’ve been having a little trouble with Whisky, otherwise we’d’ve been down before.”

I introduced Juden who nodded vaguely.

Myra examined Bogle thoughtfully. “What you need is an ermine dicky, Sam,” she said. “It would set off that dress suit.”

Sam was looking at her with undisguised admiration. “Gee!” he exploded. “That dress you’ve nearly got on is the horse’s hoofs!”

“Never mind that,” I broke in. “We’ve got a little brain work ahead of us,” and I gave Ansell the photograph.

He studied it and then passed it to Bogle. “That’s Mr. Maddox handing over the reward, I suppose,” he said.

I nodded. It surprised me he didn’t say anything about the girl in the picture. He just glanced thoughtfully at Myra, pursed his lips and then studied his small brown hands.

Bogle, however, had plenty to say. “What’s she doing in this picture?” he demanded. “How did she get to New York anyway and if she’s got the cheque, where is it?”

“That isn’t me, you dope,” Myra snapped. “Haven’t you got eyes in your head?”

Bogle blinked. “Sure,” he said. “Well, if it ain’t you, that dame’s certainly borrowed your geography. Who is she?”

“That’s what I want to know,” Myra returned grimly. “And when I find out, even a plastic surgeon won’t be able to put her right.” She reached for her drink and lowered a good two inches of the liquor down her throat.

I looked over at Juden. “We’ve got to do something, P. J.,” I said. “For one thing, if I don’t put myself right with Maddox, he might have a grudge against me. I wouldn’t like that to happen.”

“He’s got one already,” Juden returned. “You may as well know, Ross. I’m sorry, but you’re out.”

I stared at him. “What do you mean . . . out? How about my contract?”

“That falls due at the end of the month,” Juden returned, looking unhappy. “He’s not renewing it. He says you’ve cost him plenty as it is.”

“The ungrateful rat,” I said bitterly. “After all I’ve done for him too!”

“Anything might happen to change his mind by the end of the month,” Ansell broke in. “I shouldn’t let it prey on your mind.”

“I know that kind of a guy,” Bogle added. “You ought to call on him and kick his teeth in. That’ll give him different ideas.”

“I think you’d better keep away from him,” Juden said, shaking his head. “He could get you on the blacklist if he wanted to.” He got to his feet, scratched his head and then said, “Before I go, wasn’t there something about a story? Wasn’t that why I came down?”

“Yeah,” I said. “But, now I’m out, I’m sticking to that story. Catch me making a present of anything to Maddox.”

“That’s not the way to go on,” Juden said. “If you’ve got a story, you’d better let me have it.”

“Not now. Maybe, later.”

He studied my face and decided that it was no use pressing me. “Okay,” he said, “I’ll be getting along.” He looked over at Myra, frowned, and ran his fingers through his hair. “I don’t know what to make of her,” he said, almost as if he were talking to himself. “You wouldn’t have a twin, would you?” he asked her hopefully.

“No,” Myra said. “Then, I just give up. You can waste a lot of time with a problem like this. Time’s money to me.”

“Well, so long, P.J.,” I said, shaking hands. “If I’m broke I’ll look you up.”

“Sure, anything like that.”

“Okay. Keep out of hospital.”

“Sure, last time I was in there, I took a turn for the nurse,” he returned and went off laughing like a hyena.

“That guy’s got nurses on the brain,” I said, relaxing. “Oh well, let’s forget him. I guess we’ll all get drunk. It’s a fine welcome to find your job’s been thrown in your face.” Myra finished her drink, gasped, and then waved violently to the barman. “Don’t you dare blame me,” she said. “I didn’t lose you your mouldy job.”

“I never said you did,” I said wearily. “Well, I’ve got to think of something . . .”

“You’re going to help me find this blonde harridan. How would you like that?” she asked.

“It’s an idea,” I said. “But, not a very profitable one.”

The barman came over.

“Four Tiger breaths,” Myra said. “And make them large ones.”

“You like it, madam?” The barman showed his pleasure.

“No,” Myra said, with a shudder. “But it likes me.”

I looked at the other two. “What have we got out of this so far? A couple of miracles and a talking dog. Surely, we can turn that little lot into hard cash?”

Ansell said, “We’ve got a great deal more than that. The first thing to do is to find Hamish Shumway and the girl who’s impersonating Myra. We must waste no time in doing it.”

There was an odd note of urgency in his voice which made me glance at him sharply. I had not seen him look so worried before.

“What have you got on your mind?” I asked.

“Plenty.” He paused while the barman came with the drinks and then when he had gone he went on “There’s evil in Nagualism. I feel some of that evil has broken loose.”

“I wish you would be quiet,” Myra said crossly. “You’re always the skeleton at the feast. To-night, we enjoy ourselves. To-morrow we go to New York.” And she raised her glass, “The toast is frustration and confusion to killjoys!”

We drank.

PART TWO—NEW YORK

CHAPTER TEN

It wasn't until we had been in New York for three days and we had more or less settled down in a Brooklyn apartment that I began to realize that Doc Ansell's presentiments might have some foundation.

During those three days, we were all busy trying to find Myra's father. Consequently, we didn't see much of each other.

In spite of this, I was aware of a subtle change that had come over Myra. She was kinder and she did not pick quarrels with Bogle. She looked different somehow, although I did not stop to analyse just why she did look different. She also clung more strongly than ever to her policy of honesty, which unsettled us all.

The first real indication that things weren't right happened on the third night of our stay in New York. I had been around the various Press Clubs hoping to pick up some clue to Shumway and I guess I must have been doing myself rather well. I wasn't exactly tight, but I'd had enough to make me hesitate about ascending the stairs in the dark. Also, I couldn't find the light switch.

I was standing in the lobby trying to make up my mind whether I'd go up on my hands and knees or sleep in the living-room, when I heard the sound of someone coming up the steps to the apartment. A moment later the front door opened and someone came in.

"Who's that?" I said, peering into the darkness.

There was a faint gasp and I recognized Myra's voice.

"Put the light on, will you?" I said, "I've been searching for the switch for the last five minutes."

She didn't say anything, but ran upstairs. I could just make out her shadowy form as she slipped past me.

"Well, that's a nice way to treat a guy," I said, "can't you even say hello?"

By this time, she'd reached the top of the stairs and had disappeared.

Feeling a little mad and wondering what made her behave like this, I took the stairs with a rush and eventually got to the top. I went straight to Myra's room and knocked on the door. There wasn't any sound, so I opened the door and put my head round. The room was in darkness.

"Myra?" I called, "What are you up to?"

A sleepy voice came from across the room, “What is it?”

I groped for the switch and turned it on.

Myra sat up in bed. She was in a pair of gay pyjamas and she looked at me crossly. “What’s the big idea?” she snapped, “take that drink sodden face out of here and put it under a pillow.”

I stared at her. “But, you passed me a moment ago,” I said, feeling startled, “do you usually get into bed in two seconds?”

She sat further up in the bed. “You’re tight,” she said. “I’ve been asleep since eleven o’clock. Go away!”

I came into the room. “Seriously, sweetheart,” I said, “someone came upstairs. I thought it was you. Damn it, I’ll swear it was you.”

“This sounds mightily like the silk-worm gag,” she said, “get out of my room before I toss you out, you drunken heel!”

This brought me up short. I looked at her. This was the Myra I’d known in Mexico. A sudden change had come over her from the Myra I’d known during the past three days.

“Take it easy,” I said, “I’m not as tight as all that,” and I walked over to where her clothes were lying. I touched her dress. It was warm. “You’ve just got out of this,” I said, picking it up.

“Where did you get that from?” she asked, startled, “I put all my clothes away before I went to bed.”

“Yeah? Well, there’s a complete outfit on this chair. Look, one of us is nuts and it ain’t me.”

She climbed out of bed and came over. “But, I haven’t had these things out of my trunk since we came here,” she said, uneasily.

“Okay,” I said dropping the dress. “Forget it. I don’t want to know where you’ve been tonight. You don’t have to lie so hard.”

“I’m not lying!” she said angrily, “you’re trying to make a fool out of me!”

“I couldn’t do that,” I said, suddenly feeling too tired to argue. “Go to sleep,” and I walked out and left her.

I don’t mind telling you it preyed on my mind. I couldn’t get to sleep and I began imagining all kinds of things. I could have sworn that whoever it was who’d gone upstairs had been Myra. Yet it didn’t seem possible for her to get into bed and feign sleep in so short a time. Yet, that was what she must have done.

Why had she pretended to be asleep? What had she been up to? Or was she speaking the truth? That's how it went on in my mind for nearly the rest of the night. But, I did eventually get some sleep.

The next morning, while I was shaving, Doc Ansell came into my room.

"Hello there," I said as I mowed my beard with an electric razor. "Have I got a hangover or have I?"

"I've been thinking," Ansell said, sitting on the foot of the bed. "I'm not happy about certain things."

"What things?"

"That girl in the photograph," Ansell said slowly, "how do you explain she's the image of Myra?"

I selected a necktie and wandered over to the mirror. "I don't," I said.

"That's just the point. She hasn't a twin and you'll never make me believe that some other girl, no relation of hers, could look like her."

"Well, that's what's happened," I said. "Maybe, Shumway got hold of an actress who's made herself up to look like Myra. A guy like him would do a lot for all that dough."

Ansell shook his head, "I think there's more in it than that," he said, "I'm not saying you haven't hit on the explanation, but I don't think so."

"Quit beating about the bush," I said, facing him, "what are you getting at?"

"Haven't you noticed a change in the girl recently?" he asked.

Then I remembered what happened last night. "There was a change," I said slowly, "but now she's back where she started."

"I don't understand," he said. "What happened last night?"

I told him.

He sat listening, his face grave and his eyes worried. When I'd finished, he smacked one hand into the other. "Then I'm right!" he said. "There are two of them. Strange and powerful influences are around."

"Now, don't start that," I said irritably. "It's bad enough . . ."

"Did you ever read a book called 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde'?"

I stared at him, "I guess so, but what has that . . .?"

“Plenty,” Ansell broke in, “you remember it’s a story of the separating of the good and evil in man. Did you know that the Naguales have this power? I think that’s what’s happened to Myra.”

I put my coat on slowly and looked at myself in the mirror. I wasn’t looking too good in the hard sunlight. I looked pale and there were smudges under my eyes.

“If you can’t talk sense, you’d better shut up,” I said at last.

“It’s only because you refuse to believe,” Ansell said quietly. “Ignorance breeds fear. You’re becoming frightened.”

I sat on the edge of the bed. I could see he wouldn’t let it go, so I thought we might as well have it out.

“Give me a retake,” I said.

“This is what I think’s happened,” Ansell said. “Quintl has separated the good and bad in Myra and has put each of these components into materialized form. The form naturally follows the original pattern. So we have two Myras, both of them exactly alike, but one has all the good qualities that a human being possesses while the other has all the bad ones. Now, do you understand?”

“It’s crazy,” I said, hating every bit of this.

Ansell shook his head, “It isn’t, if you know about these things. If I told you that the dog would talk, you wouldn’t have believed it. Now, you admit you accept it as a fact.”

“Yeah,” I said, thinking again of what happened last night. “So you really think she can become two people or rather possess two different bodies when she wants to?”

“I think so. Perhaps not when she wants to, but when she’s not aware of what’s happening and is off her guard. Let’s put it that way.”

“That would account for what happened last night. They’ve become one again.”

“But what has the other one been doing?”

“That’s something we’ve got to find out. That’s where Myra’s danger lies.”

“What do you mean?”

“Let’s go back to first principles,” Ansell said. “We have all latent evil in our make-up. Some of us haven’t the same control over this instinct as others. It depends on our training, our environment and our strength of character whether this instinct gets the upper hand. If the evil in us is segregated without the restraining influence of our instinct for doing good, then something entirely primitive has been created and may cause a lot of destruction. I’d hate to see Myra suffer for something she hasn’t done.”

This was beyond me. “Something she hasn’t done?” I repeated.

“Yes. Suppose now, the other Myra, the Myra in the photograph, takes it into her head to commit a crime. Might not the Myra we know get the blame for it?”

“Why should she?”

“It depends if the other Myra is seen while committing the crime,” Ansell returned. “They’re exactly alike. The finger prints would be the same. Both girls are easily recognized. Can’t you see what danger there might be in all this?”

I drew a deep breath, “You’re looking for trouble,” I said. “This business is too much for me. What we’ve got to do is to get after Shumway. Now, come on, I smell breakfast.”

“Wait,” Ansell said. “What about this fellow Kelly? Maybe, we can get on to him.”

“Maybe, we can,” I said. “We’ll talk it over at breakfast.”

In the living room, Bogle was setting the table “All ready, Bud,” he said to me. “Pried ham and eggs, whaddayssay?”

“Sounds fine,” I said. “Isn’t Myra coming down?”

“Naw,” Sam said, going into the kitchen. “A dame like that likes to lay around in bed. Besides, it takes her half the morning to get up. I like to get breakfast over with.”

When he had gone, I said to Ansell, “Old Sam’s getting like a gawdamn housewife. Do you think he’s going soft or something?”

Ansell shook his head absently. “He always wanted to have a place of his own,” he said. “Many a time, in the desert, he’d talk about setting up home. Funny thing, isn’t it? Yet he’s mixed with the toughest thugs of Chicago. And now look at him, running around, keeping the house clean, cooking and waiting on Myra.”

Just then Sam came in with a tray and put the food on the table. He then shot back into the kitchen, came out again with a smaller tiny and carried it off to Myra’s room.

“Kelly,” I said, with my mouth full. “That’s an idea, Doc. I wonder if we can get a line on him.”

“Maybe your paper would know,” Ansell returned, pouring out the coffee. “Anyone there you can ask?”

I thought for a moment, “Yeah, Dowdy’s the guy. He’s sort of secretary to Maddox. He ought to know something.”

Sam came back, whistling cheerfully and pulled a chair up to the table. He sat down, "That dog murders me," he said "Jeeze! You never seen anything like it. He's in with the kid and they're talking away like a couple of professors. What they find to talk about, beats me."

"Never mind about them," I said, pushing the plate of fried ham over to him. "So long as they don't fight, what does it matter? I admit I don't find Whisky too easy to talk to. Maybe, it's because he kind of embarrasses me."

"He's a smart guy, that dog," Bogle said, spearing the ham with his fork. "He's got a political mind."

"You wouldn't know this fellow Kelly?" Ansell asked. "The one who's helping Shumway."

"Kelly?" Bogle repeated. "There's millions of Kelly's. I know two or three of 'em, but unless I saw the guy, I couldn't say."

"Don't worry about it, Doc," I said, helping myself to more coffee. "I'll go down to the Recorder as soon as I've finished. Maybe, I'll get something."

"Yeah," Bogle broke in, "ain't it time we found this Shumway guy? When we do get him, he'll have spent all that jack."

"We're doing our best," Ansell said. "You don't seem exactly full of ideas, Sam." He pushed his plate away and wandered over to an armchair. He sat down and began to read the newspaper.

Whisky wandered in, "Hey-ho," he said, with a flick of his tail "What's buzzin', cousin?"

"Don't," I said, pushing back my chair and lighting a cigarette. "Try to speak pure English if you're going to speak at all. I think Sam's accent is affecting you."

"Don't be a prig," Whisky returned, wandering over to Sam, "Well, my old," he went on to Sam, resting his long muzzle on Sam's knee, "What have you got for my breakfast? That ham looked a little fat to me."

"I'll cut the fat off," Sam said. "Don't worry about a little thing like that, or I've got a steak. Howjer like that?"

"Mmm," Whisky said. "Let's go find it. That sounds like something."

They went off into the kitchen.

"The airs and graces that dog gives himself kills me," I said. "Steak for breakfast! He'll get too fat."

“Too fat for what?” Sam asked, putting his head round the door. “You be careful what you’re saying. You ain’t no hour-glass yourself.”

“From where I’m standing,” Whisky added, pushing his snout round the door, “that bulge in your waist line looks like a six-course lunch the waiter forgot, to take out of the casserole.”

“Aw, beat it, you two,” I said grinning. “My waist line’s all right. Well, I’ll get over to the Recorder. So long, Doc.”

Ansell waved, “So long,” he said.

I thought I’d say hello and good-bye to Myra so I tapped on her door.

“Come in,” she called.

I pushed the door open and walked in. I didn’t see her in bed and I looked round the room blankly.

“Hello there,” I said, “where’ve you gone?”

“Good morning, Ross,” Myra said, and patted me lightly on my head.

She was floating near the ceiling, a book in her hand and a cigarette between her lips.

“Holy Moses!” I said, starting back. “Must you do that?”

“Why not?” she said, “Haven’t you heard the saying ‘I’m walking on air’? Well, I’m lying on it. It’s very comfortable and restful.”

She floated slowly down until her face was level with mine then she put her arm round my neck and lowered her feet to the ground. She stood with difficulty.

“I’m feeling very light, this morning,” she said, “As light as a thistle-down.”

I looked at her thoughtfully, “Apart from that,” I said, “How do you feel?”

“Oh, all right,” her eyes clouded, “you were awfully drunk last night. I’m still a little angry with you.”

I wasn’t sure but this seemed the new Myra again. “I wasn’t so bad,” I said, “tell me, what happened? You know what I mean.”

She went over and sat on the bed, “I’m scared,” she said, “I dreamed things again. I dreamed that someone came into this room and got into my body. Then you woke me up. Weren’t some clothes on that chair when you came in, or did I dream it?”

“There were,” I said, looking at her uneasily. “Why do you ask?”

“Because they’re not here now,” she returned, “Oh, Ross, what’s happening?”

“I don’t know,” I said, sure now that Doc Ansell was right. There were two of them. It seemed incredible, but everything pointed to it. “You’re not to worry. Look, I’ve got to go out. Maybe we might lunch together.”

Her face brightened. “Lovely,” she said, “what time and where?”

I looked at the clock. It was already late. “Meet me at Manerta’s in a couple of hours and we’ll talk.”

“All right,” she said. “But, do you think it’ll do any good?”

“I don’t know, but there are things I want to discuss with you.” I turned to the door, “Don’t worry, and leave Whisky home, will you? I want you to myself.”

“I’ll tell him,” she said, “but, he won’t be pleased.”

“And I couldn’t care less,” I said and left her.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE doorman at the entrance of the *Recorder* Offices seemed embarrassed when he saw me.

“Hullo there, Murphy,” I said wondering what was biting him. “It’s good to see your ugly mug again. How’s tricks? I haven’t seen you in months.”

“I guess that’s right,” he said, shuffling his feet like he was standing on a boiler plate of an overworked tug-boat, “you wouldn’t be coming in here, would you, Mr. Millan?”

“Yep,” I said cheerfully. “That’s the idea. I’m one of those big-minded guys. I’m not afraid of catching anything in this joint although it ought to have been fumigated years ago.”

He laughed like a very sad man, “Well, Mr. Millan,” he said, “you know how it is,” and he shuffled his feet some more.

It occurred to me suddenly that he wasn’t going to let me in. “What’s cookin’, Murphy?” I said sharply, “has someone died in there or something?”

“Well, no, Mr. Millan, but Mr. Maddox has given instructions that he don’t want you in the office. We all feel pretty sore about it, but that’s the way it is.”

“Maddox!” I said. “Well, how do you like that?” I pushed my hat to the back of my head and looked at Murphy more in anger than in sorrow. “Well, don’t let it get you down. You’re only doing your job. Look, I want a word with Dowdy. Will you get hold of him and tell him to come over to Joe’s?”

“You bet, Mr. Millan,” Murphy said, brightening up. “I’ll tell him. I’ll tell him right away.”

I went over to Joe’s poolroom, behind the *Recorder’s* Office end I felt sore. I’d worked for this sheet for almost ten years and it was like my second home. It was like being one of the orphans in the storm.

McCue of the *Telegram* was the only guy in Joe’s. He was sitting at the bar on a high stool thumbing through a telephone book when I blew in.

Both he and the barman stared at me as if I was something out of a zoo.

“Hey, Mac,” I said with a grin, “isn’t it your bed-time?”

He screwed up his big rubbery face and then offered a limp hand, “Ross Millan,” he said as if he couldn’t believe it, “I thought you’d committed hara-kiri in the desert.”

“Mornin’ Willy,” I said to the barman, “how about a coffee?”

“Nice to see you again, Mr. Millan,” he said, going over to the urn, “we miss guys like you.”

“Only because we pay our way,” I said, pulling up a stool and sitting down. “These desk newshounds want everything on the cuff.”

McCue took out a dollar and laid it on the counter, “Willy,” he said, “I’m paying for that coffee. I consider it an honour to pay for anything that’ll sustain the guy who cost Maddox twenty-five grand.”

I grinned, but I wasn’t feeling so good. “Quit ribbing me,” I said, “and hang on to that dollar. You know it’s the first piece of money you ever earned.”

McCue put the dollar back into his pocket, “I was forgetting,” he said. “Anyway, it’s as good as a tenement fire to see you again. I hear you’re out.”

“The Recorder’s washed me out, if that’s what you mean,” I said, lighting a cigarette. “But, I’ve got a great future ahead of me.”

“That’s what the guy said when they stuck him on the hot seat. But, then he was only foolin’,” McCue said dryly. “What kind of a corny stunt was that you and Maddox thought up?”

“Never mind,” I said, stirring my coffee. “Let the dead rest in peace. What’s cookin’ now?”

McCue returned to the telephone book, “We’ve got a new lead on the Wilson killing,” he said. “I’ve gotta phone a dame.” He found the number and pulled the battered telephone that stood on the bar towards him. It had no mouthpiece and the cord was frayed and knotted.

“When did you get back from Mexico?”

“A few days ago,” I said, watching him dial. “You want to try Mexico sometime. It’s a swell place.”

“You can have it,” he said, “I wouldn’t know what to do with sand and horses.” The telephone went plop and I heard a faint tinny voice snap something in McCue’s ear. He shifted forward on his stool, “Is this the residence of Miss Gloria Hope-Dawn?” he asked.

“For cryin’ out loud,” I said astonished. “Is that a long distance to Hollywood?”

“Naw,” he returned, grinning, “just a little tarnished glamour from the East Side.” He turned his attention to the telephone, “Hello, there. Miss Gloria Hope-Dawn? This is Mr. McCue of the *Telegram*. Yeah. Is it true Harry Wilson gave you a mink coat last year?”

She seemed to have a lot to say about that, because McCue closed his eyes and glued his ear to the receiver and listened.

“All tight, all right,” he said at last, “I’ve got to ask questions. It’s part of my job.”

He listened some more, then suddenly broke in, “Listerine’s about the best kind of mouth wash. You ought to try it sometime,” and hung up. He mopped his face with a dirty handkerchief, “Where these dames learn all their language beats me,” he said mournfully. “I guess I’ll have to go round and see her. Wilson couldn’t have bought her that fur coat to keep her warm. She’s like a blast furnace.”

I told myself that I was going to miss working on the *Recorder*. You only had to smell a little press atmosphere to realize just how much it all meant. In Mexico, it was different, but right here in New York, it was a swell game.

“Well, I’d better be moving,” McCue said, sliding off his stool. “You’ll be around, won’t you? Got any plans?”

“Don’t worry about me,” I said, “I’ve got more than my arm up my sleeve. It’ll take a battalion of punks like Maddox to rattle me.”

He looked at me thoughtfully, “Yeah,” he said, “I suppose it will,” and waving his hand, he went to the door. He nearly banged into Dowdy who came hurrying in, an anxious expression on his thin hatchet face.

McCue said, “You’d better watch your till, Willy, here’s another guy from the Recorder,” and he went off down the Street.

Dowdy refused coffee and sat on the stool with a miserable expression on his face and his eye on the door. I could see that I wasn’t going to get a lot of help from him and the sooner I let him get back to the office the better he’d like it.

“Where’s Shumway?” I asked, abruptly.

Dowdy blinked, “Shumway?” he repeated, “I don’t know. Why should I?”

“Listen,” I said patiently, “if you were to tell me all the things you don’t know, we’d be old men by the time we got out of here. I don’t know why you should know where Shumway is, but, there’s no harm in asking, is there?”

“Don’t get sore, Ross,” he said uneasily. “Maddox has told us to leave you alone. If he hears you and I have been talking, there’ll be hell to pay.”

“Don’t worry about a crum like that,” I said, “you inside men worry too much about punks like Maddox. I’ve got to find Shumway. It’s important.”

