Jack Vance

&

Ellery Queen

A ROOM TO DIE IN

Cast of Characters

CHAPTER 1

Ann Nelson taught second grade at Mar Vista Elementary School in San Francisco's Sunset district. She lived in a third-story apartment at 6950 Granada Avenue, ten blocks from the ocean.

Arriving home one afternoon early in March, she noticed a large, rather shabby Buick parked at the curb. In the driver's seat sat her mother. Ann's first impulse was to drive quickly on, but Elaine had seen her and was purposefully jabbing out her cigarette.

Ann pulled into the parking area. Elaine got out, gave her girdle a tug, and marched briskly toward her. She was a short, not unattractive woman of forty-three—eighteen years older than Ann—plump as a robin, with a swaggering air of self-reliance. Her hair, tinted an impossible auburn-bronze, was teased into hundreds of tight curls. She wore a blue silk suit with large white buttons, a frivolous white hat, and spike-heeled blue pumps.

Ann was taller, with casual brown hair. By contrast, she looked cool and uncomplicated.

They greeted each other with perfunctory pecks; then Ann led the way upstairs. Elaine talked continuously. ". . . Say what you like about Frisco—sooner I get back south the better. My teeth haven't stopped chattering since I got here, the damn fog *and* cold

and wind ... Last winter I was in Florida; that's God's country. I had the most *marvelous* house trailer, but I had to sell it. Wouldn't you know! ..."

She stood in the middle of Ann's living room and assessed every object in sight with a panoramic glance.

"Sit down," said Ann. "I'll fix you a drink."

Elaine perched on the edge of a chair. "With a job like yours," she said gaily, "I'm surprised you keep liquor in the house."

Ann smiled grimly at the ancient taunt. "Scotch or bourbon?"

Elaine wasn't sure. Ann showed her the bottles, which she had picked out of a bin at the supermarket. Elaine read the labels and winced. "I'll stick to the Scotch; it's safer."

"I'm not all that particular," said Ann.

"Don't get me wrong," protested Elaine. "I know as well as the next one that a schoolteacher's salary doesn't extend to Jack Daniel."

"I make out well enough."

"I envy you your fortitude. I'd go stark raving mad the first day. The first *hour*."

Ann's smile was becoming brittle. "It's not all that bad. Second-graders are pretty amenable."

"On the rocks with a squeeze of lemon. Or bitters, if you have any."

Ann brought ice from the refrigerator. Elaine jumped to the window and looked out into the street. Then she walked over to the counter that separated living room from kitchen and eased herself up on a stool. With quizzical eyes she watched Ann squeeze lemon juice into her glass. "I thought sure I'd find you married. At least going through the motions."

Ann made no comment. She handed Elaine a glass and poured soda into her own. Elaine drank, rumi-

nated a moment, then turned wry eyes on Ann. "My feelings are hurt. It's been *three years* since I've seen you. And you don't even say you're glad to see me!"

"It's certainly been a long time," said Ann. "What have you been doing?"

"Oh ... taking care of myself. I get the most dismal streaking headaches. Honestly, nothing seems to help. I've spent hundreds of dollars on every kind of treatment imaginable. I've been to three of the best doctors in Los Angeles. They look wise, give me some pills, and send a big bill. But night after night it's the same old story—as if somebody hit me with a hammer. Right here." Elaine rubbed her temples.

"Will you have more Scotch?" asked Ann.

Elaine shook her head. "I think not." She primly pushed her glass aside. "I suppose you never see Larry?"

Larry was Ann's ex-husband, an oboist of some reputation. "I think he's in Cleveland, playing with the Symphony."

Elaine screwed up her face. "The awful sounds that man used to make!"

Ann gave a noncommittal shrug. It was her conviction that Elaine, motivated partly by dislike for Larry, partly by sheer deviltry, had broken up the marriage. Ann could now recall the situation with dispassion, even a kind of humor. Larry had displayed a ridiculous tendency toward breast-beating; she probably had lost very little. Still, at the time ...

Elaine absently reached for her glass. Finding it empty she twitched her mouth in a *moue* of surprise. Ann politely poured more Scotch. "I suppose you're still married to what's-his-name ... Gluck?"