“Well, I’m sorry,” he said, shaking his head, “I don’t know where he is. He and his daughter collected the reward from Maddox and beat it. We haven’t their address on file.” He looked longingly at the door.

“This guy Kelly,” I went on hurriedly, seeing that I wasn’t going to hold him much longer, “What do you know about him?”

“Not much. He was the fellow who found the girl. By rights, I suppose, he ought to have had the reward, but they agreed between themselves to split it. I only saw him once and that was after Shumway and the girl had drawn the money.”

“What did he want?” I asked, feeling that we might be getting places.

“He wanted to get in touch with Kruger,” Dowdy replied.

I stared at him, “Peppi Kruger?” I asked, startled.

“Yes, Peppi’s a big shot now, Millan,” Dowdy returned. “He’s president of the Brooklyn Motor Company and an important political figure in lower East Side politics. About six months ago he got control of the Taxi Chauffeurs’ union. You know the racket. He scared the pants off the taxicab companies and made a pile of jack. Any company that doesn’t pay up, gets into trouble. He’s got them eating out of his hand at the moment, but something tells me that the D.A. ’ll get on to him before long. Anyway, he’s made enough money now to retire.”

I whistled, “A guy like that,” I said in disgust, “when I knew him he was running rum for Brescia. What did Kelly want with him?”

Dowdy slid off his stool. “I don’t know,” he said, “I wasn’t having anything to do with it, but I guess he could get in touch with Kruger easily enough.” He looked longingly at the door, “Well, I’ve got to get back,” he went on, “Maddox might want me.”

“Okay, Dowdy,” I said. “You’ve given me a lead.”

He looked at me suspiciously, “What’s the idea? Why are you interested in Shumway?”

“Wouldn’t you be interested in some guy who lost you your job?” I said, meeting his eye.

He looked a little scared, “You aren’t going to start trouble, are you, Millan?” he said nervously. “Maddox wouldn’t like that.”

“Do you think I care what Maddox likes or dislikes?” I said. “Why a midget wouldn’t be scared of a rat like him.”

He gave me another troubled look, shook hands and went off across the street to the *Recorder Offices*.

I finished my coffee, lit another cigarette and then reached for the telephone book. Kruger had a house on East Seventy-eight Street. That made me think. To have a house in that narrow territory bounded by Lexington on the east and Fifth Avenue on the west meant something. It meant more than something. It meant money. Stacks of money.

“Remember Peppi?” I said to Willy, who had just got through preparing the free lunch sandwiches.

“Yeah,” he said, “that punk used to worry me. He didn’t come in here much, but when he did, he sure started a draught. Well, I guess he’s had a successful career, but he didn’t come by it honestly. I don’t envy him.”

I shook my head, “it wouldn’t make a lot of difference if you did,” I said with a grin, “Peppi wouldn’t care.”

Willy grinned back, “I guess that’s right,” he said. “You wouldn’t be interested in Peppi now, would you, Mr. Millan?”

“I don’t know,” I said, “I’ve got time to be interested in anyone.”

“Out of a job?” The big barman’s face showed sympathy.

“Resting,” I said, yawning. “When I want work, I’ll get work. Well, so long, Willy, I’ll be in again.”

“So long, Mr. Millan,” Willy still looked worried, “I hope you get a break.”

Walking down the street, I hoped so too.

Anyway the morning wasn’t wasted. I had something to think about. Why did Kelly want to get into touch with Peppi? What was interesting. Had Shumway and the girl double-crossed Kelly? Maybe Kelly had once worked for Peppi and wanted him to put some pressure on Shumway to divide up the dough.

I remembered Peppi well. You couldn’t easily forget him. Last time I saw him was about two years ago. He was on trial for murder. I remember him sitting with his Counsel, listening to the opening address by the District Attorney. He never batted an eyelid throughout the two-day trial and he got away with it without the jury leaving the box. As far as I knew, he’d stood trial four times for murder and four times he’d been acquitted. Now, of course, he could pay some other guy to do his killing for him.

Peppi was a little guy with big bulging eyes. When he was a kid he contracted a skin disease that had stripped off his hair. He’d been as bald as an egg ever since. Apart from looking like a second cousin of Lugosi, he had a mean disposition.

So it came back to the problem. What did Kelly want with him? The only thing I could do was to call on Peppi and find out. If I went with a good enough story I might get somewhere. I didn’t exactly relish the visit, but I argued that if a guy had a house on East Seventy-eight, then he wasn’t likely to cut my throat. Or was he?

Anyway, thinking along those lines didn’t get me anywhere so I hailed a cab and gave Peppi’s address.

The driver knew him all right.

“Friend of yours, Bud?” he said, pushing the taxi through the traffic like he was anxious to get rid of me.

“You ask him. He’ll tell you if he wants you to know,” I returned.

“Wise guy, huh?” the driver snorted. “A dime a dozen. A dime a dozen.”

“I heard you the first time,” I said.

He didn’t say anything for a couple of blocks, then he ventured again, “That Kruger guy ain’t doing us any good in the taxi business. Somebody ought to stop him.”

“Come in with me and stop him,” I said, putting my feet on the spring seat in front of me.

“Yeah?” he said, “I like that kind of advice. It’s like saying why not bop Joe Louis on the snout.”

“Just drive me,” I pleaded. “I would the rest were silence.”

That held him and I didn’t get a yap out of him until he’d stopped outside Peppi’s house. I gave him a dollar. “Hang on to the change,” I said. “You look like you could use some relief.”

He put the dollar away slowly. “Some of you smart guys love yourselves,” he said, spitting on the sidewalk. “I bet you’ve got chapped lips kissing mirrors,” and he drove away before I could think up a comeback.

I concentrated on Peppi’s house. Well, it was a nice joint. It looked like it belonged to Vincent Astor or J. P. Morgan or some high-powered magnate like that. It was solid, big and cool-looking with burgundy brick walls, a terra-cotta tile roof and bay-cottage windows of white stone.

I went up the three broad steps to the massive oak and iron-studded door and rang the bell.

An elderly man, got up to look like a butler, opened the door “come in, sir,” he said, without even asking me what I wanted.

I followed him into a Large lounge which was furnished in the most modern style I’d seen this side of Lexington. I can’t say I liked it a lot, but it stank of money and I guess that was all Peppi ever worried about.

The butler looked at me questioningly. He was big with white hair and faded blue eyes. One side of his face was lifted as if he’d had a stroke at one time. It gave him a disagreeable look. “Did you wish to see anyone in particular, sir?” he asked.

“Yeah,” I said, “I’d like a word with Mr. Kruger.”

“Mr. Kruger, sir?” The butler’s eyebrows shot up as if I’d asked to see the President.

“That’s right,” I said, smiling at him.

“I’m afraid, sir,” the butler returned with dignity, “Mr. Kruger never sees anyone except by appointment. Would his secretary do?”

“Look,” I said, “I’m sorry about the appointment. I couldn’t care less about the secretary. I want to see Kruger. Go tell him that Ross Millan of the New York Recorder wants to see him and tell him it’s important.”

The butler studied me for a second. “Very good, sir,” he said and floated away upstairs, leaving me standing in the lounge.

After a while, I began to think that he had completed his stroke and was lying upstairs making noises. The hands of the big old-fashioned grandfather clock kept moving forward with little jerky jumps and I got more and more tired of standing there.

Then I heard someone coming. It wasn’t the butler. Whoever it was came along the passage quickly and lightly and then a girl came down the broad staircase. She was thin, fragile and dark. Her eyebrows were unusually straight and her eyes were very large, cobalt blue with big irises and a vague expression. She wore a pair of biscuit-coloured slacks, a burgundy sweater and a biscuit-coloured handkerchief round her head. She was all right until you came to her mouth. That gave her away. It was a tight, lipless slit of red. I could imagine her sitting up in a half dark room pulling the legs off spiders and getting a lot of fun out of it. Back and front her figure looked like she had been fed through a mangle.

“I’m Mr. Kruger’s secretary,” she said. Her voice was deep and musical.

“Well, well,” I said, “well, well, well.”

One of her eyebrows went up and she tried again, “you wanted to see Mr. Kruger?”

“That was the idea, but I’ve changed my mind. My doctor only lets me have one meal a day,” I said, adjusting my necktie. “What do you do with your evenings?”

“You’re Millan, of the New York Recorder, aren’t you?” she asked. The cobalt blue eyes had darkened.

“Yep,” I said, “Ross Millan. Just plain Ross to you. How about dating me up? The demand’s brisk, but I can manage to-night.”

“What did you want to see Mr. Kruger about?”

Somehow I didn’t feel I was making much headway, but I wasn’t discouraged, “I’ll tell him that,” I said gently. “No offence meant, but this is a little matter between men. Women have their secrets too, you know.”

“Then you’d better come upstairs,” she said and turned and walked back the way she had come.

When we reached the top of the stairs I drew level and walked by her side. “I was just kidding,” I said suddenly. “Don’t let it get your vitamins in an uproar.”

She didn’t say anything.

“Could I have your name?” I went on, “I’d like to know how to introduce you to my friends.”

“Lydia Brandt,” she said, without turning her head, “and I don’t expect to meet your friends.”

“You never know,” I said. “Strange things happen.”

She opened a door that led off the passage and stood aside, “Mr. Kruger will be in a minute.”

“But, you’re not leaving me?” I said, wandering into the room.

The cobalt blue eyes looked sultry, but she didn’t say anything. She closed the door behind her and left me in the room which was large and lined with books.

I glanced round with interest. The library was made up of the most complete collection of crime books I’d ever seen. Even police headquarters couldn’t compete with it. The books ranged from sixteenth century crime to modern crime. There were books on poison, forensic medicine, murder, blackmail, kidnapping, assault and, in fact, something of everything.

I was just getting interested in the second volume of Havelock Ellis when the door opened and Peppi came in.

All right, I admit I startled me. I hadn’t seen him for a couple of years and then, as I’ve already told you, that was when he was rum running.

Now, of course, he had come up in the world. I expected a change, but not such a change as this.

He was dressed in a grey silk dressing gown with a scarlet cord. Under this, he seemed to be wearing white silk pyjamas. His face was smooth and unwrinkled as if he’d had all the electric massage in the world working on him. His small white hands were soft and well cared for and his finger nails manicured. But his eyes were the same. They were the same small pebbles of blue stone and his large bald head was the same except it shone as if he had polished it with beeswax.

We looked at each other, then he shut the door and came further into the room.

“You’ve got a swell library, Peppi,” I said, saying the first thing that came into my head. “Who put it together for you?”

He stroked the side of his nose with his thumb. That was something new. In the old days, Peppi hadn't time to affect mannerisms. "What do you want?" His voice was high pitched and soft. Rather like the tones of a Jap and the sound of it brought back a host of memories. I'd forgotten that high pitched, hissing voice.

"What a success story," I said, admiring him. "I remember you a couple of years ago. And look at you now!"

"What do you want?" he repeated.

I paused and regarded him. The dead pebbly eyes told me that this wasn't going to be a love feast, so I decided to get to the point.

"Where's Kelly?" I asked.

"Kelly?" he repeated and frowned. "What Kelly? What are you talking about?" There was a thin edge of anger in his voice.

"There's a fellow called Kelly I want to get in touch with," I said, half sitting on the big oak reading table. "I hear he wanted to find you, so I thought if you two had made contact you wouldn't mind putting him in touch with me."

He studied me carefully. "I don't know any Kelly," he said, at last.

I shrugged, "Well, that's too bad. Okay, then I'll drift. I was under the impression that you did."

"What do you want him for?" The question suddenly shot out like the forked tongue of a snake.

"I wouldn't take up your time," I said, pushing myself away from the table. "It's nothing that'd interest you."

He said, "Don't go. Sit down." There wasn't any invitation in his voice. It was an order. Well, I had nothing to lose, so I sat down in a big armchair and relaxed.

He fidgetted with the cord of his dressing gown and I could see he was thinking about something.

"You've left the Recorder?" he said abruptly.

I inclined my head, "Yep," I said. "Maddox tossed me out. That's gratitude, after all . . ."

"What are you doing now?" he broke in.

"Living on my wits and capital," I said carelessly. "I'll get by. Why the interest?"

"I could give you something."

I looked at him. The frog-like face, the blue stoney eyes, the bald glistening head told me nothing. All the same, I didn't like it. I knew the kind of racket Peppi went in for. It wasn't my line, but I had to be careful how I told him.

"I'm not looking for anything right now," I said slowly.

"It's a good job," he said simply and sat down in an armchair opposite me. "There's nothing you wouldn't like."

I made grunting noises. "What would it be?" I asked.

"Lu Andasca is running for election," he said. "He wants someone to handle his publicity. It's worth two hundred and fifty dollars a week for the right man. You could do it."

I was startled. "Lu Andasca?" I said, "I don't know him."

"He's all right," Peppi said, examining his neat finger nails. "He's fine."

"What makes you think I could do it?" I asked, playing for time.

"You could do it," he repeated. "Two fifty dollars isn't bad, is it?"

"It's swell," I said, "but, right now I've got one or two things . . ."

"I wouldn't bother about those things," Peppi said carefully.

We looked at each other.

"After all, what do they amount to?" he went on "Shumway wouldn't interest you. He's an old man and finished. Kelly wouldn't interest you. He's a crum. Leave the girl alone. You don't want girls. They mess up the works."

Well, that was telling me. I didn't know what to say.

He sat back in his chair and stared up at the ceiling, "If Andasca gets in, there'll be a lot of work to do," he said. "I'm interested personally."

I took a quick gander at my watch. It was nearly lunch time. "Look," I said, "I've got a lunch date. Will you let me think it over?"

"There's plenty of time. I'll get my chauffeur to drop you. Where are you going to eat?"

I said "Manetta's" without thinking.

"I see," he said. "Do you think she's good looking?"

I stared at him "Her?" I said. "What ...?"

“Myra Shumway. She’s your date, isn’t she?”

“What do you know about Myra Shumway? What’s the idea, Peppi?” I sat up. He was talking too many riddles.

“Excuse me a minute,” he said and got up and went out. I sat there wondering what the hell it was all about. Then he came back after a minute and smiled for the first time. “So you want to think it over?” he said.

“Now look, Peppi,” I said, “what do you know about Myra Shumway? Let’s get this straight.”

“I read the newspapers,” he said indifferently, “I hear things. I always hear things. Andasca is more important to me. Can you say yes or no?”

I stood up. “Give me until to-morrow. Where can I meet the guy?”

“To-morrow then,” he said. “Call me. I’ll fix a meeting. You want my car?”

I shook my head. “No,” I said, “I’ll take a taxi.”

He suddenly seemed bored with me and anxious for me to go. “Then you’ll cal. Two fifty is worth thinking about,” and he went out of the room.

He hadn’t been gone three seconds before the butler came in. “This way, sir,” he said and took me downstairs to the front door.

I was on the street and the door was closed behind me before I could collect my bewildered wits. I stood staring up at the big house and I felt someone was watching me.

So I waved to a cab and told the driver to take me to Manetta’s.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THERE was no sign of Myra when I got to Manetta's, so I went into the bar.

"I'll have a mint-julep," I said to the barman. "And listen, I belong to the crushing school. Don't just soak the mint leaves, crush 'em. Do you get it?"

"We always crush them here, sir," the barrnan said, smiling, "and we wipe the rim of the glass with mint as well."

"That's fine," I said, "I don't have to tell you anything, but there are guys who soak their mint."

"They're just ignorant, sir," he returned and went to the end of the bar to fix my drink. I lit a cigarette and thought about Peppi. I just couldn't make out why he had offered me a job. Knowing Peppi I guessed there was something behind. It all and I wouldn't mind laying a bet that he knew Kelly and that Kelly had been to see him.

While I was thinking, a girl came in. A girl in a flame coloured silk dress that reached an inch below her knees. Across her shoulders she wore a white silk scarf-handkerchief with large red spots and her cute little hat of red and white felt was perched on the side of her head in a saucy tilt.

It was Myra.

And yet, somehow, I didn't recognize her for a moment. There was something in the way she moved and an unfamiliar expression in her eyes that made her almost a stranger to me.

As soon as she saw me she waved, smiled and came over.

"There you are," she said. "Have I kept you waiting?"

"I—I didn't recognize you," I said, "maybe it's the new dress."

She gave me a sharp glance, "Do you like it?" she asked, smiling again. "Especially for you."

"I think it's swell," I said, wondering what was different about her. "Let's sit down. I've had a strenuous hour."

She went over to one of the tables and sat down. I followed her. "Well," I said when we were settled with our drinks, "it's nice to rest my eyes on a beautiful woman." I looked at her knees with interest, "You've got pretty elbows," I went on, "I don't seem to have noticed them before."

She laughed. "You've developed an. awful squint since we last met."

“Yeah,” I said, watching her closely. “You got rid of Whisky then?”

“I got rid of him,” there was a little note of grimness in her voice that made me stare still more intently. She smiled, but her eyes weren’t amused. “Did you have an interesting morning?”

“I certainly did,” I said and I told her about Peppi. She sat quietly listening and when I was through she said, “What are you going to do?”

“You mean about the job? Why, I guess nothing. I wouldn’t want to work for Peppi.”

“But, isn’t it a good job?” she asked, surprised.

“I don’t know. The money’s all right. But Peppi’s a bad guy to work with. He won’t last.”

“But you’re not working with Peppi,” she pointed out. “You’d be working with this Andasca, wouldn’t you?”

“It’s the same thing. Andasca would be Peppi’s stooge.”

“You ought to think about it,” she went on, “what will you do otherwise?”

I finished my drink, “I’ll think about it but let’s eat now,” I said, getting up.

We went into the restaurant.

After the waiters had fussed around, and we had chosen our meal, I said, “Seriously, don’t you think we ought to find your father first?”

She lifted her shoulders, “Oh, I’ve been thinking about that. You know, I don’t care very much one way or the other.”

I looked at her, “You don’t, huh?”

“No.”

“What about this girl who’s impersonating you?”

Again she shrugged. “She can’t hurt me, can she? If my father wants a cheap victory, I’m big enough to let him have it. But, don’t let’s talk about that. Let’s talk about you. Don’t you think you ought to look around for a job?”

“So you’re considering me now, are you?” I said. “That’s new, coming from you.”

She looked up and I caught a look in her eyes that set my blood jumping in my veins.

“Why shouldn’t I think about you and your future?” she asked, putting her hand on mine.

“You wouldn’t suddenly have taken into your head that you could like me a little?” I said, squeezing her hand.

“I might,” she said, “I might like you quite a lot. But, you’d have to have a steady job.”

“So what?” I said, “I can get a steady job. A guy with my experience . . .”

“Why not see Andasca and find out if you could work with him?” she suggested, a little too anxiously.

“Aren’t you giving this guy an awful build up?” I asked suspiciously, “I believe you want me to work for him.”

“I want you to get fixed up in a good job.”

“Well, it seems to me you’re pushing Andasca on me,” I returned. “I’ve already told you what I think of Peppi and his set-up. I can get a job, but it won’t be with Andasca.”

“You’re being pig-headed.” There was a note of anger in her voice. “Where else do you think you can earn two fifty a week?”

“That’s not such a lot of dough,” I returned. “Just shooting in articles would get me double that.”

She bit her lip and looked away. “Well, if that’s how you feel about it,” she said and jerked her hand from under mine.

It struck me that the lunch wasn’t going to be a success and I wanted to get her somewhere where we could have this out. There was something at the back of her mind she hadn’t told me and I wanted to know what it was.

We finished lunch almost in silence. When we did speak it was about the people in the room and stuff like that and all through the meal she didn’t once look me in the eye. By the time I got the check and followed her out of the restaurant I was feeling a little low. We stood waiting for a taxi in silence, then when one drew up, I said, “Well, what do we do? Shall we go back and take Whisky for a walk? Or shall we sit in the park or what?”

“The park,” she said.

I hadn’t been in Central Park for two years. It was nice to get back there. It was just like it always was. I guess in another fifty years it’ll be the same as it is to-day. Mothers and nursemaids, minding children on roller skates, wagons, scooters and bikes, will be reading and gossiping in the sun long after I’ve been put under ground. Row-boats were lying on the lake as thick as water bugs and they’ll be there too. Your born and bred New Yorker with a modest income doesn’t miss the country much. He’s got Central Park with thirty tennis courts, nineteen ball fields, six hockey fields and four-and-a-half miles of bridle paths to take his girl along in the evening. That’s enough for him and it’s enough for me.

We sat on a seat in the shade and watched the people mill around. It was nice just to sit there, but at the back of my mind I had plenty to think about. When I tried to take her hand, she shifted away from me.

“Don’t make an exhibition,” she said sharply.

“Who cares?” I asked, surprised. “Let’s talk about ourselves, Myra.”

“Of course,” she said, “what about ourselves?”

“Do we get married?” I said, not knowing whether that was what I wanted or not, but anxious to see how she would react.

“I don’t think so,” she said, staring across the lake at the distant couples walking close together on the other side. “Why get married? Anyway, I wouldn’t marry a man who hasn’t got a position, Why should I? I’ve been getting on all right on my own.”

“People don’t get married for position or money,” I said gently. “They get married because they love each other.”

“Who told you that?” she glanced at me quickly and laughed. “That sounds like ‘What Every Girl Should Know.’ That love stuff went out with the Civil War.”

“There are times,” I said crossly, “when I’d like to throw you into a lake. Can’t we be serious once in a while?”

“Not until you get a job. Then I might.”

“Okay, if I get a job, you’ll think about it?”

“If the job’s good enough.”

“You know, Angel skin, I’m getting a little tired of your mercenary outlook.”

She pouted. “Will you go see Andasca?” she said, “just to please me?”

“What about you?” I said, hoping to side-track. “What am I to tell Doc and Sam? Don’t you want to find your father or Kelly or the girl who looks like you?”

“Ross,” she said, gripping my hand tightly “so long as we have each other nothing matters. I just want you and I to be together always. Can’t we forget about the other two?”

“Well, we could drop them,” I said slowly, “but we’d have to tell them.”

“Then let’s tell them,” she said eagerly. “Let’s tell them now.”

“Okay,” I said, “I don’t mind” and I glanced at my watch. It was just after three o’clock.

“They should be in, unless Sam’s gone down to the poolroom.”

As we walked towards the long flight of stone steps that led out of the park, she said, “Will you see Andasca?”

“Yeah,” I said, “I’ll see him sometime this evening.”

“Promise?” she said, pressing my arm against her side.

“Promise,” I said. “If it means all that to you.”

As we entered the apartment, Sam came out of the kitchen with a worried look on his face. “There you are,” he said, relieved. “Is Whisky with you?”

“Why, no,” I said, “Myra didn’t take him.”

Sam looked distressed, “Hell!” he said. “Then he’s lost. He went out soon after you’d gone,” he went on to Myra. “He ain’t been back. I’ve looked up and down the street, but there’s no sign of him. I thought maybe he followed you and you’d taken him for a walk.”

Myra shook her head, “I haven’t seen him,” she said.

“Oh, he’ll turn up,” I said, tossing my hat on the chair, “you know Whisky. He’s found a lady friend and is getting acquainted.”

Doc Ansell came in just then. “Found Whisky?” he asked anxiously.

“Don’t get excited,” I said. “He’ll turn up. He’s just finding his feet. A big dog like that wants some exercise and he’s having a look around.”

Ansell looked at Myra, “Well,” he said, smiling, “how pretty you look this morning. Did you have a nice lunch?”

“Yes, thank you,” she said, pulling off her hat. “It was very nice.”

Sam said, “Aint you worried about Whisky?”

She blinked, “Why, no. If Ross thinks . . .”

“Ross?” Sam’s eyes opened, “Gee! Have you two gone soft on each other?”

Myra turned on me. “You’d better tell them,” she said and ran out of the room.

Ansell and Sam looked at me suspiciously. “What’s buzzin’?” Sam demanded.

I wandered over to an armchair and sat down. “I don’t know,” I returned. “A lot’s happened since I last saw you,” and I told them about Peppi and Andasca and Lydia Brandt.

They sat listening in silence, then Doc said, "I've heard of Andasca. He's no good to anyone."

"So have I," Sam said, "he used to carry a gun for Jo-jo in Chi when I was there. You don't want to get mixed up with him."

I jerked my thumb at the ceiling. "That's what she wants," I said, slowly. "She wants me to drop you two and live with her. She says nothing else matters so long as we have each other and I work for Andasca. What do you make of that?"

They didn't make anything of it.

"She doesn't want to be bothered with her father. She doesn't mind being impersonated. Almost as if she was someone else," I went on, looking hard at Ansell.

"Yes," he said, "I see what you mean. Now, I wonder . . ."

"It wants looking into," I said, closing my eyes. "Maybe I'd better see Andasca."

"I think so," Doc said. "Take Sam with you."

"Where'll I find him?" I said. "Either of you know?"

"Last time I heard of him," Sam said, "he lived in a joint off Mulberry Park. Maybe someone knows what he's doing now."

"We'll go to Mulberry Park," I said. "In the meantime keep an eye on the girl friend. Don't let her leave the apartment. I may be wrong, Doc, but I'm suspicious of her change of heart."

"Leave it to me," Doc said, and we went out into the street, leaving him on his own.

Now, Mulberry Park lies north of the Brooklyn Bridge and a hundred yards or so from Chinatown. Right now it is a tree-shaded square which the city has equipped with swings, wading pools and showers for the kiddies. It looks quiet and faded but a century ago it was the toughest spot in Manhattan; Five Points was situated there and nearby a huge rambling building called the Old Brewery where swarms of Negroes and whites used to live. Seventy-five men, women and children once lived in one room of the Old Brewery. That ought to tell you how tough the place was. Murder was a daily occurrence and the kids in Old Brewery lived for years without leaving the rooms because in the hails they might get themselves knocked off by some guy with the blood-itch. The young punks were strong enough to stand up for themselves met their pals in alleys and there formed the first gangs of New York.

For the next hundred years the stretch from Mulberry Bend through Chatham Square and up the Bowery remained the centre of the sin industries of the metropolis. The gangs flourished.

So in those days the Mulberry Park district was plenty tough. Now the old gangs were dead, Chinatown and Mulberry Bend had faded into seeming innocence, but the district was still the breeding ground for thugs.

Anyway, it was like a breath of home to Sam as we into the Square and picked our way through the kids that cluttered up the sidewalk.

“Where do we go from here?” I asked, feeling the eyes of the slatternly women hostile on my back as they stood in open doorways of their drab, dirty apartments.

“There’s a guy I used to know,” Sam said, head, “who had a gin mill around here some place. what was his name?” He screwed up his face while he thought.

I waited patiently, trying to pretend I wasn’t there. Even the kids had stopped playing and were watching us.

“Good-time Waxey,” Sam said suddenly. “That’s the runt. He’ll know about Andasca. He knew every punk around here.”

We found Good-time Waxey behind the bar of an evil looking dive at the corner of Mulberry and Kenmare. He was lolling over the bar, the mid-day sporting sheet spread out before him, looking down the list of horses for the three o’clock handicap.

He looked up suspiciously as we fumbled our way into the dark little tavern.

“Hey, Waxey,” Sam said, grinning, “still carrying your corns in a snood?”

Waxey stiffened. His fat, brutish face, glistening with sweat, lit up and he shoved out a fist the size of a mellon. “Bogle!” he said, shaking hands, “where ta hell yuh spring from?”

Sam grinned as he pumped the big man’s arm up and down. “Thought I’d look the old dump over,” he said. “How’s tricks, Waxey?”

Waxey lost his smile, “Looka,” he said, “six years I work in dis burg, an’ where does it get me? A lousy handout a thoity bucks a month! Starvin’ an’ freezin’ . . . fuh what? Peanuts!” and he spat disgustedly on the floor.

“Gees!” Sam said, his eyes opening. “I thought this burg was all right.”

“It was,” Waxey returned darkly, “when da boys were around. Lucky . . . remember Lucky? . . . When he was around, dat was somethin’. But, now . . . Hell, might as well wait for Santa Claus tuh take care of me.”

“Meet my pal Millan,” Sam said, pushing me forward. “He’s an all right guy, Waxey. We work together.”

Waxey looked at me sharply, then stuck out his hand. “Any pal a Sam’s pal a mine,” he said, crushing my hand in a grip that made me shuffle my feet.

“We looked in ‘cause we thought you might wise us up,” Sam said, lowering his voice.

Waxey stroked his shapeless nose and his little green eyes showed interest. “Yuh in a racket, Sam?” he asked, hopefully.

“Not tight now,” Sam returned cautiously. “But, it looks like it was headin’ that way. What do you know about Andasca?”

Waxey blinked. “What yew mean?”

“Just that. This guy’s going to work for him,” Sam said, jerking his thumb in my direction. “But he wants to know what line he’s in first.”

Waxey studied me. “Lu’s gettin’ somewhere,” he said at last. “Twenty buck shoits. A hundred an’ fifty buck custom tailored suits. Da fat a da land he live off of. An’ he’s got a flock a dames at’d make youse guys water at da mout’.”

“But what’s the set-up?” Sam persisted.

Waxey lowered his voice, “Peppi Kruger’s behind him,” he said “Between da two a dem, dey have da Bowery sewed up tight, see?”

“How tight?” Sam asked, looking hopefully at the row of dusty bottles behind Waxey’s head, “and how about a drink, Waxey?”

“Sure.” Waxey produced a black bottle without a label from under the counter. “Dis is da McCoy,” he went on, slapping the bottle down in front of us. “Help yuhselves.”

While Sam poured the drinks, I said, “I heard Kruger’s almost washed up, that’s why I’m nervous about going in with them.”

“Hoid what?” Waxey gasped, “yuh crazy? Looks yew, both dese guys are tops, see? Nuttin’s goin’ tuh stop ‘em. Dere ain’t any punk tuh touch ‘em now.”

But I wasn’t listening any snore. I was staring out of the tavern into the street. “Hang on, Sam,” I said suddenly, “I’ll be right back,” and I left them gaping after me.

From across the street I had caught a glimpse of a dog, moving along the shadows of the wall. That in itself wasn’t anything, but the dog was a wolfhound and you don’t see many wolfhounds in Mulberry Park.

I was certain it was Whisky.

By the time I got into the open he had disappeared, but I knew which way he had gone and I chased across the street, ducked down an evil smelling alley and ran on. Something on the ground made me pause and looking down I found that I was following a trail of bright bloodstains in a disjointed string of small circles.

I increased my pace and began calling. At the end of the alley I could see Whisky dragging himself forward painfully and slowly.

“Whisky!” I shouted and ran forward, just as the dog dropped wearily to the ground. “What’s the matter, old dog?” I asked, bending over him anxiously.

There was no need to ask. There was a great patch of hardening blood on his shoulder. Across his head was a livid gash as if he had been hit very hard with a stick. Blood ran from his foot where he must have got himself a pretty severe cut. Whisky was in a bad way and from the exhausted look in his eyes I could see he was in need of some quick attention.

“Take it easy,” I said, kneeling beside him, “I’ll get you out of here.”

“Don’t waste time with me,” Whisky growled. “They’ve got her. They kidnapped her when she was going to meet you. That wasn’t Myra who was waiting for you at Manetta’s . . . that was the other one.”

“The other one?” I repeated stupidly. “Who kidnapped who? What are you talking about, Whisky boy?”

Whisky struggled to speak, then, a look of terrified dismay came into his eyes. His teeth clicked and he half struggled to his feet, only to flop back exhausted.

“Take it easy,” I said, “I’ll get Sam and we’ll fix you up, you poor old devil. But, I’ve got to know what you’re talking about. Why should anyone want to kidnap Myra?”

Whisky still clicked his teeth as if he were struggling to speak and then to my shocked and horrified surprise he began to bark.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BY the time I got back to Waxey's dive and had collected Bogle the full meaning of what Whisky was trying to tell me had sunk in. It was completely fantastic. But, then again, the whole thing was fantastic.

So the girl hadn't been Myra and Myra had been kidnapped. The sooner I got back to Ansell and put the screws to the girl the better. Now that Whisky had lost the power of talking, I wasn't going to get much help from him. I would have to wait until he was well enough to take us to the place where he had been attacked. That might give me a clue.

It was no use telling Bogle that there were two Myras. He would only think I'd gone crazy. Besides, it would be a waste of time trying to convince him.

So I left Whisky in his charge and grabbed a taxi. I had told Sam to get Whisky to a dog hospital as quickly as he could and then get back to our apartment pronto. Sam, when he saw how badly hurt Whisky was, became wildly angry and upset. I managed to convince him how important it was for him to return immediately to the apartment without actually telling him details.

It was about the longest ride I ever had in a taxi and I kept urging the driver to greater speed. I don't know why but I had the jitters all right.

When I reached our apartment block I tossed the driver his money and ran up the steps.

A moment later I was standing inside our apartment and for some unaccountable reason I felt scared. There was the same eerie atmosphere that I felt when I found Quintl's body. No sound came to me and I called Ansell in a voice that I hardly recognized as my own.

I walked cautiously into the kitchen and looked round. There was no one there. More assured, I returned to the living room. Maybe Doc and the girl had gone out. I was just going to have a look in the bedrooms when something caught my eye which brought me up with a jolt.

From under the sofa I could see something red. I knelt down and looked. It was Myra's flame coloured dress. It had been screwed up into a ball and shoved under the sofa. This startled me for a moment. I hooked it out and stood up.

As I unfolded it I touched a wet, sticky patch and looking at my hand I found blood on it. Right down the front of the dress was a large bloodstain, still damp.

Just for a moment I thought that she'd been killed and it gave me a tremendous shock. But when I examined the dress there was no sign of a bullet hole or a slit from a knife. It looked as if the blood had come not from her but from someone else.

Throwing the dress aside I went upstairs and blundered into Ansell's bedroom.

He lay across the bed. There was blood on the floor and on the walls. I hadn't realized what a little guy he was until I saw him lying like that. The front of his coat was bloodstained and his face was blue-grey. Until I touched him I thought he was dead.

And when I touched him and felt his cold hand I realized just how fond I had become of him and a wild, destructive rage swept through me. If I could have laid hands on the person who had done this I'd have killed without hesitation.

"Doc," I said gently, scared to lift him, "what is it, Doc?"

He opened his eyes and blinked up at me, but no look of recognition came from him.

"It's me . . . Millan," I said, kneeling close to him. "What can I do? Are you badly hurt?" I knew the answer to that one before I said it. I didn't think he'd last another two minutes.

He tried to speak, but couldn't quite make it. I watched his lips move and I put my ear close to them, but I couldn't hear what he was trying to say.

But he had to talk. He couldn't go like that without telling me what had happened and who had done this. So I bolted to the sitting room and poured two Inches of Scotch into a glass and rushed back to him.

"Come on, Doc," I said, lifting his head. "Get hold of yourself."

The whisky did the trick, but I could see he was going fast. My only hope now was to keep him alive long enough to hear what had happened.

I could see he wanted to talk and I could see he was making a tremendous effort.

"You were right. She wasn't Myra," he whispered at last. "She attacked me soon after you left. I asked for It, I should have waited. Look out for her, Ross, she's dangerous. Its the way I thought. She's the bad one." He closed his eyes and I thought he had gone, but he was only resting for a second or so.

I couldn't really believe that it was possible and yet I knew the Myra we had worked with and fooled with could never have done this to him.

He began speaking again, "They'll try and pin this on Myra," he said falteringly. "You've got to cover it up somehow, Ross. I told you this might happen. Where's Myra? What's happened to her?"

"Now don't worry, Doc," I said. "I'll fix it. You just relax. I'll get a doctor for you. You'll be all right."

"You've got to find her and get her an alibi," Doc went on. "Don't call the cops until you've been through the place and cleaned up anything that might connect her with this. The other one's bad. You've got to catch her and get rid of her before the end of the month. Don't let her merge into Myra again. She'll try and do it after the full moon."

I couldn't understand what he was talking about, but there was nothing else to do but to listen. His voice was getting weaker and he died as Sam walked in.

When Sam saw Doc he ran over to him, his eyes scared.

"He's gone, Sam," I said, getting off the bed. And then I realized the hopelessness of trying to explain to him how it had happened. But, I had to do it. Sam already knew too much and the thought of trying to get this fantastic business into his thick head appalled me.

Bogle took one look at Doc, then he turned and grabbed me. His grip nearly ripped the coat and shirt off my back. I thought he was going to have some kind of a fit. His face was dark with congested blood and his eyes were wild.

"Who did it?" he said, ramming me against the wall. "Open up, you punk, who did it?"

I knew it wouldn't do to tell him. He wasn't in a state to cope with a story like that. So I said I didn't know and tried to break his grip. It was like heaving against the teeth of a bear—trap.

"Take it easy, Sam," I said, "this won't get you anywhere."

He gave a snort and then shoved me away. I banged against the wall and nearly went over. He returned to Doc and kneeling by him he took his hand. Then he began to cry, so I went out quietly and left them together.

When I got downstairs, I didn't know what to do. I felt sick about Doc. I felt scared for Myra and I wanted to get my hands on the other girl. I didn't really think of her as the other girl, but as someone who had killed Doc. I went into the sitting room and poured myself out a stiff glass of whisky. Then I sat down and tried to think.

A murder had been committed. That meant the cops. It meant trying to explain something to them that I couldn't explain to myself. If I didn't get my explanation over, then Myra would be on the spot. The bloodstained dress was enough to set the law working on her right away. I finished my whisky and picked up the dress. Doc had said to destroy any clue that might point to her. Well, this was the first one to go.

Then the dress was snatched out of my hand by Bogle who had entered silently. He took one look at the bloodstain and he knew she had done it. "Where is she?" he said quietly.

I always looked on Bogle as a harmless sort of a jerk. But not now. He looked like a killer and he looked half crazy.

"We've got to talk about this," I said. "Have a drink, Sam. It'll pull you together."

"So she killed him, did she?" he said, through his teeth. "She ain't going to get away with it. That little punk was good to me. Him and me got along fine until you came along. You and

her. You think a lot of that broad, don't you? Well there won't be much of her to think about when I'm through."

"Don't be a fool, Sam," I said. "I know how you feel about Doc. He was a swell guy. But she didn't kill him."

"What's this?" he held up the dress.

"Oh, I know it looks like she killed him, but she didn't."

"The cops can work it out," he said, "I'm going to get a load of law here and let 'em find her. Then if she slips off the hot seat, I'll fix her," and he went over to the telephone.

If the cops came and found that dress, then I knew nothing could save Myra. She'd be hounded all over the country.

I jerked him round, "Leave the cops out of this," I said, "we'll handle it, Sam. Kruger's behind it. Can't you see that?"

Bogle wrenched himself away. "Do you think I'm crazy?" he said, "I know you're nuts about her, but that ain't stopping me. If we don't bring the cops in, how do you think we'll explain about Doc?"

I shrugged. "Well, if that's how you feel about it," I said, and moved so that I was behind him.

I didn't like doing it, but it was the only way. I had to have a little time to clear things and make sure that Myra hadn't left anything for the police besides the dress.

But Bogle was expecting trouble. He turned and faced me. "Don't start anything," he said viciously. "It won't get you nowhere."

"There's no harm trying," I said and swung over a punch that caught him on his cheekbone.

He swayed back as my fist landed, so he rode most of the steam out of it. Then he moved in and his fist caught me in the ribs, sending me against the wall. Bogle could punch all right.

He lowered his hands. "Cut it out," he said, "I don't want to hurt you and if you make me mad you're going to get hurt plenty."

I thought that was likely. But I could see the mess that was ahead if I didn't stop Bogle.

I edged forward, "Can't you use your head, Sam?" I pleaded, looking for an opening to land my right. "I tell you Myra didn't kill him. She loved that old guy as much as you did. She wouldn't touch him. You ought to know that."

"Yeah?" Bogle said. "Then how come that dress? We left her with Doc, didn't we? Where is she now?"

“Kruger’s got her, you fat fool,” I said, suddenly realizing that we were both wasting time. “Don’t you see?” I went on, Kruger or some of his mob came here. For some reason they wanted Myra. Doc tried to stop them and they killed him. While we’re bellyaching, they’re taking her further away.”

For a brief moment, Sam looked as if he was going to fall for it, then his eyes darkened again. “The dress,” he said impatiently. “Why should Kruger want her? A guy as big as him wouldn’t want her.”

Then we both saw it at once. How I missed it in the first place I don’t know. I guess it was the shock of seeing the dress and then finding Doc that had blinded me to it. On the mantelpiece was a white envelope, propped up against the clock.

We both made a rush for it. I nearly reached it, but Bogle suddenly lashed out and his fist caught me below the ear, sending me over. It was like the Empire State Building had fallen on me and I don’t know how long I was out. It couldn’t have been more than a few seconds, but it was long enough for Bogle to open the letter and read it.

I sat up slowly and one look at Bogle’s face told me that nothing further I could say would convince him that Myra hadn’t killed Doc.

“It’s for you,” he said in a cold flat voice. “She says she knocked him off and that she’s going away. She’ll write you again when things have eased down,” and he slipped the letter into his pocket. “Talk yourself out of that!”

I shook my head clear and stood up. I had to get that letter. That was enough to send Myra to the chair. That and the dress. I realized the full significance of what Doc had said. The girl who had killed Doc was determined to pin it on Myra. With Bogle as a witness the cops had an open and shut case.

Somehow, I had to explain about the two Myras to Sam. It was the only way to save her.

“For the love of mike,” I said, “will you listen to me? Doc told me what happened. When I reached him, he managed to say enough for me to know how it went. The girl who met me at Manetta’s was not Myra. It was the girl who’s been impersonating her. She’s exactly like her,” and I went on to tell him about Whisky.

Bogle said, “You’re soft on that girl, ain’t you? You’d do anything to save her neck. Well, you’re not kidding me with a yarn like that. Tell it to the cops.”

I never hoped he’d believe it, but I had to try. There was only one way to settle this. I had to destroy both the areas and the letter. So I went into action with both hands. But, I went in much more cautiously this time. I feinted with my left and then hooked with my right. Bogle knew all about that kind of fighting. He took the right on his forearm and came back with a heavy punch to my face. But, I was getting mad now and I rushed him, smothering his punches and driving him across the room. I forced him against the wall and slammed in two solid punches before he drove me away with a stunning uppercut.

I went in again and ran into a haymaker that nearly took my head off my shoulders. I felt myself floating and then I whammed against the wall with a jolt that knocked the wind out of me.

Bogle shuffled across the room after me. As I crawled to my feet, I caught a glimpse of his face and that sent me cold. He was fighting mad now and I'd be lucky to get out of this alive. He banged me one on the side of the head before I was half up and then pumped a couple into my stomach.

Being hit by Bogle was like being beaten by a sledge hammer. My ribs bent every time he hit me in the body. Those slams hurt more than when he caught me in the face.

I managed to shake myself loose and got in a lucky one that sent him back. Somehow I went in and landed one on his mouth. He grunted and I knew he was hurt. But, I couldn't stop him. He was too tough and he was twenty pounds heavier.

He got in close and hit me four times in the ribs with punches that didn't travel more than a couple of inches. It felt like being under a pile drive. I felt my knees going and I grabbed hold of him to stop myself falling. He shoved me off and dimly I saw something coming at me. It looked like a football whizzing through the air. I couldn't do anything about it. I couldn't even try to get out of the way. Then it exploded on the side of my jaw, and that was that.

I was alone when I came to the surface. I sat up slowly and felt my jaw. It was swollen, but I was relieved it wasn't broken.

I got to my feet and wandered over to the whisky bottle. The liquor did me a lot of good and a second shot did even better. I wasn't mad at Bogle. From his point of view he had done the right thing. I'd have done the same if I'd been in his place.

I went into the bathroom and bathed my face. It looked a little better by the time I was through, and as I was leaving the bathroom I heard the wail of police sirens.

Sam was standing in the hall. His face was bruised and puffy, but he looked almost handsome beside me.

We looked at each other. Then he said a little shamefaced, "I'm sorry, Bud, but you had to stick your neck out. My beef ain't with you, but I'm not letting that dame get away with this. I can't help it if you're soft on her, can I?"

I said, "No, but you're making an awful mistake, Sam," and went into the sitting room.

Then the law walked in. There was Clancy of the Homicide Bureau, who I knew quite well, and a couple of patrolmen and a cameraman.

I heard a lot of talking going on outside in the hall, but I was past caring what happened. I had to wait to see how things shaped, then try to get Myra out of the jam.

I heard Clancy go upstairs to look at Doc. They were up there some time, then Clancy came down with Bogle, leaving the others to work on finger-prints and stuff like that in Doc's room.

Clancy was a little fat guy, with eyebrows like overgrown shrubs and a blue-black jowl which made him look tough. He usually dwelt behind a dead cigar and modelled his inners along motion picture lines. He wasn't the brightest star of the Homicide Bureau, and I was sorry he was handling the case.

He came in and stood over me. "Well, well," he said, surprised, "Ross Millan! What are you doing here?"

"Hello, Clancy," I said, leaning back in my chair, "I haven't seen you for a Long time."

He stared in astonishment at my face, then he looked at Bogle, "Hey!" he said, "what's this? You two been fighting?"

"Fighting?" I said. "What makes you think that?"

"Don't stall," he snapped, "look at your face."

"Oh, that," I shrugged. "That's the way I wear my face these days. You pick up odd habits in Mexico. Some guys wear beards, some wear ear-rings, I wear bruises. It's considered the thing in Mexico, isn't it, Sam?"

Bogle didn't say anything. He wasn't quite at ease with the cops.

"Still smart, eh?" Clancy said. "What have you two been fighting about?"

"Oh, we like to keep tough," I said, "it's got nothing to do with this business. All kidding aside, Clancy, it's just our form of self-expression."

Clancy chewed his cigar and eyed me suspiciously. "Okay," he said, "we'll skip that for the moment. How are you tied up in this business?"

I told him in a few words how I had met Doc and Bogle in Mexico, but I didn't say anything about Myra.

"What do you know about this girl?" He shot the question out as if he'd got a half a dozen cameras focussed on him and a bunch of admirers waiting for his autograph.

"Which girl?" I asked, carefully.

"You know," he said darkly, "Myra Shumway."

"I know that," I said, "but which Myra Shumway? There are two of 'em."

That slowed him down.

“What are you talking about?” he asked, “what do you mean . . . two of ‘em?”

“Look, Clancy,” I said, “there is a lot behind this business that you don’t know. It’s going to be difficult for you to understand, but if you’ll take the weight off your feet and lay off pulling the tough copper on me, I’ll try and explain.”

“Don’t listen to him,” Sam said savagely. “He’s nuts about the girl.”

Clancy hadn’t much use for Bogle, “Clam up!” he snapped.

“When I want a commentary from you I’ll let you know.” He turned to me, “Now, what is it?” he said.

I waved to a chair, “Sit down,” I said. “It’s going to take time and you’ll need all your energy to keep your brain working.”

“Leave my brain out of it. You be careful of yourself Millan. I know you think you’re smart, but if you’re trying to make a monkey out of me I’ll slam you in the cooler as a material witness. How would you like that?”

“Now don’t let’s have threats,” I said, but I was a little dismayed If I were in jail there would be no one to help Myra.

“Come on, Millan, don’t stall,” he said.

I wasn’t going to be rushed. The idea of telling a guy like Clancy the whole story of the Mexican business appalled me, but I had to do it.

So I sat and talked. Clancy sat listening with a drowsy expression in his eyes. He even put a match to his cigar, which let off a rank smell. He didn’t seem to like fit himself, because he let it out after a couple of drags. At that rate a cigar could last him a couple of weeks. This one smelt like he’d had it for years.

I nearly gave up half way, because I could see it was hopeless He didn’t know whether I was crazy or whether I was stringing him. So he just got hotter and hotter until I thought he was going to catch on fire.

“Well,” I said, “that’s the way it is. Someone’s kidnapped Myra and her other half killed Ansell.”

I didn’t mention Kruger. I knew Kruger had a lot of influence and I wanted to go for him on my own without police interference.

“What a story to take to a judge!” Clancy said, drawing a deep breath. “If I didn’t know you, Millan, and if we hadn’t knocked around in the past, I’d toss you into jail right now for wasting my time. Do you think anybody but a lunatic would believe a yarn like that?”

I waved my hand to Bogle, “Your witness, Clancy. He’ll bear me out. Sausage, talking dog, floating woman and the whole set-up.”