"I see Harvey off and on," Elaine acknowledged. "He wants me to move back to Glendale, but"—she gave her head a sage shake—"uh-uh. I've had it with

Harvey, unless he gives up those vile kennels." She sipped the Scotch. "Do you ever see your father?"

Years of practice had schooled Ann in the most subtle shadings of Elaine's voice. She asked, "What do you want with him?"

"You haven't seen Roland, then?"

"About a year ago I had dinner with him and his wife. Then, let's see—in August?—July or August I happened to be in Sausalito and I ran into him on the waterfront. He and Pearl were separated, and Roland was living out in the country. I don't know what he's doing now."

"You lack all sense of duty toward either Daddy *or* Mommy," declared Elaine.

Ann laughed grimly. "I certainly lack something. If it hadn't been for Grandmother, I'd have lacked a lot more."

Elaine sniffed. "Well, it's not kind to say so, but you must know you were an accident. Heavens, I was just a kid. And after your father and I separated . . . well, I had my career to think of."

"Career? What career?"

"I've tried everything."

"That's a fact."

Elaine rose, smoothing the blue suit over her torso. Years ago, at Santa Monica High, she had been a cute redhead, full of mischief, ginger, and zip. She had been cheerleader, jitterbug champion, general hell-raiser. How and why she had ever cast her lot with Roland Nelson—scrounger, iconoclast, bum, and sometime chess player—was a mystery Ann had never resolved.

Elaine had decided to sulk. "I must say I expected you to show a little more *warmth*. You've got every bit of your father's egotism. Here I've come all the way north, groped my way through this miserable city . . ."

Ann could think of nothing to say. Above all, she must be careful to avoid the slightest proffer of hospitality. Elaine was deft at converting a halfhearted "look in on us sometime" to three weeks in the master bedroom.

"Well," snapped Elaine, "what is your father's address? I want to talk to him."

"Why?" Ann was surprised enough to ask.

Elaine smiled. "If the truth be known, dear Bobo has come into money, and I want what he owes me—which is plenty."

"How in the world would Daddy come into money?" Ann asked, bewildered.

"Haven't you heard? His wife died."

"No!"

"Yep. What was her name . . . Pearl? Anyway, they were never divorced, and he inherited. As easy as that."

"I'm sorry," said Ann. "I liked her." She gave Elaine a puzzled look. "Where did you learn all this?"

Elaine laughed brightly. "Don't you worry; I keep my ear to the ground. You *do* have his address?"

"When I spoke to him he was living in Inisfail. No telephone. He'd become a hermit of sorts."

"Where in the world is Inisfail?"

"Cross the Golden Gate Bridge, keep on the freeway into San Rafael. Then ask or check a map, because it's off the main highway. Toward the ocean. The address is five sixty Neville Road."

Elaine noted it on the back of an envelope. Ann watched her write. "You're just wasting your time."

"What do you mean?"

"Roland won't be anxious to share his wealth with you. Or me. Or anyone."

Elaine pursed her lips in a thoughtful smile. "I

think he will. In fact, I *know* he will. Or I'll make his life so utterly unbearable—"

"You've got a point," said Ann. "But I don't think it'll work."

"We'll see." Elaine drained her glass. A moment later she left. Ann watched from the window as her mother crossed the sidewalk and got into her car. She looked up before she shut the door, flipping her hand in jaunty farewell. The engine started with a burst of blue exhaust.

The car lurched off, around the corner, and out of sight, and Ann was left in a mood of dark depression.

CHAPTER 2

A month later, out of long habit Ann sent her mother a birthday card, addressing it "828 Pemberton Avenue, North Hollywood." Motivated by a mixture of malice and curiosity, she wrote at the bottom *Any luck with Roland?*

In due course the envelope came back, stamped *No forwarding address.* Ann tossed it into the wastebasket.

A week later she passed her own twenty-sixth birthday. Before she knew it she'd be thirty. Unmarried, a schoolteacher to boot. Unpleasant visions of loneliness began to take shape in her mind. But she mustn't panic; that would be the surest way to frighten off the few eligible bachelors she knew.