“Well,” Clancy snarled at Bogle, “what have you got to say? Did you see this guy turn into a sausage?”

Bogle looked at me and then at Clancy, “I told you he was trying to gum up the works,” he said. “I didn’t see any of that stuff, because it just didn’t happen.”

I half rose from my seat, “Why, you dirty heel!” I said furiously, “you know as well as I do it’s all true!”

“Like hell it is!” Clancy suddenly roared. “I’ve had enough of this, Millan. You either talk turkey or you’ll come down to headquarters.”

“But, I tell you . . .” I began.

“Okay,” Clancy said, getting to his feet, “come on, the pair of you. I’ve had all I can stand of this. We’ll see what the chief’s got to say.”

I looked at Bogle, “So that’s the way you’re going to play it.”

Bogle’s face twitched, “She’s going to pay for this,” he said viciously, “and you’re not talking her way out of it. If these flatfeet don’t pin it on her, then I’ll fix her, but she don’t knock Doc off without footin’ the bill.”

“Who are you calling a flatfoot?” Clancy demanded angrily.

Bogle sneered, “What makes you think you’re anything but a fallen arch?” he demanded.

Before Clancy could come back on this the wagon rolled up to take Doc away.

We all stood silently watching, and when the stretcher came down. Sam began to cry again.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE police captain was a guy named Summers. I knew him pretty well and he wasn't a bad guy if he felt like it. Otherwise, he had a temper like a flea on a hot stove and was liable to fly off the handle without warning.

They kept me waiting nearly four hours before they took me to his office and the wait nearly drove me crazy.

"Hullo, Millan," he said when Clancy pushed me into the room. "I'm sorry we had to keep you. Sit down."

Clancy stood behind Summers and gnawed dismally at his dead cigar.

I sat down after shaking hands. "That's all right," I said, trying to look as if I hadn't a care in the world. "It's just one of those things."

"Yep, I guess so," he studied me for a long minute, then took out a box of cigars and pushed them over, "Help yourself," he said.

When we had lit up he said, "Not like you to be mixed up in murder. I thought you were too smart for that."

"I'm not mixed up in anything," I said firmly. "Don't go making any mistake about that. I just found the poor little guy."

"Yeah, you just found him. Why did this girl leave a note telling you she had knocked him off?"

"This is a tough story to tell," I said slowly. "But, she didn't kill him and she didn't write that note. The other girl did both those things."

"The other girl?" He hid behind a cloud of oily smoke. "Oh that! Man into sausage, talking dog and floating woman. Yeah, Clancy was telling me."

Clancy shifted from one foot to the other and then a silence fell so that I could hear the watch on my wrist like it was an alarm clock.

"You've got to do better than that," Summers said at last. "I wouldn't want you telling me a whopper like that. Maybe, it amused you to kid Clancy, but it wouldn't amuse you for long to kid me."

We eyed each other and I decided that I had to think up something else.

"Okay," I said. "Why not ask the girl? Why ask me?"

“We will when we’ve found her,” Summers returned. “We’ll ask her a lot of things, then we’ll sit her on a nice hot seat and fry her.”

Well, anyway, they hadn’t found her yet. That was something.

“She was your girl, wasn’t she, Millan?” he went on casually. I shook my head.

“No, I liked her. She was good fun, but that’s all.”

“This guy Bogle says different.”

“You don’t want to believe what he says,” I returned. “You see, he was the little guy’s pal. He thinks Myra killed him and he’ll say anything to get her convicted. He’s prejudiced.”

“Don’t you think she killed him?”

“I’ve told you already,” I said sharply. “Of course she didn’t.”

“I guess you’re the only guy who thinks so. Why, she even says she killed him herself,” and he tapped a sheet of notepaper which I recognized as the note Bogle had taken.

“Well,” I said, uncrossing my legs. “You’ve got what looks like a confession and you’ve got the stained dress. There isn’t much I can do about it.”

“The knife had her finger-prints on it,” Summers said, caressing the back of his head gently. “We found a strand of her hair in the old guy’s coat. Nope, it’s a cinch, Millan, so you’d better be careful.”

“I shrugged. “Well, I can’t help you. I would if I could, but If my story’s too much for you to swallow, I give up.”

He eyed me thoughtfully. “Okay,” he said. “Give. I’ve known you a long time, Millan, and I don’t think you’re a liar. So tell me. I’ll listen anyway.”

Clancy groaned, but neither of us took any notice of him.

So I told him what I’d told Clancy, only I gave him a lot more details.

Summers listened, caressing the back of his head the whole time. His cold, blank eyes never left my face, and when I was through he nodded.

“Well, I have to hand it to you, Millan. It’s some yarn.”

“Yeah, it’s some yarn, like you say.”

“So the dog talks, huh? A real honest to gawd dog—talking. Where’s the dog now?”

“He’s in a dog hospital some place. Bogle took him. Ask Bogle. He’ll tell you.”

“We’ve already asked Bogle about the dog. He says it never talked.”

“Then telephone the dog hospitals. The nearest one to Mulberry Park ought to find him.”

Summers brightened a little. “Do it,” he said to Clancy. “I’d like to hear a dog talk.”

Then, with a sudden feeling of sickness, I remembered. “Wait,” I said. “He doesn’t talk any more. Someone hit him on the head and he just barks now.”

There was a long, painful silence and Summers’ beefy face grew dark. “Oh, so he just barks now,” he repeated, then seeing Clancy hesitate, he snapped. “Get after him all the same. I want to know if an injured dog’s been picked up recently.”

Clancy went out.

“I’m sorry Summers,” I said. “This sounds phoney, but he did talk yesterday. I swear he did.”

“So the dog doesn’t talk any more and maybe the woman’s given up floating,” Summers said, his eyes glinted with anger. “If I didn’t know you, Millan, you might be in for a bad time. I might even get some of the boys to give you a shellacking.”

I shifted restlessly. “Give me a chance to prove it,” I said suddenly. I remembered that Summers used to stake all his pay on a single cut of the cards. I’ve even seen him gamble with his next month’s salary. He was far more likely to play along if I appealed to his sporting instinct. “Look, Summers, if I bring these two girls to this office and let you see them, will that convince you?”

“How would you do that?” he asked, but the glint went out of his eyes.

“Give me a couple of weeks. I’ve got to find them first and that’ll take some digging around. But I’ll find them all right if you call off your bloodhounds and give me a free hand.”

“What do you think the newspapers’ll say if I don’t get action in the next day or so?” he asked, pulling at his short thick nose and looking at me old fashioned. “You’re in the business. You know what a ride I’ll get.”

“I’ve been in the game long enough to know that if you want to stall the newspapers you can do it,” I returned, feeling that I had the thin end in the crack and it only needed one good smack to drive it home. “There’s something much bigger than murder behind all this. It’s going to be a whale of a story and it’ll do you a hell of a lot of good to be tied up in it on the right side. I tell you, if you grab Myra Shumway and try to pin the murder on her, you’ll be passing up something that someone on top is trying to cover up. Let me handle it for a couple of weeks and I’ll give it to you on a plate.”

“What someone on top?” he asked, interested.

“That’s my affair, Summers,” I said. “I may be wrong, but I don’t think so. I’ll tell you when I’m ready.”

“I suppose you realize that I could hold you as an accessory after the fact on that statement,” Summers said, his voice suddenly cold.

“Where are your witnesses? I didn’t say anything.”

He tried to get mad, but then grinned. “I’ll give you a week,” he said. “You’ve got a week from now to bring the two girls to this office. If you don’t, then I’ll issue a warrant for your arrest as an accessory and we’ll see if we can’t persuade you to talk. How’s that?”

I didn’t hesitate. “Suits me,” I said and put out my hand.

He shook it casually. “Okay, Millan,” he said. “You can beat it. Remember, I want you here this time next week with the two girls. You’re not to leave the City unless you tell me where you’re going. Okay?”

“Okay,” I said, and made for the door.

“I don’t think you’re going to be very lucky,” he said as I was going out. “I don’t think there are two girls.”

“We’ll talk about that when next we meet,” I said, and closed the door behind me.

Clancy was coming along the passage and he stared at me.

“Where the hell do you think you’re going?” he demanded.

“Summers doesn’t want me until next week,” I said cheerfully. “Any news of my dog?”

“Yeah,” he said. “There was a wolfhound at the Eastern Dog Hospital with a bang on his dome, but he took it on the lam before anyone could take care of him. Maybe that was your dog.”

“Maybe it was,” I said. “Now, will you have a talk with Bogle about that? It looks like I’m not the only guy who can tell stories.”

Clancy’s face became grim. “I’ll talk to him,” he said sourly.

“And Clancy, if you can keep him on ice for a week, you’ll be doing me a favour.”

“I will, will I?” he looked at me hard. “What are you up to?”

“Never mind that,” I said. “You ask Summers, he’ll tell you. But Bogle’s got the wrong idea and he’ll be better off out of the way. Do what you can for me, will you? I’ll give you a good write-up if I handle the story.”

“That reminds me,” Clancy said, snapping his thick fingers. “Maddox ‘phoned through a couple of hours back. He wanted you to go around to his office right away.”

This startled me. “Maddox?” I repeated. “Wants to see me?”

“Yeah,” Clancy said.

“Okay, thanks, Clancy. Be seeing you. So long,” and I beat it out of Headquarters as fast as I could travel.

As I got into the street a cruising taxi slowed down and the driver looked at me hopefully. I nodded and he stopped.

“Recorder office,” I said, and jerked open the door. Then I paused.

There was a girl sitting in the far corner.

“What’s the idea?” I demanded, turning on the driver. “You’ve got a customer, you pudden-headed monkey.”

“Get in, Mr. Millan,” the girl said. “I want to talk to you.” The voice was familiar and I looked back into the cab. Lydia Brandt was sitting there and in her hand she held a small, businesslike automatic. Its snub nose was pointed at my waistcoat.

“Why, hello,” I said, because I couldn’t think of anything else to say.

“Get in,” she repeated. “Unless you want another belly button.”

“Not outside police headquarters,” I said hastily. “It’d be bad for their nerves,” and I got in and sat down gingerly beside her.

The driver shot the cab away from the curb and took off down the street.

Lydia Brandt was dressed in a smart olive green dress, and cerise turban, gloves, handbag and shoes. She looked like Fifth Avenue.

“Didn’t I tell you I was susceptible to your feminine lure, you beautiful butterfly? I don’t need kidnapping at the point of a gun,” I said, watching her closely because I didn’t like the efficient, almost careless way she handled the automatic. From that range a slug from that pop-gun could make me awfully unhappy.

“Mr. Kruger wants to see you,” she said indifferently. “I thought you might not be anxious to come.”

“What, not see Peppi?” I said. “You don’t know me. He’s a guy I dream about. I want his autograph and I’ll wear his old clothes.”

“Very funny,” she said, her eyes darkening. “You’ll laugh the other side of your face before long.”

“Don’t threaten me,” I returned, smiling at her. “Peppi wants to give me a job. I was going to call him anyway.”

She put the automatic on top of her bag and folded her long, slim fingers over it. Its barrel still pointed at me, but she had taken her finger off the trigger and that gave me more confidence. “You want to be sure to pick someone smaller than yourself next time you start fighting,” she said, eyeing my bruises.

“Never mind that,” I said, relaxing. “You know it was a dumb trick to pick me up outside police headquarters. Both from Peppi’s and my own point of view. It’s not the smartest thing to let the cops know that we are interested in each other.”

“What do you mean?” She looked searchingly at me.

“I’ve been turned loose, but I’m willing to bet my last pair of socks that I’ve got a load of law tailing me and I’ll be tailed from now on.”

I’d hit the right note. She looked alarmed.

“Tailing you?” she repeated and looked hastily through the little rear window.

There was a lot of traffic on the road and she didn’t see any particular car that attracted attention.

But the movement was enough for me. I had her gun before she knew what I was doing. I put it in my pocket. “You’ll excuse me,” I said. “But that heater made me nervous.”

She sat glowering at me.

“And now,” I went on. “Let’s be sensible. Tell the driver to take us to my apartment. I want to talk to you.”

“You can talk here,” she said, her voice off key.

“Don’t be a dope,” I said sharply. “You’ve had your fun. I’m going to have mine.” I leaned forward and told the driver my address. “And make it snappy, Happy,” I added.

He made no move to change direction, but kept on towards Fifth Avenue.

“One of your boys?” I said, looking at her.

She didn’t say anything, but I could see I was right. I took her automatic out of my pocket and rammed it into the driver’s neck. “Maybe you didn’t hear me the first time,” I said.

He swung off the main street and I sat back.

“You’ll pay for this,” she said angrily.

“Be smart,” I returned. “Look back now,” and I indicated a large black car sitting on our tail. “That’s the law, and let me tell you something: I’m tied up in a murder case. If they think Peppi’s in on this, they’ll take him apart just for the fun of it.”

I could see she didn’t know what to think.

“You don’t have to get your girdle twisted,” I went on. “I just want to have a little talk with you, then I’ll go over and see Peppi. But, before I do, I’ve got to shake these coppers.”

Neither of us said anything until we reached my apartment, then as she got out of the taxi I cautioned her, “Don’t make a fuss,” I said, “just go straight in.”

The driver, a thin, weedy youth looked at her enquiringly but she crossed the sidewalk without saying anything to him and entered my apartment. I gave him a half a buck. “Tell Peppi I’ll be along in a little while,” I said, and left him staring after me.

As Lydia and I entered the apartment house the big black car swept by. I caught a glimpse of Clancy, looking back through the window then I shut the front door quietly.

“Sit down and make yourself at home,” I said, waving to the armchair.

She faced me. “What do you want?” she demanded angrily. Her cobalt blue eyes were dark and the lines of her mouth hard.

I took her arm and shoved her gently into the chair. “I want to talk to you,” I said and stood over her. “Ansell was murdered this afternoon. He was killed by a girl who’s impersonating Myra Shumway.”

“He was killed by Myra Shumway,” Lydia said softly. “Well, anyway that told me where we stood.

“Where is she?” I asked.

“With Mr. Kruger.”

“The other one’s with him too?”

“There’s no other one.”

“Oh yes there is,” I said grimly. “This talk’s off the record. Neither of us have witnesses and I want to get things clear.”

“There’s no other one,” she repeated.

“Okay, there’s no other one. What is Kruger going to do with her?”

“He’ll tell you when he sees you.”

“That’s what he wants to see me about?”

“Why did she kill Doc. Ansell?”

“You’d better ask her that yourself.”

“You tell me.”

She didn’t say anything.

I pushed myself off the table and wandered to the window. There was a guy on the opposite side of the street, hiding behind a newspaper. He had copper written all over him from his hard hat to his fiat feet. I turned back to Lydia.

“Where does Andasca come into all this?”

“You’d better let me go,” she said suddenly, gathering up her bag and gloves. “This has gone on long enough.”

“So it has,” I said. “So it has.”

I didn’t like doing it, but the idea only occurred to me as she stood up. It was one of those ideas that come like a bolt from the blue and are so good that you’ve just got to play them without thinking.

I hit her on the point of her chin with a short tight. I’ll swear she never felt it and she was on the floor before I had regained my balance.

I knelt beside her, lifted her eyelid. She was out for a long count. Well, if Peppi had Myra, I certainly had Lydia. In playing with a rat like Peppi it was just as good to have one of his toys if he had one of yours.

I took a quick gander out of the window. The copper was still there. That was going to make things difficult but not impossible.

I went into the bathroom and found a long roll of adhesive tape. Then I came back into the sitting room and taped Lydia’s hands and ankles. I gagged her with my best silk handkerchief and put her on the sofa.

Then I lit a cigarette and did some thinking. The moment Peppi knew I had her .he’d send a bunch of strongarrns to my apartment. So she’d have to be moved from here. The question was where could I put her? And when I’d found the right place, how was I going to get her out with that copper nesting on my doorstep?

This certainly called for a little thought.

There was the back way out of the apartment block. But, I guessed there'd be a copper watching that too. I went into the kitchen and looked out into the alley. I was right. A big beefy man loitered at the entrance of the alley.

How I was to get out of this building with Lydia and not be seen baffled me. I couldn't imagine her going with me willingly, now that I had dipped her. And to carry her out with the law looking on just wouldn't do.

I had to work fast. I had to get her out of the place before the taxi driver could wise Peppi up that I'd taken her gun and forced her into my apartment. In a way, the cops guarding both entrances prevented Peppi sending a bunch of toughs to beat me up. That was about the only consolation I had.

I wandered upstairs, trying to think of a way out. I went into my room, saw nothing to give me an idea and wandered out into Myra's room.

It was lucky I did. Propped up in a corner was a life-size dummy of a girl, modelled along Myra's lines. It was a prop she used as a magician and it gave me an idea.

The dummy was in an evening dress and was made so that it could stand up or sit down. I went over to it and lifted it. It wasn't heavy.

I carried it down into the sitting room and laid it by Lydia's side.

Then I had another look at the copper standing out in front. I'd never seen him before and that meant he wouldn't be familiar with my looks.

Then I went into my room and selected a light suit in contrast to the one I had been wearing, dug out a slouch hat which I jammed over my eyes. Then I went over to the bed and stripped off the two sheets and went downstairs again.

In the room there was a small, round table, the top of which measured about a foot and a half in diameter. This would just suit my purpose. I got a screwdriver and took it apart.

Then I sat on the floor and swapped a table leg behind each of Lydia's knees with adhesive tape. I strapped the other two legs to her body.

I stood her up. The wooden table legs kept her rigid and that was just what I wanted. Putting her back on the floor, I took off her shoes and went into the kitchen where I found some long screws. I screwed her shoes to the table top. Then with some difficulty I put the shoes on her feet again and laced them securely.

Then I stood her up again and stepped away from her. She looked like a wax dummy on its stand that you see in any dressmaker's shop.

All this had taken about ten minutes and I had to hurry. I put some more adhesive tape round her mouth and fastened her arms to the table legs. I didn't think, if she did come to the surface, she could move or attract attention.

Then I covered her with one of the sheets and tied the sheet round her waist with a length of string. I did exactly the same with the dummy.

Side by side, under the sheets, you couldn't tell which was the dummy and which was Lydia.

Now the tricky part of the business began. The apartment house was divided into wings. We lived in the West wing and each wing was connected by a long corridor. There were four entrances all leading out to the same street, so the copper who was watching outside could see all entrances at once.

But I reasoned this way. He saw me go in with Lydia by the West entrance. He knew I was wearing a dark suit. I had to hope that if I came out of the North entrance with a light suit on he might not connect me with the guy he saw going in the West entrance. Anyway, that was how I had to play it.

I picked Lydia up under one arm and the dummy under the other. Together they were plenty heavy, but I managed. I walked out of my apartment down the corridor, until I came to the North hall. I left Lydia and the dummy there and giving my bat another jerk over my face, I walked out into the street.

I felt as if every eye in the police force were watching me. I glanced right and left. The cop, who'd parked himself outside the West entrance was moving slowly towards me. He wasn't suspicious, but I guess he just wanted to make sure.

I turned and walked very slowly towards him. I saw him hesitate and then turn back to the West entrance. Who said that attack wasn't the best form of defence?

I looked back over my shoulder and then paused on the curb. When a taxi passed, I yelled and the driver crammed on his brakes.

As he nailed the taxi beside me, a patrolman wandered past. He looked at me casually and I took a chance.

"Hey, officer!" I called, moving towards him, "I want some help and your protection."

He looked puzzled, but his face brightened when he saw the five bucks I was folding carefully. That's one language all cops understand.

"Sure," he said. "Any little thing."

I slipped him the dough. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see the copper who had been watching the West wing suddenly show interest in what was going on. He began to move towards me.

I grabbed the patrolman's arm, "Come in, officer," I said, leading him into the lobby. "This is a gag. I've got a couple of dummies to put in my pal's bed. I've been waiting to get even with him for some time and his wife's a jealous woman."

While I was speaking I'd got him up to Lydia and the dummy. I took the dummy and opened up the sheet so that he could see the papier mâché face. "Doesn't she look like the real thing?" I asked.

He gaped at it. "You're going to put that in some guy's bed?" he said, astonished.

"I'm going to do a lot better than that," I told him, "I'm going to put both of them in a guy's bed."

I thought he'd break a blood vessel. I haven't seen a guy laugh so much in years. All the time he was smacking his leg and bellowing I had to stand by and pretend I enjoyed the joke. But I was losing weight every second wondering if Lydia was coming to the surface and whether if she moved he'd spot her.

"Give me a hand," I urged, when he stopped laughing to mop his eyes, and I shoved the dummy into his arms. "Will you put her in the taxi? If the driver sees this without the law around he'll think I'm kidnapping someone. And listen, don't let your lack of chivalry take advantage of a lady who can't protect herself."

That set him off again. He gathered the dummy up in his arms. "Do you waltz, madam?" he asked, and then locking at me he said, "Her breath smelts of Scotch."

"What of It?" I demanded, "you'd smell of something too if you were as stiff as she is."

"Yeah," he said, "I hadn't thought of that," and he staggered out into the Street, snorting with mirth.

I grabbed Lydia, who stirred as I picked her up. I felt the sweat running down my back, but I had to go through with it. Moving fast, I joined the patrolman by the taxi.

At that second, the copper drifted up and stood looking at us with a disapproving eye.

"What goes on?" he demanded, staring at the two shrouded figures and then at the patrolman.

"Well, if it ain't O'Hara," the patrolman said, losing his good humoured expression. "Holy Moses! Don't I ever get any privacy on my beat?"

"I'm on a special job," O'Hara said. "What have you got there?"

“You look after your special job,” the patrolman said shortly. “I’m just helping this guy kidnap a couple of dames,” and he began laughing again.

Both O’Hara and the taxi-driver were staring now with eyes like door-knobs.

I tried to edge round O’Hara and get into the taxi, but he was too near the door and I couldn’t quite make it. I was scared of attracting his attention. Up to now he hadn’t even looked at me.

“Kidnapping?” he repeated stupidly, “I don’t get it. That’s a Federal offence.”

The patrolman turned to me, “This guy started the rumour that dicks were dumb,” he said, and went off into another spluttering guffaw.

O’Hara began to get mad. He turned on me. “What the hell is this?” he demanded. “What have you got here?”

“Show him, officer,” I said, trying to smile. “We shouldn’t keep it to ourselves. He might run us in.”

“These are dummies, you big sap,” the patrolman said to O’Hara. “This guy’s going to put them into his pal’s bed. Ain’t that funny?”

“Dummies?” O’Hara repeated blankly. “How do you know they’re dummies?”

“What the hell else do you think they are ... corpses?” The patrolman began to get heated, “Are you nuts? Think I’d help get corpses in a cab?”

“You might do anything,” O’Hara said, darkly. “I’ve heard things about you.”

The patrolman thrust the dummy into my arms and clenched his fists. “Yeah?” he said, pushing his face into O’Hara’s. “What kind of things?”

“Never mind what kind of things,” O’Hara returned airily. “But I’ve heard enough to know you ain’t so hot.”

Lydia stirred in my arms and then she made a small grunting noise.

Both O’Hara and the patrolman stopped glaring at each other and turned to me.

“That was the cucumber I had for dinner,” I said hurriedly.

“Well, you cut out eating cucumber,” O’Hara said, “I don’t like that kind of noise.”

“Why shouldn’t the guy eat cucumber?” the patrolman demanded fiercely. “Who the hell do you think you are?”

O'Hara scowled, "I know who I am," he said with a sneer, "that's more than I can say for some people."

By this time, the taxi-driver was losing patience. "Listen, you guys," he said plaintively, "are you using this cab or ain't you?"

Both O'Hara and the patrolman rounded on him.

"You stick around and like it," the patrolman snarled. "We'll tell you when we're ready, see?"

The driver began to tremble with temper, "I ain't scared of a couple of coppers," he said. O'Hara turned his attention to me. "How do I know they're dummies?" he demanded, fixing me with a cold eye.

I suddenly lost my own temper and shoved the dummy at him. "Look and see," I said angrily, "I'm getting fed up with this. I ask this officer to give me a hand and the whole damned police force has to come along and shoot its mouth off."

"Yeah," the patrolman said, ranging himself on my side, "what he says is right."

O'Hara felt the dummy gingerly, took a peep at its face and seemed satisfied. "Well, it's a crazy trick, anyway," he said, handing the dummy back to the patrolman.