What she needed was a change, Ann decided. Scenery, friends, profession, outlook—everything! A completely new life . . . Easier said than done, however. She had no talent for frugality; her savings were modest. Enough to take her to Mexico, or perhaps even Europe for a couple of months, since her teacher's salary continued through the summer. But returning to the apartment, to the second grade at Mar Vista—what a dreadful anticlimax! . . . Of course, there was always the Peace Corps. Ann gave

the idea serious consideration. But was she really that dedicated? Probably not.

About this time she met Jim Llewellyn at a party and fell madly, instantly, in love. There were problems, naturally. Jim was married. His wife was hell on wheels, Jim said; they had occupied separate bedrooms now for two months. The only consideration that deterred him from divorce—and he meant it, he said—was the two kids. There was an affair that persisted until Jim's wife wife telephoned Ann and wistfully asked if they could have a talk. Ann said, "Yes, of course," in a tremulous voice; and presently Dorothy Llewellyn appeared—an obviously decent woman whose basic deficiency seemed to be her looks: she was as homely as a coal scuttle.

Ann was stricken with guilt, and felt a fool as well. Not only a fool, but a cheap, vulgar, common little tramp. She assured Dorothy Llewellyn that the episode was at an end. The woman sadly confessed that this was a yearly task, this herding Jim back to the fold. "I know I'm not pretty—but he begged me to marry him, and I did. I've kept my part of the bargain. I suppose in time he'll get over this—this . . ." She hesitated over the word.

"Philandering," said Ann.

Dorothy departed, and Ann's depression became more acute than ever. Jim Llewellyn never called again.

During May, Ann definitely decided not to renew her contact with the Mar Vista Elementary School. Or *almost* definitely.

On the evening of Thursday, May 30, Ann had barely arrived home when her doorbell rang. She answered, to find in the corridor a serious young man in a dark blue uniform. The insigne on his arm read *Deputy Sheriff, County of San Francisco.*

"Miss Nelson?"

Ann nodded.

"May I come in?"

Ann stepped back; the deputy entered. He seemed ill at ease. "I've come on a very unpleasant errand," he said, looking everywhere but at Ann.

"Oh? What have I done?"

"Nothing, far as I know. The fact is, I'm the bearer of bad news."

Ann waited.

"It concerns your father."

"Oh? He's had an . . . accident?"

"Worse than that."

"He's dead?"

"I'm afraid so, Miss Nelson."

Ann went thoughtfully to her kitchen cabinet. "Can I pour you a glass of sherry?"

"No, thanks." He added earnestly, "But by all means have one yourself."

Ann smiled in wan amusement. "I'm not about to collapse. I usually have a glass of sherry when I come home."

The deputy raised his eyebrows a trifle. "I see." It was obvious that he didn't.

Ann returned to the living room. "How did it happen?"

"I don't have the details. I understand he was shot."

Ann stared. "Shot? With a gun?"

"So I understand."

"You mean ... an accident? Or did somebody murder him?"

The deputy shook his head. "I honestly don't know. If you telephone Inspector Thomas Tarr, at the Marin County sheriff's office, he'll give you the details. The number is Glenwood 4-4010."

Ann went to the telephone. "Are you sure you won't have some sherry?"

"No, thanks." He was no longer solicitous. He said in a formal voice, "If everything's all right, I'll be going."

Ann said, "I'm not cold-blooded; it's simply that my father and I weren't at all close."

"I'll be going along, then."

He departed. Ann dialed GL 4-4010 and asked to speak to Inspector Thomas Tarr. An easy, rather husky, voice said, "Tarr speaking."

"This is Ann Nelson. I've just heard about my father."

Tarr's voice turned grave. "Oh, yes, Miss Nelson. A very bad business."

"What happened?"

"This morning your father was found dead at his home. We haven't completed our investigation yet, but the circumstances seem to indicate suicide."

Ann stared unbelievingly at the telephone receiver. "Did you say *suicide?*"

"Yes."

"I don't believe it."

"There doesn't seem to be any other explanation."

"I still don't believe it. When did it happen?"

Tarr's voice became cautious. "I don't have a definite report. He's been dead several days, at least."