"Who wants your opinion?" I said, opening the cab door.

As I began putting Lydia into the cab, she grunted again.

O'Hara said, "Cucumber, huh?"

I looked back over my shoulder, "You must be psychic," I said and got into the cab.

"Just a minute," O'Hara said, pushing forward, "I want to look at the other dummy."

That nearly brought me out in a rash.

"If you think I'm going to unpack this just to satisfy your curiosity, you're crazy," I said, slamming the door.

"Leave him alone," the patrolman said, "you pain in the neck."

I could see O'Hara was determined. He yanked open the door again. "I'm seeing that other dummy," he said between his teeth, "and if you start anything, I'll take you to the station."

I got out of the cab again. At least, it would give me a chance to run.

Then just as he was laying hands on Lydia, a guy came out of the West entrance of the apartment block and set off fast, walking away from us.

“Isn’t that the guy you’re watching?” I said, jerking O’Hara out of the cab and pointing excitedly.

He took one look, cursed under his breath and broke into a frantic run.

I turned to the patrolman, “Can I scam before he comes back?” I rustled another five-buck note because I didn’t think he could see it in the darkness.

“Sure,” he said, reaching out his hand, “you get off.”

“West Forty-fourth,” I said, saying the first thing that came into my mind. “And step on it.”

As the cab shot away I sank back between Lydia and the dummy and drew a deep breath of relief. Even when Lydia began to wriggle violently and let off a few grunts I couldn’t care less.

“That’s some cucumber you’ve been eating,” the driver said chattily. “Yes, sir, your grocer sure must have an uneasy conscience.”

I put my hand over Lydia’s mouth.

“If you don’t shut up,” I said to her fiercely, “I’ll strangle you.”

The car lurched and the driver said, “Was you talking to me?”

“Don’t be a dope, I can talk to my stomach if I like, can’t I?” I returned, squeezing Lydia’s face between my fingers.

“I wish you wouldn’t, mister,” the driver pleaded. “It makes me kind of nervous. Besides, you don’t strangle stomachs, you kick ‘em or you poison ‘em, but you don’t strangle ‘em.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” I returned, wiping the sweat of my face with my free hand, “Thanks, pal, I’ll know next time.”

“You’re welcome,” the driver returned airily, “It’s guys who use their brains that get places.”

I agreed with him.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PAPPI'S butler showed no surprise when he opened the front door and found me on the doorstep.

"Come in, sir," he said, stepping to one side.

"Peppi in?" I asked, tossing my hat on the large mahogany table that stood in the hall.

"Mr. Kruger's in, sir," he corrected me. "He's expecting you.

"Swell," I said, fingering my tie.

He closed the front door, "I trust Miss Brandt is in the best of health, sir?" he said quietly.

I eyed him, but his face was Inscrutable. "So far as I know," I returned. "But, the modern woman varies from hour to hour. Shall we say, she was all right when last I saw her?"

Just for a second, he looked as if he wanted to slug me and then the poker face came back again. "Miss Brandt has been very kind to me in the past," he said, as if to explain his curiosity.

"I'm glad," I said. "One of these days you must tell me all about your love life. It should be very, very interesting."

"Yes, sir," he said, and I could see that he was hating my guts. "Will you come this way, please?"

I followed him up the stairs and into the library.

"Mr. Kruger won't keep you long," he said.

"Tell him not to stop to brush his teeth. I ain't particular," I said.

"Very good, sir," the butler returned, and went out, closing the door behind him.

Peppi came in a moment later.

He stood looking at me and I could see he liked me a lot less than when we had met previously.

"There you are," I said, admiring his suit "What a well-turned-out guy you've turned out to be."

"Where is she?" he said.

That's one thing I liked about Peppi. He didn't waste time getting to the point.

“That’s the question I was going to ask you,” I said, looking up at him from my chair.

It was certainly a smart idea when I grabbed Lydia. I had no idea that both the butler and Peppi would start running round in circles.

Peppi drew a hissing breath through his teeth and controlled himself with an effort. “I’m talking about Miss Brandt,” he said, his small hands clenched at his sides. “Where is she?”

“And I am talking about Miss Shumway. Be your age, Peppi, this won’t get us anywhere. Turn Myra over to me and you can have Lydia. I’m just trying to even the odds.”

“I see,” he said, and suddenly smiled. “Very clever of you, Millan, very clever.” He drew up a chair and sat down. “You are taking a chance on getting me mad, but I think we can come to an agreement.”

“I hope so,” I returned, watching him carefully. The change round was a little too sudden.

“You haven’t hurt her?” There was an anxious note in his voice.

“I tell you what I haven’t done,” I said, looking at him coldly, “I haven’t framed her for murder. So you’re still one up on me.”

He examined his finger nails, “No one’s been framed for murder,” he said. “You still haven’t answered my question.”

“We’re wasting time,” I said. “I want Myra and you want Lydia. That’s all there’s to it. Do we make a deal?”

“If I had Miss Shumway, then, of course, we’d make a deal,” he said smoothly. “But she got away.”

“Then maybe Lydia will get away, but I doubt it,” I said, not believing him.

“I could call the police,” he said, moving restlessly.

That was a joke. Peppi going to the police was like a snake dropping in to see a mongoose.

“You could do that,” I said, lighting a cigarette. “They might be glad to see you.”

“If you found Miss Shumway,” he said, “what would you do with her? She’s wanted by the police.”

“I’ll look after that when you turn her over,” I said, “and look, Peppi, I’m getting impatient.”

Then the door opened and Lydia Brandt walked in.

It was a shock, but I managed to smile at her. It looked like the breaks were not in my favour in this game.

“There you are, Peacherine,” I said, “we were just talking about you.”

I was almost sorry to see she had a small black bruise each side of her jaw where I had tried to stop her talking in the cab. There was also a graze on her chin where I had hit her. And, what was worse, she looked as mad as a hornet in a paper bag.

Peppi was as startled as I was. He took her arm and stared at her as if he couldn't believe his eyes.

“What happened?” he demanded.

She pushed him aside and came over to me. If there's one thing that makes me nervous it's a dame in a temper. You never know what they're going to do. They might stab you with a hat pin or scratch your eyes out. They might try and make you bald. They might kick you. You just don't know which way it's coming.

I held up my hand, “Now, don't bust your brassiere,” I said, hastily. “Remember your upbringing and act like a lady.”

She caught me a sizzler on the shin with her pointed shoe. “You heel!” she said, “I'll kill you for what you did to me!” and back went her leg to post me another bone-crusher.

I caught her foot as it shot towards me and lifted it sharply. She sat down with a thud and I guess the jar cooled her fever. Anyway, she just sat there, her eyes snapping and her mouth twisted with pain.

As I got to my feet, someone grabbed me by my shoulder spun me round and I ran into a punch that sent me crashing into the table. I tried to get my balance, but couldn't quite make it. The table and I went over on the floor.

I touched my chin with a grimace and looked at the guy who had hit me. He was one hundred per cent. muscle and brawn, with a face moulded on Epstein's lines and a pair of shoulders as wide as a barn door.

“It's a funny thing,” I said, “but no one seems to like me.”

Lydia, seeing me close, lashed out again and caught me on the knee. I hurriedly got to my feet. “Will you quit kicking me around?” I said, stepping away from her.

The guy who had hit me was bearing down on me again, but Peppi stopped him. “Wait,” he said, “don't hit him again. I want to talk to him.”

He then turned and helped Lydia to her feet. She looked as if she were going to make another rush at me, but he jerked her round, “Cut it out!” he said. “What happened?”

It came out like a bursting dam. She told how I had got the gun, taken her into my apartment and knocked her cold; how I had taped her up and taken her to the top floor of an empty warehouse by the river and left her there, and how some bum had found her and released her.

All the time she was talking she was glaring at me, and when she was through she made a sudden dive in my direction, but Peppi grabbed her arm and shoved her back. "Get out," he said, in his little hissing voice, "you're not hurt and you've had a lucky break. I want to talk to this guy. Maybe I'll let you at him later."

She gave a look that'd stop a runaway horse and then she went out, leaving me alone with Peppi and the muscle man.

"Okay, Lew," Peppi said, "just watch him. If he acts dumb, you can have him."

I sat down again. "Go on," I said bitterly, "don't mind me. Put me up for auction."

Peppi came over and helped himself to a cigar from a box on the table. "You don't seem to be so clever after all," he said.

"Can I help making mistakes?" I said, shrugging. "I'm just good at 'em, that's all."

"Well, this makes a big difference," he went on, blowing a cloud of smoke into my face, "we can talk now." He began wandering about the room. "I've got this Shumway girl. You were right."

I looked at him in disgust "You always were a liar," I said, "you got the other too?"

Peppi smiled, "Arym, do you mean?"

"Is that her name?"

"Why not? She's just the opposite to Myra. I think its a good name, don't you?"

"Myra backwards?"

"Yeah, Myra backwards in every way. Your girl's a good girl."

"Where do you get that my girl stuff?" I asked, trying to look bewildered.

"I know," Peppi smiled, "otherwise I wouldn't have bothered. Now there's no chance of you getting away until I say so, you may be interested in some details. Then we can talk business."

"Go ahead," I said airily, "I've got nothing to lose."

For all that, I was interested. There was a lot to clear up and if Peppi wanted to talk I wouldn't stop him.

“Ansell was right. There were two girls,” Peppi said, flicking ash into the empty fireplace. “It wanted believing, but it didn’t take me long to see how it all added up.”

“I bet it didn’t,” I said bitterly, “you were always a smart guy. Didn’t some columnist say you had more brains in your little finger than you had in your head?”

“Shall I hit him?” Lew asked casually, puffing a short rubber club from his hip pocket.

Peppi shook his head, “Not yet,” he said, “there’s time for that.” He turned back to me, “You remember this guy Kelly?”

“Sure,” I said, “you’d never heard of him when I was here the other day.”

Peppi smiled, “I wasn’t ready to talk then,” he explained. “Kelly told me about the Shumway girl. She interested me. She gypped Kelly and he wanted me to get the 25 grand out of her. I didn’t help him. It wasn’t my line, but I wanted to see the girl I quite liked her.” Peppi flicked more ash, “She’s quite a dish. So, I got rid of Kelly and kept her here for a while. Her father got in the way, too. But, I gave him a little money and got rid of him. Then she told me about you, and what happened in Mexico.” He moved over to the window, glanced out and then wandered back to the middle of the room. “I didn’t believe it at first, but she convinced me. She’s a restless dame.” He shook his head. “I don’t know where she gets to. Now, there’s this trouble about your pal Ansell. She shouldn’t have rubbed him out, but, in a way, it suits me.”

“Let’s have it,” I said, interested, “I feel this is where I get dragged in.”

Peppi nodded, “I’d fixed a substitute Arym for your girl because she said she could persuade you to work for Andasca. I wanted that. It was easy after you told me you were taking Myra to Manetta’s. All I had to do was to send Lew along and snatch Myra while Arym took her place.” He shrugged “Then she loses her head when this Ansell guy gets nose and kills him. Well, it’s still all right with me. If you don’t play along, I’ll turn Myra over to the cops.”

“Don’t talk in riddles,” I said, “what do you mean?”

“I’ve got a job for you. Now, listen, Maddox wants you back.”

“Maddox? Did he say so?”

“Sure, he wants you back. And I want you to go back because Maddox has a set of photos I want. You see, I’m being frank with you.” He smiled, and when Peppi smiled it was the most unbeautiful thing in the world. “I want you to get those photos. It shouldn’t be hard. Andasca got tight some months ago and got himself in a jam. Some guy photographed him. He was talking to me. I didn’t want him to talk to me, but he was tight. If those pictures get in the press Andasca’s finished. If anyone knows I’m behind him he might just as well throw in his hand. Maddox’s going to print those photos the day before the election. You’ve got to get ‘em before then, or I’ll turn Myra over to the cops.”

There wasn't much to say to that. It was a straightforward proposition.

"I want more than that," I said, "I want both the girls. If I'm to get Myra out of a jam, the other one's got to be given to the cops."

Peppi shrugged, "That's okay with me," he said. "She's no use now. All I want is the photos. You can have 'em both."

"That's on," I said, standing up, "I'll see Maddox right away."

Peppi stubbed out his cigar, "You've got three days before the election," he said, tapping the calendar. "It's no use talking to Maddox. I've offered him fifty grand for those photos. He ain't selling. You've got to find where he keeps them and lift 'em, do you get it?"

I could see myself stealing anything from Maddox. He'd have all the law in the country after my hide quicker than a flea's hop.

"That's okay by me," I said. "I owe him something and this'll about even things up."

Peppi jerked his head to Lew. "Okay," he said, "don't try and be smart. Crossing me won't get you any place."

I smiled at him, "You wouldn't let me have a word with Myra?"

He shook his head.

It was no good arguing with him. So I walked out into the hall where the butler opened the front door.

"So long," I said, "be careful of that brunette. She ain't always kind."

He said something under his breath, but I didn't catch it. Then he closed the door sharply behind me.

Within fifteen minutes I was in Maddox's office.

Now Maddox wasn't the kind of guy you invited to your home. He looked the kind of guy who was put in a home. Maybe his blood pressure bothered him. I don't know, but he looked like he had swallowed a volcano and was uncertain of future events.

With him was his personal secretary, who most of the boys knew as 'Whalebone Harriet.' That dame was so straight laced her figure suffered from arrested development. But in spite of this she was smart and she'd always been a good friend of mine.

Right now, she was trying to calm Maddox down while I stood by the door waiting to see how safe it was to advance further.

Maddox left off scrumpling up his blotting pad and breaking his pens and pencils, so I guessed that the first spasm was over. I advanced cautiously across the wide expanse of carpet until I was within six feet of his desk. "Hello there, Mr. Maddox," I said, smiling.

Maddox half rose from his chair, but Harriet pushed him back firmly, so he had to be satisfied with a lot of lip twisting stuff.

"So you've come back, you incompetent, useless, pin-headed baboon," he exploded, with a roar that rattled the windows. "Call yourself a newspaper man? Call yourself a special correspondent? Call yourself a . . .!"

"Mr. Maddox, please," Harriet broke in, "you promised you'd behave! You can't expect Mr. Millan to help you if you begin by calling him names."

"Help me?" Maddox repeated, wrenching at his collar, "do you honestly think this brainless ink-slinger can help me? He's cost the paper twenty-five thousand dollars! Twenty-five thousand dollars!! And look at him! It means nothing to him!"

"That wasn't my fault," I said, edging back a couple of feet. "You ask Juden. He'll tell you what happened. You were double-crossed, Mr. Maddox. You've got Shumway to blame for that."

Maddox began to swell, "I was double-crossed all right," he said, leaning over his desk, while Harriet hung on to his coat, "you fell down on the job, you hollow-headed monkey! I know all about it . . . if you think I believe that stuff you told Summers you're crazier than I thought. Floating women! Talking dogs!! Man into sausage!!! Bah!"

"Never mind about that," I said, "I want to talk to you about Andasca."

"Andasca?" He stopped tying his face in knots and stared at me. "What do you mean? What do you know about Andasca?"

"I know what you've got on him" I said, cautiously, "and I know Kruger wants you to lay off."

He sat down abruptly, "How do you know?"

"Kruger told me. Now listen, Mr. Maddox, forget the twenty-five grand. Alter all this paper can afford to lose twenty-five grand once in a while . . ."

I thought that would start him all over again, but Harriet anchored him to his chair.

"Kruger's framed Shumway's daughter with murder. Unless he gets those photos he's going to give her to the cops. He wants me to get those prints from you and in return he'll turn the girl loose," I went on. "He's got enough on the girl to send her to the chair."

Maddox drew in a long, deep breath. "So you want those photos, do you?" he repeated, struggling to get the words out. "You want to give them to Kruger, do you? Well, you're not

having them! I don't care if he's got enough to send every man, woman and child in this country to the chair! Do you understand that?"

I didn't expect anything else. "Now, look, Mr. Maddox," I said, "can I give you the whole story? Will you listen?"

"Will I listen?" he snarled, "why do you think I sent for you? Do you think I wanted to look on your cretinish face?"

"Okay," I said, drawing up a chair, "it'll take a little time, but at least you'll know where you are."

"At least I'll know where I am," he repeated, "and by the time you've finished, you'll know where you are!"

I didn't let him rattle me, but went straight into the story and told him everything from the meeting with Myra to the meeting with Kruger.

He sat drumming on the desk, looking as if he could eat me, while Harriet took the story down. When I was through, he just sat looking at me. There was a long painful silence. Even Harriet looked doubtful.

"What a dream!" he exploded at last. "That settles it. Young man, you're a menace to the citizens of this country. Do you know what I'm going to do to you? I'm going to have you sent to a nut house. If I spend my last dime, I'll have you put away before the end of the week."

I got hastily to my feet. "Hey," I said, "you can't do a thing like that!"

"I can't, huh?" Maddox snarled. "Well, you wait and see. This time next week you'll be in a strait jacket!"

A knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," Harriet called.

Murphy, the doorman, walked in. I've never seen a guy look so altered. His face was pale and lined and he carried himself as if he'd got a ton weight on his back.

"What do you want?" Maddox snapped, "get out, I'm busy."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Maddox, sir," Murphy said in a low voice, "but, I'm leaving. I've just come to say good-bye."

"What do you mean . . . you're leaving? You've been with me twenty years," Maddox said, startled.

“I know that, sir,” Murphy replied, shaking his head sadly, “it’ll be a blow to the wife when she hears about it, but I’ve got to go. I’m conscientious, sir, and I don’t think I’m fit any more for the job.”

Maddox got to his feet. “What are you drivelling about?” he roared. “What is this? I warn you, Murphy, if this is a gag, I’ll make you sorry. I won’t have people wasting my time. Now, go downstairs and look after the doors. If you’ve been drinking, sleep it off. You’re an old trusted servant and I’ll overlook this, if you’ll get out.”

Murphy approached him. “It’s not that, sir,” he said mournfully, “my brain’s given way.”

Maddox took a hasty step back, “Your brain?” he repeated uneasily.

Murphy nodded. “Yes, sir,” he said, “it was all right this morning, but it’s gone now. I’ve got to go. I might do something I’d be sorry for.”

“How do you know your brain’s given way?” Maddox asked, behind his desk by now.

“I’m hearing things, sir,” Murphy said. “Voices in my head.”

Maddox appealed to Harriet. “Do people hear voices in their heads when their brains give way?”

Harriet lifted her square shoulders. “It’s not an encouraging sign, Mr. Maddox,” she said softly.

Maddox wiped his face with his handkerchief. “I suppose not,” he said. “But what kind of voices?”

Murphy shivered. “There’s a big dog downstairs,” he said. “I thought he spoke to me. That’s why I say I’m hearing voices.”

“Spoke to you . . . a dog? What did he say?” Maddox demanded.

“He wanted to know if I changed socks every day.”

I jumped to my feet, “What?” I shouted, “a dog?”

Murphy shrank back, “Yes, Mr. Millan, a big dog I shouldn’t ought to bother you with this...”

“Where is he?” I shouted. “It’s Whisky” I turned on Maddox. “Now, I’ll show you something. Get that dog up here! Where did you leave him?”

“I don’t want him up here,” Murphy wailed. “I couldn’t bear to have him up here.”

I rushed to the door and jerked it open. Half the office staff, who had been listening at the keyhole, fell into the room, but I didn't stop. I trod over them, shoving the others out of the way and rushed for the elevator.

Downstairs, I found a group of people standing round the door, but there was no sign of Whisky.

"Anyone seen a dog around here?" I demanded.

"Sure," a big guy said, pushing his way towards me, "a big wolfhound. He came in here a few minutes ago and then Murphy suddenly seemed to go crazy and ran for the elevator. The dog went off like he was offended."

"Which way did he go?"

"To the right. What's it all about?"

I didn't wait, but bolted out into the street.

There was no sign of Whisky anywhere. That didn't worry me a great deal. There was only one place where he'd go and that would be home.

I signalled a passing taxi and gave him my address. "Keep near the sidewalk," I said, "I'm looking for a pal of mine."

The driver, a wizen little punk with suspicious rat-like eyes, touched his cap. "I'm ready to stop when you are," he said, and drove along the street, hugging the curb.

I was nearly home, when I spotted Whisky trotting along. He looked in better shape. Someone must have cleaned him up, but he still had a nasty wound on his head.

"Stop!" I bawled to the taxi driver and bundled out of the cab. "Whisky, old boy!" I called, running towards him, "Gee! Whisky, it's nice to see you."

Whisky turned quickly, "Well," he said, "I've been looking all over for you."

"Come back in the cab, Whisky," I said, patting him gently. "We've got a lot to talk about."

We crowded back into the cab. "Just drive around, will you?" I said to the driver. "I've got a lot to say to my dog."

The driver eyed Whisky. "He's a nice dog, ain't he?" he said, "you ain't been beating that dog, have you, mister?"

"Now listen," I said, pushing Whisky in a corner so I had room to sit down, "I just want to talk to my dog. I don't want to get tied up in a conversation with you. I haven't got the time for it."

“I don’t like guys who beat dogs,” the taxi driver said, turning in his seat. “I got plenty tough with the last guy I saw beating his dog.”

“Yeah?” Whisky said, pushing his face into the taxi driver’s, “then he must have been a midget.”

“Well, he was, but that don’t change the idea of the thing,” returned the driver and started up his engine.

Whisky and I settled back and we regarded each other affectionately. “Well, pal,” I said, “you’ve certainly had a bad time. What did they do to you?”

Before he could reply, we were both thrown in a heap on the floor as the driver trod on his brakes.

“What’s the idea?” I said, angrily. “What do you think you’re doing?”

The driver turned in his seat. His face was the colour of a fish’s underbelly. “Hey!” he said in a trembling voice, “didn’t that dog speak?”

“What are you talking about?” I said. “Get on with your driving, can’t you?”

“Now, wait a minute,” the rat-like eyes glared at me. “I’ve got to get this straight. Did that dog speak to me?”

“Well, what if he did? That’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. But dogs don’t talk. They bark, see?”

“Oh, I get it. Well, there’s nothing to worry about. He’s just that kind of a dog.”

“Well, if that’s all it is,” the driver said, relieved, and he began driving again.

“I thought you’d lost your voice,” I said to Whisky.

“So I did,” he growled, “and damned inconvenient it was too. I hope I never go back to barking again; you just don’t get anywhere like that. But, we’re wasting time, I know where Myra is.”

“So do I,” I said gloomily, “with Peppi.”

Whisky shook his head. “She’s in a top front room in Waxey’s dive,” he said.

I stared at him. “She’s with Peppi,” I said, “let me get you up to date,” and I told him about Ansell and Peppi and the whole set-up.

He sat looking at me with alert eyes and when I'd finished, he said, "Don't bother about those photos. I tell you she's at Waxey's dive. We can get her out of there and then turn Peppi over to the cops. Tell the driver to turn around."

"You're sure?" I said, half convinced. "What has Waxey to do with Peppi?"

"Will you stop yapping," Whisky said fiercely, "and tell the driver."

"Okay," I said, and leaning forward I said, "take us to Mulberry Park, will you?"

"Sure," the driver said, "and listen, I've been thinking. I don't believe that dog talked, see? And nothing you say'll convince me," and he swung the cab off the main street.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHILE we were driving to Mulberry Park, Whisky explained what had been happening to him. He had seen Myra kidnapped when she left our apartment and he had followed the car. He had seen her taken to Good-time Waxey's dive and he went after her.

But Waxey and Lew had been too much for him. He only managed to get away by the skin of his teeth and not before Lew had nearly brained him with his rubber club.

I listened grimly to all this. "I'll settle that heel," I said. "He's nor going to knock you around and get away with it."

"Better be careful," Whisky said mournfully, "he's a mighty big guy."

"I'll be careful," I said. "If I get a chance to slug him when he's not looking, I'll take the chance."

As the cab slowed down, Whisky said, "Well, here we are."

"Yeah," I said, getting out and paying the driver. He didn't look at me when he took the money, but he eyed Whisky suspiciously, then he drove away fast. "I don't think that guy liked us," I said. "Now, listen. We'll get nowhere if they see you, Whisky. You watch the building. If I don't come out in half an hour, you'd better get the cops."

"No good doing that, unless the two girls are there," Whisky said. "If the cops get Myra and not the other one what sort of jam will we be in?"

"You've got something there," I said, "but, what if something happens to me? What'll you do?"

"I'll send you a wreath," Whisky returned. "What else can I do?"

"Never mind about the wreath," I returned sharply. "You better come in. after me if I'm longer than a half an hour."

"I'll think about it," Whisky returned. "I'm not worked up about the idea."

"I can understand that," I said. "You're sure she's in the place?"

"She's upstairs in the room facing the street. I saw her look Out of the window."

"Swell. It just means getting up there."

"That's right. If anyone tries to stop you, just don't take no for an answer."

I didn't feel I was getting all the encouragement I needed, but apparently Whisky wasn't an encouraging kind of dog.

I left him at the corner of the square and wandered towards Waxey's dive. The place seemed deserted and when I got inside I found a thin weedy youth half asleep over the counter.

"Where's Waxey?" I asked.

"Out," the youth yawned and put his head on his arms again.

I glanced round the dim room. Over to the right was a door which I guessed led upstairs.

"I'll wait," I said, sitting on an upturned box near the door.

The youth didn't say anything. He was nearly asleep. I sat there watching him and after a minute or so he began to snore.

I shifted my box closer to the door, but he didn't look up. I gave him a few seconds just to be on the safe side and then reached the door. It opened silently and, leaving the youth spread over the counter. I peered into the gloom of a passage that led to a flight of stairs.

I'd have felt a lot more confident if I had a gun with me. All the same, if Myra was up there, I was going to get her out. I went up the stairs quickly.

The first room I entered was obviously Waxey's bedroom. It was empty except for a rough cot and a lot of dirt. Waxey certainly lived the hard way.

The next door was locked. I hadn't time for any fancy stuff, I drew back and caught the door a peach of a kick just below the lock. The door flew open and I sprawled in the room on my hands and knees.

Myra twisted over on the bed so that she could see who it was. I sat up and grinned at her. "So you've come at last," she said, trying to sit up. I could see that her wrists and ankles were bound. "Don't sit there like a big drip. Hitch up your truss and get me out of here."

"Kid," I said, getting to my feet. "It's grand to hear your voice again."

"Never mind that stuff," Myra snapped, bouncing up and down on the bed. "Get me undone. We can have our little cry together later on."

"I'm right with you," I said, going over to her. "They haven't hurt you, have they?"

"Don't talk so much," Myra returned. "They haven't had time, but they've promised all kinds of things."

I examined the cords that bound her. Whoever tied her had made a swell job of it. But when I found my knife, it didn't take long to free her.

"There you are, sugar," I said, sitting beside her. "How does it feel?"

“Lousy,” Myra said moving her legs and wincing. “I’ve got a cramp.”

“I’ll fix that,” I said, pushing back my cuffs. “I’ll get some life in them.”

“Hands off!” Myra said sharply. “I like to do my own massaging.”

“That’s a pity,” I returned. “I was looking forward to that.”

While she began restoring her circulation, I glanced round the room. It was empty except for the bed and a table. On the table stood an odd looking contraption. There were two large springs, a handcuff on a long chain and one or two cogwheels. They were all joined up together and they intrigued me.

“Someone’s going to pay for this,” Myra said angrily. “Why should they want to kidnap me?”

“I’ll tell you in a second,” I said, picking up the handcuff, “what’s this thing?”

Myra gave a little scream, “Don’t touch it!” she cried.

“Why not . . . is it a man-trap?”

There was a sudden sharp click. The springs moved forward, the cogwheels spun and I found the handcuff on my wrist.

“You big sap!” Myra said furiously.

“Why, it *is* a man-trap!” I said, admiring the thing. “That’s smart. There might be a fortune in it.”

Myra swung her legs off the bed and hobbled over to me. “Didn’t I tell you not to touch it?”

I took hold of the handcuff and jerked at it. “I’ll get it off,” I said calmly. “I was glad to see it work.”

“You won’t get it off,” Myra said, nearly crying. “Oh, I could brain you!”

And she was right. The handcuff had me tight round the wrist and nothing I could do would shift it. The chain to which it was fastened only allowed me a few feet from the wall.

“Hey!” I said in alarm, “get this off, will you?”

“But I can’t,” Myra wailed. “You stupid dope! What am I going to do now?”

I wrestled with the thing silently. After a while, I gave up. “Don’t let’s get into a panic,” I said. “If this chain thinks it can hold me . . . why it’s crazy!” I put my feet against the wall and holding the chain in both bands, I threw my weight backwards. It ought to have wrenched

the staple that held the chain out of the wall. But it didn't. But it did nearly give me a hemorrhage. I sat on the floor and mopped my brow.

"You're right, sugar," I said in disgust. "I'm a sap and a dope!"

"They'll kill you if they find you here," Myra said anxiously. "Don't talk that way," I said hastily. "Someone might hear you and get ideas. Now listen, you're in a jam and I'm in a jam, but it's a lot worse for you than for me."

"What do you mean?"

So I told her in a few words about Doc Ansell and the cops and how they were looking for her.

"So you see," I said, "you've got to hide some place. Don't wait for me. Get going. Take Whisky with you and tell him where you're going. He'll tell me later."

"I'm not leaving you here," she said, "I'll get a file or something and break that chain."

"You're wasting time. Find me a rat to talk to and I'll pretend I'm in jail. Go on. They won't do anything to me."

"I'm not leaving you," she said, and then she gave a sudden sharp cry.

"What's the matter? Why are you looking like that?" I asked as her expression changed.

She put out her hands towards me and I saw she was shivering.

"You're not going to faint, are you?" I asked in alarm. "Here, hold up, kid," and I tried to reach her.

"Something's happening to me," she said wildly.

The look in her eyes scared me and then I saw something that made me start back. You won't believe this. I didn't believe it myself. It was like something had gone wrong with my eyes.

Myra was becoming blurred. Her figure was smudgy, like a blurred photograph and even her features seemed to be dissolving.

"What's happening to you?" I exclaimed, feeling my heart pounding.

She didn't say anything, but just stood swaying before me. I could see something filmy in front of her. Something that moved. Then a shadowy figure stepped from her.

You've seen those trick films where people become transparent? Well, that's exactly how this figure looked. It sent my blood pressure up and gave me the scare of my life.

As I watched, the figure became more distinct and then there she was—Myra the second, the spitting image of Myra except she was dressed only in white satin panties and brassiere.

I knew it must be Arym. But, even seeing the two together, it didn't make it possible.

Myra backed away. She was as startled as I. Then she clutched at her frock and gasped.

“You—you've got on my underwear!” she said.

Arym admired her figure. “Well, I had to have something,” she returned airily. “After all we aren't alone.” She looked at me archly. “Aren't you staring a little too much?” she asked.

I hastily averted my eyes. “You're not a sight for anyone to pass up,” I said feebly.

“But ... you're me!” Myra exclaimed, looking stunned. “Of course, I am,” Arym said. “At least, we share the same body.”

Myra put her hands to her face. “This is awful,” she said, “what am I going to do?”

“It's all right once you get used to it,” Arym returned with a giggle. “Every one has two sides to their natures.”

“I know,” I put in, “but they don't have two bodies. This is driving me batty.”

“Oh, that's Quintl,” Arym went on, “he had a swell sense of humour. In a way, it's been a good thing. I've got tired of sharing a body with someone else. It's nice to have one of my own.”

Myra came over and clutched at me. I put my arm around her. “Take it easy,” I said. “We'll wake up in a minute and find this is just another nightmare.”

“Oh no, you won't,” Arym said. “Why don't you get wise? I'm just part of you and I've decided to leave you.”

Myra looked at her fixedly. “You're bad,” she said quietly. “I can see you're bad.”

“What of it?” Arym said, shrugging. “We can't all be good, besides no one would be interesting if they didn't have a little bad in them. Think how prissy you're going to be now that I've left you.”

“So you're the one who's been making a mess of my life,” Myra said, stepping away from me and confronting Arym.

“It's been mighty hard work. I tell you, it's quite a relief to get away from you for a while.”

“You'll never get back again,” Myra said. “So don't you think you will.”

“If I want to, I shall,” Arym returned, wandering over to the bed and sitting down. “You can’t get along without me.”

“Yes, I can. . . and I’m going to.”

“How do you think you’ll live?” Arym scoffed. “I made all your money by stealing it. Remember Joe Krum? What a time I had to get you to break the ice!”

Myra flushed scarlet. “Oh, I wish I’d never listened to you.”

“You’ve got quite a strong character really,” Arym admitted reluctantly.

“You won’t need to worry about my character now,” Myra said grimly. “I’ve got you out of my system, and this time I’m keeping you out.”

Arym shrugged, “I don’t want to come back,” she said. “You don’t have to get so worked up. I don’t think it would be safe any more. In fact, I’m certain it wouldn’t be,” and she laughed.

Myra stared at her. “What do you mean by that?” she demanded.

“If it wasn’t for that silly little man, I suppose I wouldn’t have left you for good. I think I was getting the upper hand of you although it was a tough struggle. But he had to interfere and so I had to kill him. You see Peppi says they’ll put me in the chair if they catch me. He’s going to hide me until they find you. They think you killed him, so when they’ve dealt with you, I’ll be able to start all over again.”

Myra suddenly saw what a jam she was in and looked desperately at me.

“If I could only get this handcuff off,” I said, jerking furiously at the chain, “I’d know what to do.”

“There’s nothing you can do,” Arym said, curling up her long bare legs under her. “This is the proverbial struggle between good and bad. I’ve tried to get along with Myra, but it’s been too uphill. Why should a girl with such a nice body and looks lead such a dreary life as she makes me lead? I’m sick of it. Since she met you, she hasn’t stolen a thing. How does she expect us to live? Why, had to leave her to get after that reward. She wouldn’t have bothered about it. Now, I’ve salted it away where no one can find it,” and her eyes lit up at the thought. She put her arms behind her and leaned back. I don’t want to stress the point, but that dame would certainly have made Petty a swell model. “Are you still going to marry me like you said, when all this is over?” she went on looking at me with an arch smile.

“I’ll have you understand he loves me, you horrid little hooker!” Myra broke in before I could say anything.

“That’s what you think,” Arym said, waving her away. “But he’s actually proposed to me. Haven’t you, darling?”

I didn't know what to say.

"That settles it," Myra said grimly. "I won't let you get your claws into him. You've talked too much already. I'm going to take you to the police. They can choose between us."

Arym looked alarmed, "Oh no, you're not," she said, sliding off the bed. "That wouldn't do at all," and she made for the door.

"Don't let her get away," I shouted, trying to reach her.

Myra made a dash towards her, but Arym was too quick. As she opened the door, Lew came bounding in.

Then things happened. I kicked over the table in front of Lew. Aryrn disappeared out of the room, slamming the door behind her and Myra suddenly swooped up to the ceiling.

As the table went over, the man-trap apparatus crashed on the floor. The fall set the mechanism working; there was a whirr of wheels and the handcuff clicked open. I just managed to get it off my wrist as Lew came at me.

I stopped a punch on the side of my head that made my teeth rattle, but I managed to slow him down with a counter to his belly.

He stepped back and Myra grabbed his hair. She twined her fingers almost lovingly in his locks and pulled.

I thought he was going out of his mind. He looked right and left and then behind him. He couldn't see anything because Myra was above him. While he was occupied, I stepped in and hit him pretty well where I liked. I remembered Whisky, so I let him have it. He tried to back away, but Myra, exerting all her strength clung to him like a leech. Then he looked up and saw her. He could only gape in horror and I had no difficulty in hanging a punch on his jaw that came up from my ankles.

He gave a tired little smile and folded up on the floor.

"Very nice work," I said, blowing on my knuckles. "And now let's get out of this fast."

I reached up to take Myra's hand and I pulled her gently to the floor. She was as light as a thistle down and I had difficulty in keeping her by my side.

"She's gotten away," she said desperately, holding on to me, her feet a few inches off the floor.

"Never mind that," I said, "at least, I've got you and that's something." As I moved to the door I heard the sound of heavy footsteps pounding up the stairs.

"The window," Myra said. "Quick!"

I let her go and dashed to the window. As soon as I released her, she shot up in the air and banged against the ceiling.

“Oath!” she exclaimed from up there. “That hurt!”

I didn’t pay any attention. I was leaning out and looking down into the street. It was a long drop and we’d only break our necks if we went that way.

“It’s too high!” I said, coming away from the window. “What the hell are we going to do now?”

Myra floated down and drifted out of the window. She hung suspended just outside. It was an unnerving sight to see her standing calmly on nothing thirty feet or so above ground.

Already a number of people had stopped and were staring up at her. Several were clutching each other and one fat woman began running madly down the street, screaming like a train whistle.

“Don’t stand there,” she said impatiently. “Give me your hand. I won’t let you fall.”

“What? You want me ...” Then I heard the door crash open behind me and Myra grabbed me.

I don’t mind admitting that I shut my eyes as I stepped into space. But she had no difficulty in keeping me from falling. I felt a rushing sensation and I opened my eyes timidly.

We had flashed over some buildings, leaving Waxey’s dive far behind.

“Do you like it?” Myra asked, holding my hand firmly and smiling at me.

“Only because I trust you,” I said, taking a firmer grip on her. “Otherwise, I’d just go crazy at the thought.”

We swooped over a crowded street. I noticed a loiterer below. He glanced up casually, stiffened and then hid his face in his hands. I guess that guy would go off liquor for the rest of his days.

“Pick a quiet spot and let’s get down,” I said. “We’ll start a riot in a minute.”

We circled some buildings, spotted a deserted alley and floated gently to the ground. As we recovered our balance, we noticed an old man standing in a doorway staring at us with fixed concentration.

“Do you do that often?” he quavered, plucking nervously at his beard.

“It only happens when we’re a bit light-headed,” I returned, dusting myself down. “Think nothing of it.”

“I wish I could,” the old man said, wistfully. “It’ll haunt me for the rest of my days.”

“That won’t be long,” I said, kindly, “so it won’t be hard to bear.”

“Don’t tease him,” Myra said. “He looks as if he’s been through rather a strain.”

“I have, lady,” the old man said eagerly. “The trouble is no one will believe me,” and he went into his house and shut the door.

“Phew!” I said. “We’re lucky to get out of that.”

Myra suddenly faced me. “Did you really propose to that blonde?” she said, looking at me accusingly.

“But, darling,” I said hastily, “I thought it was you. There was a look in her eyes and ...”

“You mean, I haven’t encouraged you?” Myra said seriously. “I suppose I haven’t,” and she reached up and kissed me.

“The proposal still stands,” I said, a few minutes later. “Will you consider it?”

“I will,” she said. “And now I want some undies. Will you take me somewhere where I can buy them?”

“We’ve got to be quick,” I said. “If the cops ...”

“I can’t go around like this,” Myra said firmly. “We’ve just got to take a chance.”

At the end of the alley, I spotted a taxi and I waved. Just as we got in, Whisky came bounding up. He scrambled in as we drove off.

CHAPTER SEVENTENN

“WHERE to, boss?” the driver asked, as soon as we had settled down.

“Keep driving,” I returned, shoving Whisky’s foot out of my chest. “I’ll tell you when I’ve had time to think.”

Myra and Whisky were making a great fuss over each other, and I had to tell Whisky that when I wanted his tongue over my face I’d let him know.

“It’s certainly nice to see you again,” Whisky said, panting with excitement. “I’d given you both up for lost.”

“We’d given ourselves up for lost,” I said, taking Myra’s hand. “It’s a good thing you learned to float, sugar.”

“You know, I just can’t help it,” Myra said apologetically. “But I must get some undies. I just haven’t any confidence without them.”

“What have you done with them?” Whisky asked, pricking up his ears.

“Don’t tell him,” I pleaded. “It’ll take too long. Never mind about your undies. The cops are looking for you. They’ve only to hear I’ve been seen with a blonde and a dog and they’ll come after us like bats out of hell.”

“Very well,” Myra said, settling back. “But you’ve no idea how it preys on my mind.”

“The point to concentrate on is where do we go from here?” I said.

“That, I think, is for you to decide,” Myra said, slipping her hand into mine. “I’ll go where you say.”

“I’ve got to put you in some place where the cops won’t find you. Then I’ve got to get hold of Arym.”

“Who’s Arym?” Myra asked, puzzled.

“Your other self, my pet,” I said lightly. “That’s what she calls herself. If I get her, then you’ll be in the clear.”

“But how are you going to do that?”

“I don’t know. I’m not even going to think about it. I must first find a hide-out for you.”

Then I remembered Harriet. “I know,” I said, and leaning forward I told the driver to stop at the first public telephone.

“This do you?” he asked, cutting across the traffic and drawing up outside a drug store.

“Yeah,” I said, then to Myra, “wait here, I’ve got to ‘phone.”

I found there was only one telephone booth when I got into the drug store and some dame was using it.

I went over to the soda-jerker behind the counter. “Is that lady going to be long?” I asked. “I’ve got a taxi outside and I’m in a hurry.”

He shook his head. “She’s about through,” he said. “Anyway, I figure it that way. She’s been in there since noon and she must have used up most of the air in that little booth by now.

I thanked him. He had a pretty good grip on his business because the woman suddenly hung up and stepped out of the booth. She nodded to the soda-jerker and went out into the Street.

“What they find to talk about,” he began, leaning on the counter, but I didn’t wait to hear any more. I shut myself in with the telephone and put a call through to the *Recorder*.

Harriet was tied up with Mr. Maddox, I was told.

“Well, can’t you send someone in to cut her loose?” I demanded. “This is important.”

“How important would you say?” the switchboard girl asked. She didn’t sound impressed.

“Her apartment’s on fire and her old man’s trapped up on the roof,” I lied. “If that’s important to you, I guess you might do something about it.”

“I can’t interrupt Mr. Maddox for that,” she replied. “How long has he been upon the roof?”

I would have liked to have been right behind that baby. I’d have surprised her.

“Look,” I said. “It doesn’t matter how long he’s been up there. The point is the place is on fire and he gets dizzy when he’s high up. He wants to see his daughter before anything happens to him.”

“Well, I’ll tell her when she’s through with Mr. Maddox,” the girl replied curtly and rang off.

Maybe she didn’t believe me.

I had to leave the booth to get some change and when I got back some guy was entering the booth.

“Look, mister,” I pleaded. “I’ve got a priority. Would you mind giving way to me?”

He shook his head. “I’ve got a priority too,” he said. “My wife’s apartment’s on fire ...”

“I know and she’s up on the roof,” I skid, in disgust.

He looked at me sharply. “I wonder how you knew that,” he returned, then he suddenly shrugged. “Well, hell I’ll wait. There’s plenty for her to look at up there.”

I thanked him and got back to the Recorder. “If you don’t put me through to Miss Halliday,” I said when I got the operator, “I’ll fix you good some dark night.”

“Let’s make a date,” she replied promptly. “The trouble is the nights are never dark enough these days.”

“How can they be?” I said, wanting to strangle her. “Well, you know what I mean. How dark does it have to be?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care. I’ll just choose the first dark night that comes along,” I said, snarling.

“I can’t do business on those lines,” she replied, giggling. “I like something definite. How about to-night? To-morrow there’s a new moon and it’ll be too light for fixing.”

Something jogged my memory. “New moon?” I repeated. “Did you say there’ll be a new moon to-morrow?”

“Sure, I have to watch little things like that. They make an awful difference in a girl’s life.”

“Never mind about your life,” I said quickly. “What’s the date?”

“July 31,” she replied. “Have you been shipwrecked or something?”

I nearly dropped the receiver. The end of the month. I remembered what Doc Ansell had said. Myra would lose her influence at the end of the month when the moon changed. I looked hurriedly at the clock on the wall. It was just five-fifteen. I had only seven hours to get everything fixed up.

“Hello . . . hello . . . hello?” the girl said. “Are you still there?”

“I think so,” I said cautiously. “Will you see how Miss Halliday’s getting on?”

“How about that date?”

“Sure, make it to-night. I’ll pick you up.”

“But how shall I know you?”

“Who, me? You’ll know me all right. I’ll be wearing a Zoot suit and I carry my left leg over my right shoulder. No one’s mistaken me yet.”

There was a moment's silence. "Can't you do anything about that left leg?" she asked at last.

"I can leave it at home."

"Couldn't you be a little rough with it for to-night?" she asked hopefully. "I'd stand the Zoot suit but the leg gets me down."

"That's the idea," I pointed out.

She thought about this for a moment. "It's a date," she said briskly. "Miss Halliday's free now. I'm putting you thr—r—r—ough."

Harriet was all brains. I didn't have to go into details. She got what I wanted almost before I had started. She told me where her apartment was and how to get in and she promised to be back early. I thanked her and rang off. I felt I'd lost ten pounds by the time I got out of the booth. I collided with the guy waiting to put through his call. He apologized.

"Excuse me, pal," he said. "Can you remember what I wanted to telephone about?" I told him.

"That's right," he said. "I've got the darnedest memory. Do you know I just can't remember whether the fire was to-day or last week. Ain't that a hell of a thing?"

I shoved past him and went out into the street.

I found Whisky lying on the floor of the taxi, but Myra wasn't there.

"Where is she?" I demanded.

"Get inside," Whisky said. "Where have you been?" The urgency in his voice startled me, so I got into the cab and shut the door.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"How much longer are you keeping me here?" the driver asked angrily. "I've got a home if you haven't."

Whisky showed his teeth. "Sit there and like it," he snarled. The driver got out of his cab hastily. "Come on, legs," he said, clutching at his collar. "I'm going to start running."

"Come back when you're through," I said. "You've got a nice evening for it."

The driver didn't listen. He began running madly down the street.

I turned my attention to Whisky. "Now," I said, "where did she go?"

"Keep down," Whisky said in a mysterious mutter. "The cops have moved in."

“What?” I exclaimed, startled. “What do you mean? Have they got her?”

“A couple of minutes and it’ll all be over,” he returned with ghoulish gloom. “She’s in that lingerie shop across the street. The moment you’d gone, she spotted it and made a dart for it. I hadn’t time to reason with her. There was a copper on the corner and he saw her. It took him just five seconds to call the riot squad. They’ve just moved in.”

I looked across the street. Two patrolmen stood outside the smart modiste shop, looking with interest at the various garments displayed in the windows.

“Why don’t they bring her out?” I said, feeling a little sick.

“How do I know?” Whisky said peevishly. I could see he was as worried as I was.

“Well, I’m not staying here,” I said, “I’m going to see what’s cooking. You wait here,” and I left the taxi and crossed the Street.

The two patrolmen looked like they were going to stop me, but I kept walking and they let me through.

The first guy I set eyes on was Clancy.

“Well, well,” I said, smiling at him. “Buying something for the little woman?”

“There you are!” he said, swelling with rage. “I’ve been looking all over for you. Where *is* she?”

I took a quick gander round the shop. It was certainly a nice place. The guy who’d put it together had taken a lot of pains to get it just right. It was all chromium furniture, mirrors and concealed lighting. The carpet was so thick that it tickled my ankles. There were a number of alcoves round the room containing life-size models on which were displayed bathing suits, lingerie and evening gowns. Some of these models were so snappy that I took a second look to make sure I wasn’t passing anything up.

At the far end of the room, a patrolman stood guard over a group of girls. He seemed to be enjoying his job. I could understand that. The girls looked like they had been lifted straight out of the front line of the Follies. There was a nervous looking guy in morning clothes, fussing around. I guessed he was the manager of the shop.

But there was no sign of Myra.

I turned my attention to Clancy. “Where’s who?” I asked. “Why don’t you relax sometimes, old boy? Life ain’t all work. Take a gander at those wenches huddling in the corner. Don’t they stir your pulse?”

“Don’t give me that stuff,” Clancy said, looking fierce. “She was seen coming in here and now you turn up. Do you think I’m dumb?”

“She . . . she . . . she?” I repeated. “What are you talking about? What she?”

“This Shumway bird,” Clancy said, clenching his fists and looking homicidal. “You’d better be careful, Millan. She’s wanted for murder.”

“I know, I know. But, what have I got to do with it? I just got here,” I said. “Haven’t you searched the joint? And listen, Clancy, while we’re on the subject, you’d better be careful. My paper won’t stand for me being kicked around.”

That slowed him up. He vented his temper on the cops.

“Don’t stand there like a bunch of stuffed eels,” he snarled. “Look for her. Turn this joint upside down. Take it to pieces. She’s here, so find her!”

The manager came rushing up. “I won’t have it!” he spluttered. “You can’t go into the dressing rooms. My customers wouldn’t stand for it. This is an unpardonable, unwarranted outrage!”

“Wait a minute,” Clancy said to the cops. Then he turned on the manager. “Do you think I care what you’ve got to say? A woman came in her five minutes ago and she’s still here. Where did she go?”

The manager wrung his hands. “I put her in that dressing room,” he said, pointing to an empty room near one of the alcoves. “She’s vanished. I didn’t see what happened to her.”

“Well, she’s somewhere around,” Clancy said, between his teeth. “Send one of your dames into all those rooms and get every woman out of ‘em.”

“This should be good,” I said. “A great out-door playboy like you wouldn’t know that dames go in those rooms to undress.”

“Keep out of this!” Clancy bellowed. “I’m going to find that dame if it’s the last thing I do.”

“It certainly will be the last thing you do if you drive a lot of undressed society dames out of hiding,” I returned. “Captain Summers’ wife buys stuff here.”

He pushed his face into mine. “If you don’t pipe down, I’ll make you sorry you were born,” he said violently, but I could see that I’d shaken him. “You want this girl to get away, don’t you? Well, she ain’t getting away.”

I shrugged. “Go ahead,” I said. “It’s your funeral.”

He turned back to the manager. “Get ‘em out!” he ordered. “Everyone of ‘em. She’s hiding somewhere in those rooms and she’s wanted for murder!”

The manager hesitated, then he decided that there was nothing he could do about it. He told off a couple of the girls and they went from cubicle to cubicle.

In five minutes about six women, in wraps, were standing indignantly before Clancy, who looked as if he were going out of his mind. Myra wasn't among them.

While he was staring at them, I wandered round looking at the wax models. I began to suspect where Myra was hiding. Sure enough, one of them looked familiar. I looked again and Myra met my eyes imploringly. She had on a smart black frock and a large floppy hat which hid her face. Standing with the other models, it was impossible to spot who she was until you got right up to her.

"Go away," Myra hissed. "Don't look at me."

"But I must look at you," I said in an undertone. "I love you for one thing and you look terrific for another. Are you scared, sweetheart?"

"Terribly," she said. "But, do go away."

"I'm going," I said, "but I'll be back."

As I turned away, one of the saleswomen came to me.

"Hello," she said.

I looked at her and paused. She was a red-head. Now, I like red heads. I like them particularly if they have a nice creamy skin, green eyes and a lot of curves. This one had everything, so I said, "Hullo," and raised my hat.

"Were you thinking of buying that dress?" she asked, smiling. "I'd just love to help you."

I glanced over at Clancy. He was still trying to explain himself to the indignant women.

"It did cross my mind," I said cautiously, "but I've got nothing to fill it with when I get it home."

"You don't have to worry about that," she said, sidling a little closer. "The trouble is having too many girls and not enough dresses to go round."

"I like it that way," I said simply. "I'm a man of nature."

She blinked just once, but it didn't stop her entirely.

"There's something in my book of rules about men of nature," she said, looking puzzled. "I just can't remember what it was right now."

"Lady," I said earnestly, "you don't need any rules. You ought to get along all right by your instincts."

"That'd be like driving a car with no brakes," she said. "I know my instincts better than you."

She began to interest me.

“Maybe we’ll go for a drive together one of these days,” I said hopefully.

“Let’s not make too many plans,” she returned. “Let’s concentrate on this dress.” She turned back to Myra. “Don’t you think I’d look cute in it?”

“Not half so cute as without it,” I said hurriedly.

“I don’t think I like that remark,” she said. “It doesn’t indicate a sound business footing.”

“Who cares about a business footing?” I returned. “Let’s go somewhere and forget business.”

“Keep concentrating on this dress,” she said insistently. “I know I’d look good in it. Let me put it on and show you.”

“Some other time” I began, and stopped because she had put her hand on Myra’s arm.

“It’s awfully attractive,” she said wistfully. Then a look of puzzled fright entered her eyes and she pressed Myra’s arm.

I hastily took her hand away. “I used to be a palmist,” I said. “Let me read your lines.”

“So long as we’re thinking of the same lines,” she returned, trying to smile, but all the time she kept staring at Myra with growing uneasiness. “Do you know that dummy felt almost human,” she went on in a low voice.

“Yeah?” I said, patting Myra’s hip. “Isn’t it marvelous what they do with papier mâché these days?”

I still kept hold of her hand and she began to calm down. Then out of the corner of my eye, I saw Myra move. Still keeping her fixed pose, she rose a foot into the air and remained there. I came out in a cold sweat

The red head had her back to Myra, so she didn’t see what was going on. I put my hand on Myra’s shoulder and pushed her back on her stand again and held her there.

“Can you really read my lines?” the red head asked.

“Well, I took a correspondent course a few months back,” I said, feeling like hell. “I can only read the past up to now, but I hope to get around to the future sometime next week.”

I released Myra for a second. She began to rise off the ground, so I hung on to her again.

The red-head hastily snatched her hand from mine. “I’ll wait until next week,” she said, “I know all about my past. That’s something I like to keep to myself.”

That came as no surprise, but I didn't tell her so.

"You seem to like that model," she said, "or can't you make up your mind?"

It was becoming increasingly more difficult to hold Myra and just for a moment, she succeeded in rising a few inches before I slammed her back again.

The red-head drew in a sharp breath. "Is—is it trying to get away?" she said fearfully.

"There's a draught in this joint," I explained. "These models are mighty light."

She backed away. "You know I don't like that old model," she said. "I just don't like it at all."

Clancy, who had got rid of the indignant women, joined us. He was sweating freely and he looked mad.

"What are you pawing that dummy for?" he demanded.

"I'm that kind of a guy," I said desperately. "I go for dummies in a big way."

The red-head said, "There's something about that old model. It's trying to fly away."

Clancy looked at her suspiciously. "What do you mean ... fly away?"

"I don't know," she said. "But that's what it's trying to do."

"Pay no attention to her, Clancy," I said quickly. "She's not herself to-day."

Clancy looked at me and then he looked at Myra. "So that's it," he said between his teeth. "I might have known it. So that's where she's hiding," and before I could stop him he'd whipped off Myra's hat.

Myra didn't blink an eye-lash. She just stood there, her eyes blank and her body rigid.

Clancy stared at her. "Yeah," he said, "it's her all right. You can cut that dummy act out. You're under arrest," he went on to Myra.

I took my hand from Myra's shoulder and stepped back. As Clancy moved forward to grab her she floated out of his reach. Still keeping her stiff pose, she rose about ten feet in the air.

It certainly upset Clancy. He closed his eyes.

"Gawd!" he said. "What a horrible sight!"

"What's worrying you?" I asked. "Haven't you heard of the new lighter-than-air models? It helps solve the transportation problems," and I patted him on the back.

“Never mind about the transportation problems,” he said, looking at Myra from between his fingers. “I’ve got my own problems to worry about just now.”

Then Whisky wandered into the shop.

In the general confusion no one noticed his entrance. The saleswomen were screaming, while the shop manager had collapsed on the floor and was jerking feebly at his collar. The cops just stood rooted, staring at Myra in horror.

To make matters worse, the red-head had thrown her arms round my neck and was screaming wildly in my ear.

It was a pretty good time for Whisky’s entrance. He came straight over to me. “You haven’t been long getting yourself fixed up,” he said approvingly. “That’s quite a pretty trill you’ve got there.”

The effect of this speech was electrifying. The red-head gave a stifled moan and slid to the floor in a faint. Clancy backed away, his face like a flour bag, while everyone else in the room stopped making noises and clutched one another.

“And now do you believe my story about talking dogs and floating women?” I said to Clancy. “It’s all here for you to see.”

“I’ll believe anything,” Clancy said, shivering. “This is too much for me. You’ve all got to see the captain.”

Whisky peered into the red-head’s face “Odd how these dames pass out, isn’t it?” he said and began to lick her face energetically.

I caught him a quick kick where it’d do him the most good. He gave a startled curse and removed his tail hurriedly.

“Leave her alone,” I said sternly. “Besides, all that make-up might poison you.”

“As a matter of fact,” Whisky said with a leer, “it was extraordinarily tasty. But apart from that, I was just trying to revive her.”

“She doesn’t need reviving,” I returned. “She’s happier the way she is.”

“Can’t you stop him?” Clancy pleaded, gazing at Whisky as if he was some monster. “I can’t stand any more of this.”

Myra swooped past me. “What do we do now?” she asked. “Shall I run away?”

“No,” I said. “We can’t go on like this. We’ll all go along to Summers and let him sort everything out.”

She settled lower and then stretched out within my grasp. I pulled her to me and kissed her.

“It’ll be all right,” I promised. “They’ll have to listen to reason.”

Clancy tried to pull himself together. “Can’t you persuade that dame to stand on her feet?” he pleaded. “It’s doing me no good at all seeing her that way.”

Myra frowned at him. “I’m not considering you,” she said. “You’ve never done anything for me.”

“You remain like that,” I urged. “The more people who see you like that the more witnesses we’ll have. Let’s go, sweetheart.”

I took her by her shoulders and began pushing her towards the door.

It must have been a pretty upsetting sight. Myra lay full length, suspended in the air, with her hands folded across her chest. It was like pushing a perambulator that hadn’t any wheels.

Whisky fell in step beside me. “Going through the streets like that, old pal?” he asked.

“That’s the idea,” I said firmly, leaving Myra in mid-air while I opened the shop door.

“Hey!” Clancy said, running up to me. “You can’t do a thing like that!”

“I’d like to see you try and stop me,” I said grimly.

He looked round desperately. “You guys!” he shouted to the cringing patrolmen. “Get these two into the wagon.”

The patrolmen hesitated and then approached us warily.

“I think we’re going to have a little trouble,” I said to Myra. She lowered her feet to the ground. “Leave this to me,” she said, her eyes snapping fire, “I’ve been very good up to now. If they’re going to be nasty then I’ll be nasty, too.”

Now she was on the ground, the patrolmen seemed to regain some of their courage. They came towards us in a body.

Myra flickered her fingers at them and they suddenly paused. “It’s beginning to rain,” one of them said uneasily.

“What are you talking about?” Clancy snarled. “It doesn’t matter if it rains! Arrest that woman!”

A big Irish cop extended his hand and then went a little pale.

“Holy Moses!” he said in a strangled voice. “It’s raining in here!”

I thought Clancy would go out of his mind. “It don’t rain indoors, you punk!” he stormed. “I’ll tear that badge off your coat if you don’t do what I tell you!”

Myra flicked her fingers in his direction and almost immediately he stiffened. “Gawd!” he said looking up at the ceiling. “It is raining!”

“Didn’t I tell you,” the Irish cop said feverishly. “I think I’ll get out of here.”

This intrigued me. Over each patrolman and Clancy I could see a light sprinkle of water falling. It didn’t come from the ceiling but seemed to start a few feet above them.

As they moved uneasily the shower of water followed them. It was the damnedest thing I’d ever seen.

“Are you doing this?” I whispered to Myra.

“Certainly,” she said. “Didn’t you know I could make rain? It’s an old Naguale custom.”

She suddenly spied the red-head who was sitting up in a dazed kind of way. “And a little rain might improve that young woman’s complexion,” she went on grimly.

She flicked her fingers in the red-head’s direction.

There was no question of a sprinkle of water this time. It began to rain in torrents. The red-head screamed wildly and getting to her feet, she dashed round the room. The narrow ribbon of pouring water followed her ruthlessly. In a few seconds she was soaked to the skin.

“I think that will do,” Myra said, looking pleased. “She’s not nearly so attractive, is she?”

Right now the red-head looked like something that’d got lost in a river.

“You’re right,” I said, wondering if I was losing my mind. Myra flicked her fingers and the rain stopped.

The cops and Clancy began mopping themselves with their handkerchiefs. The red-head lay on the floor and drummed hysterically with her heels.

“If there’s any more talk about wagons,” Myra said coldly, “it’ll begin raining again.”

“Do what you like, lady,” Clancy said brokenly. “I ain’t making trouble.”

Myra resumed her suspended position. “Push me through the streets,” she said to me. “All the way to police headquarters. Then we’ll have lots of witnesses, won’t we?”

As I began to push her to the door again, Sam Bogle entered the shop.

One look was enough to see that Sam had been hitting the bottle. He didn’t look at any of us except Myra.

“Don’t think you’re getting away with it,” he said. “Doc was a pal of mine and no jury can kill a pal of mine and get away with it.”

We were all so startled that no one moved. Myra lowered her feet to the floor and faced him.

“I didn’t kill him,” she said quietly. “You ought to know that, Sam.”

“You killed him all right,” Sam said, his eyes gleaming evilly.

“Well, this is where you get yours.”

“Look out!” Whisky shouted and sprang forward.

He was too late. Sam fired from his hip. I saw the flash from the gun. Myra took two tottering steps forward. Then she spread out on the floor.

No one could do anything but stare. Sam let the gun slide out of his hand.

Then I ran to Myra. As I bent over her, I heard Sam’s voice wailing.

“I didn’t mean to do it,” he kept saying “Honest to Gawd, I didn’t mean to do it.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WE waited at the hospital for more than an hour before the doctor had any news for us.

There was Clancy, Summers, Whisky, Bogle and I, as well as a handful of cops who were keeping an eye on Bogle.

Summers and Clancy kept throwing looks at Whisky like he was something they couldn't believe. Summers had now heard the whole story and after the first shock of hearing Whisky talk, he had been big enough to apologize to me.

"You've got a free hand," he said, "Hell's bells! What a case to bring before a jury! I hope that girl lives. It's the damnedest thing I've ever run into. You can't blame me for being suspicious, can you, Millan? But, if you want to get after the other girl, it's okay by me."

I hadn't the heart to go after Arym. The thought of Myra lying in the little room across the way struggling for her life, knocked the ground from under me. I just wanted to be near so if anyone could see her I'd be the first to go in.

Whisky felt the same way.

We just sat and waited, and when the doctor came out I was too scared to go over to him.

"Which of you is Mr. Millan?" he asked.

Summers went over and said something. The doctor shrugged. The gesture chilled my heart. Then Summers nodded at me and the doctor beckoned.

I got up and walked the few yards with legs that felt like they'd been mashed by a trolley-car.

Whisky followed at my heels.

"How is she doc?" I asked, looking anxiously at his tired face.

"Not so good," he replied. "She's asking for you. Don't excite her. I don't think she's going to make it."

I clutched at his arm, "She's got to make it," I said. "You must save her."

"We're doing all we can," he pulled his arm away with a grimace of pain, "but, she just won't try. There's not much we can do when a patient throws up the sponge. That's what she's doing. She doesn't seem to have the will to live."

"Can I see her?"

"For a minute, but be careful what you say."

I went into the little room with Whisky.

Myra was lying flat. She looked small and white and just to see her turned my heart over.

I sat down and took her hand.

She opened her eyes. "I was afraid you wouldn't come," she said.

Whisky pushed his long muzzle on the bed. She touched his ears for a moment before turning to me again.

"There was no one big enough to keep me out," I said, trying to smile. "Please get well, sweetheart, I can't get along without you."

"I'll get well," she said, "only, I'm tired. I'll be better when I've had some sleep. I don't want to stay awake any more."

"Listen, kid, the doctor says you're not trying," I went on, stroking her wrist, "you must fight. There's Whisky and me wanting you. You can't pass us up."

"It's awfully hard," she said drowsily. "I have only half my resistance. If my other half were here I know I'd be all right."

Then I realized why she couldn't get well. She had to have Arym to help her fight. Before I could say anything, a nurse came in and beckoned to me.

I patted Myra's hand. "I'll be back," I said. "Promise you'll wait for me."

She kept her eyes open with an effort. "Come back soon," she said urgently.

I went out into the hall again.

Summers said, "She's pretty bad, isn't she?"

"I guess so," I returned. "Can I take a walk around the block! This place gives me a pain."

"Sure," he said sympathetically, "I know how you feel."

I went over to Bogle. "Cheer up," I said, "I'm doing all I can for her."

Sam had tears in his eyes. "I don't know why I did it," he said miserably. "I guess I was crazy."

I couldn't help feeling sorry for him. "I know how you felt about Doc. He meant as much to you as Myra does to me.

I'd have done the same thing in your place."

He shook his head, "I wouldn't have hurt her for anything, but I got good and mad."

There was nothing I could say to him that'd do any good, so I left him and went out into the street.

"Whisky," I said, "we're going after Arym. She's the only one who can save Myra."

"How can she help her?" Whisky asked hopelessly.

"Don't you understand? She's got half of Myra's willpower and strength. Get them together and they can both make a real fight for it. Peppi will know where she is. I'll see him first."

"You're taking a chance with Peppi, aren't you?"

"I have to take a chance. If he doesn't know where she is, I'm sunk."

"He won't talk without those photos," Whisky said. "Why not get 'em and trade with him?"

I glanced at my watch. It was seven fifty. Maddox would have gone home by now.

"It's an idea," I said, waving down a passing cab. "If we can get into Maddox's office, I think I can bust his safe?"

As we drove off Whisky said, "I don't think I want to be mixed up in this. I was merely giving advice."

"You'll come with me and like it," I said shortly. "It all depends whether we can reach Maddox's office without being seen. If we can, then the rest's easy."

Whisky clicked his teeth uneasily. "They wouldn't put a dog in jail, would they?" he asked.

"No, they'd take you some place and shoot you."

"I was afraid of that," Whisky returned mournfully.

"Why worry? They can't do that more than once to you," I said, trying to cheer him up.

Maddox's office was on the top floor of the *Recorder* building. I stopped the cab at the corner of the street and we walked the short distance to the entrance. There was no doorman on duty at that time of night, but I had to get past the man at the information desk just inside the hall to reach the elevator.

We paused at the entrance and I took a quick gander through the glass doors.

"We're in luck," I said to Whisky, "I don't know the guy. Come on in."

The man at the desk just glanced at us without interest.

“I want to talk to the night editor,” I said. “I’m a friend of his. Can I go up?”

“Sure,” he said. “Know your way?”

I nodded and we went over to the automatic elevator. “Well, that was easy,” I said, as the elevator shot up.

Whisky heaved a sigh. “You can get five years for this,” he returned. “Even Summers couldn’t do anything for you.”

“Quiet!” I said and stepped out onto the eighth floor. At the end of the passage was the door that led to Maddox’s offices. As we approached, Whisky cocked his head on one side.

“Wait a minute,” he said sharply.

“What’s up?”

“Someone’s in there,” he said, “I can hear ‘em.”

I listened, but I couldn’t hear a thing. “Sure?”

“You bet I’m sure,” Whisky said, lowering his tail.

I crept to the door and listened. A man’s voice sounded faintly through the thick door.

“Hell!” I said, stepping back. “What do we do now?”

“We go some place and wait,” Whisky returned.

I put my hand on the doorknob and turned it softly. The door gave a few inches and I looked into the outer office. There was no one there, but voices came from Maddox’s office across the room. His door stood open.

“Wait here,” I whispered, and entered the outer office silently.

I crossed the room and edged up to the open door. One quick glance brought me up short.

Peppi was standing by Maddox’s safe. With him was his muscleman, Lew, and two other men I hadn’t seen before.

Peppi was smoking a cigar, his hands in his pockets and his hat pushed to the back of his head. He watched Lew, who was trying to open the safe.

I backed away, crossed the office once more and started to join Whisky. Then I paused.

Standing on one of the desks was a press camera complete with a flash-gun. I picked it up as I passed and then joined Whisky in the passage.

“What’s up?” Whisky asked, eyeing the camera nervously.

“Peppi and his gang are cracking the safe,” I said. “Now look, I’m going back in there and I’m going to get a picture of them. If we can get away with this we’ve got Peppi just where we want him.”

“You don’t think he’ll let you take a picture of him and then walk out, do you?” Whisky demanded. “He’ll probably be a very mad man.”

“That’s where you come in,” I said.

“They’ve tried to brain me before,” Whisky returned uneasily. “I’d prefer to remain neutral, if it’s all the same to you.”

“Pipe down,” I said. “As soon as I’ve taken the picture, I’ll give the plate to you and you beat it. I’ll bold them off until you get away. They won’t do anything to me so long as we have the picture.”

“That’s what you hope,” Whisky said. “They may have different ideas.”

I thought that was likely, but I had to take the chance.

“When you get outside, go to Miss Halliday’s apartment and wait for me,” I said. “I’ve told her about you and she’s expecting us. If I don’t come out within an hour, turn the picture over to Summers.”

Whisky looked worried. “Aren’t you being unnecessarily heroic?” he asked. “Can’t we work out something better than that?”

I shook my head. “I’ve got to put the screws to Peppi and this is the only way to do it. Get in the elevator and wait for me.”

“Well, I’d rather it was you than me,” Whisky said, enter in the elevator.

I adjusted the shutter of the camera and set the lens-stop. Then I went back into the room.

Peppi was cursing Lew when I arrived at the door.

“If you can’t get that can open,” he snarled, “why don’t you say so? We’ve been here twenty minutes.”

“Gimme a break, will you?” Lew grunted, his ear against the safe. “I gotta have quiet to hear these tumblers.”

Peppi drew in a deep breath and stood over him. That was how I found them.

I shoved the camera round the door and braced it. Then I said sharply: “Hold it!”

I gave them time to look round and then I released the shutter. There was a blinding flash as the flashlight exploded and I didn't wait to see what happened.

I whipped across the outer office, slammed the door and jerked the plate out of the camera.

Whisky watched me with startled eyes.

"Here you are," I said and shoved the plate holder into his mouth. Then I pressed the elevator button and the door snapped shut as Lew and Peppi tumbled into the passage.

Lew had a gun in his hand and he looked mean.

"Grab some air," he said, pointing the gun at me.

I raised my hands, holding the camera above my head.

Peppi, snarling with rage, snatched the camera out of my hand. He took one look at it and flung it to the floor.

"Where's the plate?" he snapped.

"On its way down," I said. "Now, don't get excited," I went on hurriedly as Lew made as if to slug me. "That picture'll give you a lot of grief if you don't wise up."

"Who's got it?" Peppi snarled.

"Never mind who's got it," I returned. "All you have to worry about is who's going to have it in an hour's time."

"That's it, is it?" Peppi's voice was soft and menacing. "You're crazy to try that stuff on me."

"Okay, so I'm crazy," I said. "But I've got something on you, Peppi, that you won't get out of in a hurry."

"Let me slug this punk," Law said.

Peppi jerked his head to the office. "Come in here," he said, "I want to talk to you."

I went into the office with Lew crowding me.

"What's the idea?" Peppi said. "Come on—give."

"If I'm not at a certain address in an hour's time," I explained, watching Lew out of the corner of my eye, "that picture's going to the police chief. And then you can talk yourself out of it."

"What address?" Peppi asked, fiddling with his cigar.

“Be your age,” I returned, wandering over to the desk and sitting on it. “Now listen, Peppi, here’s the deal. Give me Arym and I’ll give you the picture.”

While I was talking I glanced over Maddox’s desk. I remembered there was a button concealed somewhere which let off the burglar alarm. Maddox had had it fitted when some hood had threatened to scramble his brains in the old days of prohibition.

Peppi turned to Lew. “Get that safe open,” he said. “We’ll fix this guy when we’re through.”

That didn’t suit me. I spotted the button and rammed my thumb on it.

One of the other men caught me a full swing behind my ear, but he was a shade late. As I went over on the floor a bell began to ring somewhere in the building.

I struggled to my feet as Law went for me.

“Cut it out!” Peppi said, his face white with rage. “Take him and let’s get out of here.”

Lew dug his gun into my spine and herded me into Maddox’s private elevator. The others followed.

As we shot between floors, Peppi said: “You’ll be damned sorry you stuck your neck out.” And I didn’t like the look in his eyes.

The elevator landed us at the side entrance, away from the main doors. There was a big closed car waiting and as soon as we had bundled in it shot away towards Fifth Avenue. No one said anything all the way to Peppi’s house. Law sat by my side with his gun sticking into me and a hungry look in his eyes. I felt that I’d only to flicker an eye-lash and he’d plug me. So I sat still and sweated plenty.

When we got inside Peppi’s house Lew Shoved me into the sitting room.

The butler was in there fussing with a decanter. He looked at me with a tight smile on his crooked face.

Peppi said: “Get Miss Brandt.”

The butler went out.

Peppi and Law left me standing in the middle of the room and went over to the window. They whispered together and then Law gave a low laugh.

“Don’t waste too much time,” I said, feeling uneasy. “You’ve only got another thirty-five minutes to turn Arym over to me.”

“That’ll be long enough,” Peppi said.

“I’m not bluffing,” I said. “I’ve got you where I want you. Give me the girl or that picture goes to Summers. Where is she?”

Peppi shook his head. “I don’t know,” he said. “And I don’t care. I warned you not to double-cross me. Now you’re going to get your lesson.”

The door opened and Lydia Brandt came in. She looked at me much the same way a tiger looks at its dinner.

“I want this guy to talk,” Peppi said. “I thought maybe you’d like to soften him.”

Lydia smiled.. “Yes,” she said. “That would amuse me.”

“What are you going to do with him?” Peppi asked.

“I want to try that experiment again. I made a mess of it last time,” she answered.

Peppi shrugged. “She thinks she can cut a guy. I tell her she can’t do it.”

Lew sneered. “Let her try,” he said. “It don’t matter if she makes a mess of this punk, does it?”

I began to sweat.

Lew went to the door and called in the other two birds who had been in Maddox’s office. “Tie this lug up,” he said. “If he starts anything, beat his brains out.”

Before I could make up my mind what to do they grabbed me. I waited until they began to twist my arms behind me, then I let them have it.

I wrenched one of my arms free and slugged the bigger of the two guys in the eye, then as the other swung at me I stepped close and hit him low.

That was as far as I got. Lew came up and slammed me over the head with his gun-butt. By the time I’d cleared my head I was sitting in a chair trussed up like a Houdini act.

Peppi was looking at the clock. “We ain’t got a lot of time,” he said.

“It’s not going to take me long,” Lydia said. She held a thin, sharp knife in her hand. She looked across at me. “You won’t have many dates after this,” she said viciously.

“Let’s be reasonable,” I said hurriedly. “You wouldn’t really want to do that to me.”

She held up the knife, then she came over. “You won’t feel it for a while,” she said, standing over me. “I’ve done it before.” Her face was white and stony and I could see she was - getting a big kick out of seeing me sweat.

Peppi said to me. “Are you talking?”

“I’m talking,” I said, shrinking away from the knife.

“Where’s the plate?”

I gave him Harriet’s address.

“Let’s go,” he said to Lew. “We’ve still got ten minutes.”

They made for the door.

“Hey!” I shouted, “don’t leave me with this dame. She might start something.”

Peppi paused and smiled at me, “She will,” he said, “maybe you won’t be in such a hurry to double-cross me next time.” He looked over at Lydia, “When you’re through, tell Toni to park him in the river.”

She nodded.

“We’ll be back pretty soon,” Peppi said, and they all went out leaving me with Lydia.

I admit, right at that moment I was losing a lot of weight. I strained on the cords that held me but I couldn’t budge them.

There was a cold efficiency about Lydia that told me she was going through with this.

She was batty, of course. As crazy as a bug, but that didn’t help me.

“Well,” she said, “we’re ready to go. All you have to do is to sit still. I’m quick and it won’t hurt for a few hours, anyway,” she chuckled. “Then it’ll hurt plenty.”

I believed her.

She came over and twined her long fingers in my hair. I rammed my chin on my chest so she couldn’t get at my face.

“Don’t make it difficult,” she said, pulling at my hair. It scared me to feel how strong she was.

I braced myself and kept my chin down. She kept pulling and it felt like the top of my head was coming off.

“Damn you!” she said suddenly and touched my ear with the knife.

I jerked away with a yell and the next second I was staring up at the ceiling with the knife hovering a few inches from my eyes.

Then the door burst open and Arym marched in.

Lydia released my hair and stood away. Arym stared first at me and then at Lydia, and I could have hugged her if I'd been free.

Lydia was the first to recover, "What do you want?" she said in a flat, sullen voice, "go away!"

"What do you think you're doing?" Arym demanded, her eyes flashing. "What's happening, Ross?"

"She's going to mask my face," I said feverishly, "it's an old family custom."

"Is she?" Arym laid her gloves and bag down on the table. She took off her hat with deliberation. "Not so long as I'm standing on my two feet," she said.

"Get Out" Lydia said furiously, "you've no business being in here. Go upstairs and wait for Peppi. He wants me to do this."

"He's mine," Arym said, moving towards Lydia. "No one touches him but me."

Lydia went for her with the knife.

I yelled a warning, but it wasn't necessary. Arym was quite capable of taking care of herself. She simply vanished in a puff of white smoke.

Lydia stopped in her rush with a startled scream. She looked around the room, her knife held ready and her eyes wild.

Just behind her a large vase containing flowers suddenly floated off the table. It shot high into the air and descended on Lydia's head. She flattened out on the floor and the vase flew in a hundred pieces.

"And that's that," said Arym's voice.

Invisible hands gathered the flowers into a bunch and laid them on Lydia's chest.

"She only lacks a wooden overcoat," Arym said, suddenly reappearing. "But I haven't time for that now."

I felt unnerved. "I just can't get used to your tricks," I said, staring at Lydia with morbid fascination.

"Didn't you like that little exhibition?" Arym asked, not without pride.

"I thought it was swell," I said, "but I can't stand a lot of it. Look, sweetheart, will you untie me?"

"Oh, no," Arym said firmly, "I want to talk to you first."

“But we haven’t time,” I said desperately. “Peppi’ll come back any minute.”

She shrugged, “I couldn’t care less about that,” she returned, putting her arm round my neck. “I can do to Peppi what I did to her and think nothing of it.”

“Arym, you must let me loose,” I said feverishly, “I want you to do something for me.”

“I know,” she said, “but you’re going to hear what I want first.” She sat on my knee and began fondling my ear. That’s a thing I can’t stand, but I wasn’t in the position to tell her so. “You’re going to marry me.”

I stared at her, “Of all the crazy things!” I said angrily. “This is no time for fooling.”

“But, I’m not fooling,” she said, “you’re marrying me or it’ll be the last thing you refuse me.”

“I’m marrying Myra,” I said, trying to push her away, “Be reasonable for the love of mike. Myra’s desperately ill. She needs you. You can’t refuse to help her.”

“I know all about that,” she said carelessly, “I’ve just come from seeing her. She knew what was happening here and she sent me to get you out of the mess. I agreed on one condition—that she would give you up. Well, she’s given you up. If you want me to save her, you must promise to marry me.”

“I’m not going to,” I said, hardly believing my ears. “Of all the dirty tricks! You ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

“Don’t get upstage,” Aryrn said, putting her face against mine. “I’ll let Peppi handle you, if you don’t play along with me. And I’ll let Myra fend for herself, too.”

I drew a deep breath, “You can’t do this,” I said, “think what it means. You don’t really think you could hold me to such a marriage. Why I’d leave you in a week. What do you think I am—a mouse?”

A look of doubt came into Arym’s eyes, “But, don’t you like me a little?” she pleaded, hugging me to her.

“I like you all right,” I said, “you’ve got everything Myra has except her nice nature. That’s something you’ll never have.”

“I could be nice to you,” she wheedled, “and you would be good for me.”

I had a sudden idea.

“I’ll agree on one condition,” I said.

She looked suspicious, “What condition?”

“You return to Myra, give up your body and I’ll marry you both.”

“No,” she said, getting off my knee. “I want to have a body of my own.”

“But, you’ll never really be happy,” I urged, feeling that I was persuading her. “It’s the only way you’ll ever get me. If you can’t share me with Myra then I’m through with you.”

She began to pace up and down. “You don’t understand what this means to me. As I am now, I can do what I like, go where I like and love whom I like.”

“And where’s it getting you?” I asked. “Can’t you see it’s the only possible way out? Ask yourself, have you been happy? You’re only half yourself. Myra has all the good qualities. If you go back to her you’ll be complete and you’ll have me.”

She stopped pacing and stared at me. “You devil,” she said, “I hadn’t thought of it like that. You’re right. I have missed Myra. I’ve missed tempting her to do the wrong things. I’ve missed fighting with her. I guess I’m being a sucker, but I’ll do it, if she’ll have me back.”

“I warn you,” I said, “you’re going to behave. No more stealing. I’ll be around to keep you in order.”

“I’ll do it—for no other man in the world but you,” she said, and picking up the knife she cut me free.

I stood up with a grimace. “We must get over to Myra,” I said, stamping life into my legs. “I’ve left her too long as it is.”

“Don’t fuss,” she said. “She’ll be all right.”

I suddenly remembered Whisky. “My goodness!” I said hobbling to the telephone. “Maybe Peppi’s cutting poor old Whisky’s throat right now.”

“You worry too much,” Arym said calmly. “He’ll have his throat cut sooner or later, he’s that kind of a dog.”

I got through to police headquarters.

When Summers came on the line I shot him the story. “Get a squad over there,” I said feverishly, giving him Harriet’s address. “And make it snappy. You’ll have Kruger and his mob on ice if you get that picture.”

“We’ll get it,” Summers said excitedly, and hung up.

“I hope they do,” I said. “Well, let’s get over to the hospital.” I put my arm around her and kissed her. “You’re a nice kid,” I said. “And you won’t have any regrets. Now, come on. Go into your vanishing act. The cops mustn’t see you.”

“Consider it done,” she said, and a wisp of smoke indicated where she had been standing.

When we reached the hospital we found Clancy and a couple of cops still waiting outside Myra's door. Bogle had been taken away.

I went up to Clancy. "How is she?" I asked anxiously.

Clancy looked mournful. "She's bad," he said. "The doc's in there now."

"Can I go in?"

"Not yet," Clancy said, shaking his head. "Maybe when the doc's through."

I turned away. I was tempted to burst into her room, but I knew it wouldn't do, so I wandered over to a chair and sat down.

"Who's the guy with a face like a tomato?" Arym whispered in my ear.

I told her.

"He looks like a heel," Arym said. "I think I'll throw a scare into him."

"Lay off," I said hurriedly. "We don't want any trouble here."

"It wouldn't be any trouble to me," she said wistfully. "It'd be fun."

"Now for the love of mike behave yourself. Haven't I enough on my mind without you adding to it?"

Clancy had drawn near and was staring at me with startled Interest. "Do you have to do that?" he asked suspiciously.

"Why not?" I returned. "Can't I talk to myself without you horning in?"

"I guess so," he returned, looking at me old fashioned. "But, I don't like it much. It shows softening of the brain."

"That's better than having no brain at all, you cretin," Arym's voice snapped.

Clancy stiffened. "What's that?" he said, glaring at me. "I didn't say anything," I returned hurriedly.

"Don't tell lies," Clancy said. "One more crack like that and I'll toss you in the can. And cut out that falsetto voice. I don't like it."

Just then a young and pretty nurse came down the corridor.

Clancy, who never passed up a nice-looking girl, swallowed his wrath. He adjusted his necktie and smirked at her. "Evening," he said, swelling out his chest.

She paused and smiled brightly. “Good evening,” she said. “Is there anything I can do for you?”

Before Clancy could reply, Arym’s voice said from behind him, “You can wipe that smile off your insipid face.”

Clancy couldn’t believe his ears. He looked around wildly, his mouth gaping.

The nurse tossed her head. “If it comes to that,” she said, “your face isn’t so much, and from the sound of your voice you should be shuffled and dealt again.”

As she passed Clancy there came the sound of a sharp slap. The nurse gave a convulsive start and stifled a scream. For a moment she stood rigid and then turned, her face scarlet.

“That wasn’t a nice thing to do,” she said. “Do you call yourself a gentleman?”

Clancy blinked at her. “I ain’t done nothing,” he said uneasily.

“It may seem nothing to you,” the nurse returned. “But, I’ll have you know that back in my home-town gentlemen don’t do such things.”

Clancy began to get mad. “You’re not the only one who has a home-town,” he snapped.

“I shouldn’t like to visit yours, if you’re a specimen of what comes out of it,” the nurse returned, putting her hands carelessly behind her and edging away.

This remark hurt Clancy’s pride. “I’ll have you know,” he said, “my home-town’s the oldest in the country.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” the nurse said feelingly. “You have some of its oldest habits,” and tossing her head, she went off down the corridor.

“What kind of hospital is this?” Clancy demanded, glaring after her. “Even the nurses are nuts!”

While he was speaking, Myra’s door opened and the doctor came out.

I jumped to my feet. “Can I see her?” I asked anxiously.

He looked at me gravely. “I’m sorry,” he said. “But I did all I could for her.”

My heart went cold. “She’s not ...?” I began, but the look in his eyes told me.

“She wouldn’t fight,” he said. “I can’t make it out. She just didn’t seem to have the will.

I pushed past him and went into the room.

A nurse had pulled the sheet over Myra's face. She glanced at me sympathetically and left the room.

I stood looking at Myra's small form under the sheet and I felt pretty bad.

"So she quit," Arym said, suddenly appearing at my side. "Can you beat that?" she jerked the sheet off Myra's face.

Myra looked very peaceful. Her hair framed her small white face and there was a faint smile on her lips.

"Of all the smug, two-faced, prissy-mouthed fugitives from a convent," Aryrn said in disgust. "She's it."

"Don't," I said, sitting wearily on the bed. "She wanted to live, but we were too late to help her."

"Phooey!" Arym snapped. "She's putting on an act. Cut it Out, Myra," she went on. "Or I'll grab that body and leave you without one."

"Try it and I'll haunt you," Myra's voice said close to me.

I looked round with a startled gasp. Standing at the foot of the bed I could make out a filmy shadow.

"Don't materialize any further," Arym exclaimed. "You haven't got any clothes on."

"As if I didn't know," Myra sounded annoyed. "Where have you two been? I was just going to look for you."

"Wait a minute," I said. "Aren't you dead after all?"

"Of course, she isn't," Arym said. "I told you not to worry."

"Has the darling been worrying?" Myra asked eagerly.

"You know how men are," Arym replied airily. "But never mind him. Get back into your body. We have things to talk about."

"I'll be right with you," Myra said, and the shadowy figure climbed on to the bed and melted out of sight.

A second later what had been Myra's remains sat up abruptly in bed.

I shied away from her. This, I felt, was a little too much.

"He wants me to come back to you," Arym said sulkily. "That's the only way he'll marry me."

“Certainly not,” Myra said firmly. “I’ve had enough of your influence to last me a lifetime. I’d rather be dead.”

I pulled myself together. “Myra,” I said, taking her hand, “you must be sensible. The new moon rises in an hour. If Doc was right, that’s when you’ll lose your supernatural powers and then it’ll be too late to do anything. You have to take her back. Think of me. Think of having her around all the rest of our days. Think of the mischief she could do us if we thwarted her.”

“That’s all very well,” Myra returned. “But what about Doc? She did kill him. I draw the line at sharing a body with a murderess.”

She had something there.

Arym pouted “If I fix Doc, will you do it?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

“I didn’t kill the old fool. I wanted to have a hold on you so that Ross would work for Andasca.”

“Now look here, Arym, it’s no use lying. You did kill him. I saw him die,” I said coldly.

“You thought you saw him die,” Arym said, smiling. “Haven’t you heard of mass hypnotism?”

I ran my fingers through my hair, “What are you getting at?” I said. “Mass hypnotism? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You’re not being very bright, are you darling?” she said patiently. “All I did was to put Doc in a coma and hypnotize you and Sam into believing he was hurt. The letter and the dress were planted to give the right atmosphere.”

“I don’t believe it,” I said, “the cops saw him too.”

“So what?” she returned “I was there all the time, although you couldn’t see me. It was as easy to hypnotize the cops as you.”

“Do you really mean Doc’s alive?” I still couldn’t believe it.

“Of course, but he doesn’t know it,” she said airily. “Right now he’s in the City morgue and he thinks he’s as dead as George Washington but we can soon fix that.”

“Then what are we waiting for?” I exclaimed “Look at the time, we’ve only a half an hour before midnight.”

Arym looked over at Myra, “Are you going to take me back?” she asked.

“I suppose I’ll have to” Myra said, a little doubtfully “Are you going to behave?”

“She’ll behave,” I said, “I know how to handle her.”

“All right,” Myra said, “I’ve missed her too. Come on back,” her eyes lit up, “it’ll be just like old times.”

Aryrn hesitated, then she came over to me. “You won’t ever see me again,” she said sadly, “not as I really am.” She put her arms round me. “This is the last time I’ll hold you like this.”

I pulled her to me and kissed her. “Be good,” I said, “I’m trusting you.”

“I’m ready when you two are,” Myra said, a little waspishly.

Aryrn gave me a quick hug and pushed me away. “Look out of the window,” she said, “I have to undress.”

I hadn’t turned my back for ten seconds when the door opened and Clancy walked in.

“So she’s dead, eh?” he said, “well, Bud, I’m sorry.”

I took a quick look at the bed and then stiffened. Myra and Arym were lying side by side, their blonde heads sharing the same pillow. Even though I knew what was happening, the sight unnerved me.

Clancy saw them at the same time. He blinked and passed his hand over his eyes. Then he had another look and went pale.

“She looks nice, doesn’t she?” I said, deciding to bluff.

Clancy made gurgling noises. Beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead. He moved closer to the bed and stared. “Yeah,” he said, in a cracked voice, “but it ain’t the kind of thing I want to see every day.”

“Nor do I,” I said feelingly, “but she does look happy.”

“That’s more than I do,” Clancy said, supporting himself against the bed rail, “my eyesight’s giving me a little trouble. You wouldn’t say there are two dames in that bed, would you?”

“No,” I said firmly, “I wouldn’t say that at all.”

“I didn’t think you would,” he returned, with a groan, “Maybe I’ve been working too hard.”

“You’d better go away some place quiet and lie down,” I said.

“Yeah, yeah,” Clancy said, “but I can’t imagine any place quiet enough,” and he went out of the room with dragging steps.

I turned back to the bed in time to see Arym merge into Myra.

“I’ll sure be glad when this business is over,” I said, mopping my face with my handkerchief.

Myra sat up in bed. “Wait for me,” she said, “I’ll be with you in a few minutes.”

“Don’t let them see you,” I said, and went out into the corridor.

Clancy was sitting in a heap with his head in his hands. The two cops were watching him uneasily.

“Don’t worry him,” I said to them, “he has a lot on his mind right now.”

“We ain’t worrying him,” one of the cops returned uneasily, “he’s worrying us.”

I moved down the corridor and stood waiting. Myra didn’t keep me long. Her voice sounded in my ear after a few minutes, “Let’s go,” she said.

We reached the city morgue a quarter before midnight. A thin, querulous looking bird with a heavy moustache and a network of veins over his sharp, hooked nose sat behind the counter. “What do you want?” he snapped.

“You have a body here I want to look at,” I said, taking out a *Recorder* press card and handing it to him, “a guy named Ansell. Doc Ansell.”

He flipped the card back to me, “Come to-morrow,” he said, and picked up his newspaper.

“Wait a minute,” I said, “I have to see this guy right now.” The morgue attendant glared at me over his glasses, “No one’s going in there to-night. Beat it,” he said.

I turned to Myra, “One of those nice helpful guys,” I said, “maybe you’d better do something about it. Look at the time.”

It was ten to twelve.

Myra said, “I’m on my way,” and she vanished.

On the floor where she had been standing were her clothes in a neat little pile. Her hat rested on top and her shoes were at the bottom of the pile.

I lit a cigarette and watched the effect on the morgue attendant with interest.

He got up deliberately and peered at the pile of clothes with glassy eyes.

“Astonishing how little these girls wear,” I said chattily, “just a handful of silk here and a wisp of silk there and yet they look marvellous.”

“Where is she?” he whispered, clawing at his throat.

“In the morgue by now,” I said, “but, she’ll be back.”

He gave a long sigh and fell down behind the counter. I didn’t blame him. It was a shock for a guy his age.

I left him there and ran round the counter. As I reached the head of the stairs that led to the morgue I saw Doc Ansell come stumbling up.

I ran down and grabbed him, “Doc!” I cried, “am I glad to see you!”

“Take care of him while I dress,” Myra’s voice said, “he’s still a little dazed.”

“Don’t hold that against me,” Doc said, gripping my hand, “I’ve had a very trying experience.”

The morgue attendant still lay behind the counter, but as we passed he sat up and peered at us.

“You won’t want this stiff any more,” I said to him. “I’m going to take it away and buy it a meal.”

Myra flashed into her clothes.

“Come on, Doc,” she said, slipping her arm through his, “let’s get out of here.”

As we went out, the morgue attendant gave a low wail and collapsed once more on the floor.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

I REALLY don't think that I need keep you any longer. If you have read this far you'll probably be like Maddox who never could bring himself to believe my story and if I hadn't left New York, I'm sure he would have shanghaied me into a nut house.

The only defence I offer is that strange things do happen. I'm not suggesting that you should believe everything you read or hear, but if you make a habit of doubting everything you will miss much of the fun in life.

It was nice to have Doc Ansell with us again. It was nice for me to have Myra without Arym and to know that she wouldn't suddenly shoot into the air or vanish without warning. She meant a lot to me and if I'd had to have her with her black magic, I wouldn't have hesitated. But after the new moon she settled down to normal life again.

There was no trouble in getting Bogle out of jail. Summers was so pleased to have Kruger and his mob on ice that he was willing to give way of a small matter like releasing Sam.

I cannot close this story without telling you what happen to Whisky. The police rescued him from Peppj and held him for us. At midnight as we were hurrying with Doc to the police headquarters, there was a sudden uproar in the room where they had put Whisky. On going in they found Whisky trying to gnaw an immensely fat Mexican Who had mysteriously appeared out of thin air.

The Mexican had been so abusive and violent that the police kept him for us to see. You can imagine our feelings when Pablo was brought in, looking as if he could make mincemeat of us all.

Yes, Pablo had come back. He wasn't any nicer and I can't say I blamed him. To have been turned into a sausage and then eaten by a large wolfhound is a pretty harrowing experienced. He was inclined to blame Myra and me for it, and I felt, that if he were at large, he might resort to his horn trick some dark night when we weren't expecting him.

I had a word with Summers and he sent Pablo back to Mexico under an armed escort. There, he was handed over to Mexican authorities who put a rope around his neck and strung him several feet into the air.

I never liked Pablo anyway.

Now that his influence had been removed from Whisky the dog was unable to talk. We regretted this because Whisky had been a sensible kind of dog and he invariably had a number of sensible things to say.

At first, Whisky was depressed because he couldn't express himself, but, fortunately, he ran into a lady dog who took to him and they settled down quite happily together.

Myra and I decided to set up home on the Pacific coast. This decision was largely influenced by finding among Myra's clothes twenty-four thousand-dollar bills. It was the reward that Arym had hidden on the night she met me for the first time on the stairs, three days after we had arrived in New York.

It seemed a waste of good money to return the money to Maddox. He had plenty of his own and we could use it to advantage ourselves. Besides, Maddox never really forgave me and as he spent much of his time making inquiries about lunatic asylums, it seemed safer to have a change of air.

Doc set himself up once again as a herbalist and Sam helped him. They insisted on sharing our house. It seemed only right to have them after all we had been through together and we invited Whisky and his lady friend to join us.

It is an odd thing, but I never did meet Myra's father. We heard he had married a midget from a travelling circus, but we never had confirmation of this. Anyway, he dropped out of Myra's life which was a good thing. I had enough on hand without having a midget for a mother-in-law.

I found a profitable market as a short-story writer and Myra was busy preparing for Ross Milan junior.

I always wanted a son. And, after the inevitable alarming span of months, a son arrived. He was a nice-looking kid, more like his mother than me. We were all crazy about him.

On the face of it, it looked like we had finished with black magic, policemen and hoodlums and were all set for a nice quiet trip to old age, but it didn't work out like that.

One Sunday morning I was sitting at my desk trying to invent a situation for a story, when a sudden wild scream brought me to my feet. Throwing down my pen, I rushed into the garden.

Myra, Doc and Sam were staring into the sky with horrified expressions.

I followed their gaze and my reason almost crumbled.

Thirty feet or so in the air sat Ross Millan junior. He waved his toy Mickey Mouse excitedly when he saw me.

"Look, Pop," he shouted happily, "I'm flying!"

THE END

This eBook is created by Mohamed Watfa
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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mohamed Watfa', written over a light-colored rectangular background.