"It's fantastic," said Ann. "Anyone who knew my father . . . it's *incredible.*"

"He never spoke of suicide?"

"Never. Although—"

"He did mention it, then."

"No." Ann's voice took on an edge. "When I last saw him I thought he seemed preoccupied. But this was months ago, and he'd just separated from his wife."

"He was depressed?"

"Not to the point of suicide. He said something about being in a state of 'transition,' but I don't pretend to understand what he meant."

"He seems to have been a strange man."

"He was."

"You're his closest blood relative?"

"His only blood relative. I suppose I'd better do something. Arrangements, and so on."

"I guess it's up to you. We'll also want an official identification."

"Oh, heavens. Must I?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Tonight?"

"No, that's not necessary. In fact, I'm about to go off duty. But if you'll telephone in the morning, or meet me here at, say, ten o'clock?"

"I'll be there at ten."

"I'll see you then."

Ann rose slowly, stood for a moment in the middle of the room, then poured herself another glass of sherry and sat down again. Shock had worn off; something like awe took its place. Suicide! Inspector Tarr had been definite; she would have to accept it, unbelievable as it was.

She thought of her father as she had known him over the years: a man of protean complexity, tall and spare, with assertive aquiline features and a ruff of thick, prematurely gray hair. Many times Ann had tried to puzzle out the rationale by which her father lived. Always she had arrived at the same conclusion. Roland Nelson—stating the case in its crassest form—cared not a thistle for anyone's good opinion but his own, and often was driven to makeshifts that might have demolished the dignity of a man less assured. She thought of their meeting the previous summer. She had chanced upon him in an art shop, where he had just placed a number of "non-objective" sculp-

tures cynically welded from oddments of junk. Obviously squandering his entire capital, he had taken Ann to lunch at the best restaurant in town.

Over coffee he mentioned, as an item of no great importance, that he and his second wife had come to a parting of the ways.

Ann, accustomed to capricious, apparently self-defeating acts on the part of her father, was not surprised. She expressed mild disapproval. "You were lucky to find someone as nice as Pearl."

"No question but she's nice," Roland agreed. "Too nice. And she worked hard. Too hard. I'm not used to having my every wish anticipated. Especially when I might not have been planning to wish in the first place."

"It wouldn't have taken her long to learn. You've only been married six months."

"Going on seven. But it's over with. *Kaput.* I'm now in a state of transition."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I'm making rearrangements. Shifting the internal furniture. It takes a while."

"Where are you living?"

"Out in the country, near Inisfail. I don't see anyone for weeks on end. It's remarkably pleasant."

"I suppose your art makes heavy demands on you," said Ann, in ironic reference to the *avant-garde* "sculptures."

Roland smiled his harsh, uneven smile and called for the check.

A week or so later, at eleven o'clock of a rainy night, Ann's telephone had rung. At the other end was Pearl. She apologized for calling so late in the evening; Ann assured her that she had been reading a book; and they discussed Roland for half an hour. Pearl was melancholy but philosophical. She had married Roland Nelson fully aware of his peculiari-

ties; things simply hadn't worked out. "Roland is a very obstinate man, especially where women are concerned. He won't believe that someone can say no and mean it. It may take him a while to come to his senses."

"You're probably right," said Ann, uncertain of what Pearl was talking about. Only later did she speculate that Pearl might have been referring to someone other than herself. And soon afterward Pearl had died. Ann wondered what had caused Pearl's death.

A new thought occurred to her, a startling, exciting thought that burst in her head like fireworks. Roland had inherited from Pearl; Ann would presumably inherit from Roland—and apparently a great deal of money was involved. Unless Roland had left a will making other provision—which she doubted. How strange! Money, originally the property of a total stranger, would now become hers! Ann could not restrain a thrill of joy at the prospect. She instantly scolded herself for rejoicing in a situation which had cost two lives. And she thought of her mother, who would certainly expect a share of the inheritance. Elaine would first hint, then supplicate, then viciously demand. It might be wise to move to a new address, thought Ann.

Tomorrow was Friday, a workday. She telephoned the principal at Mar Vista, and explained the situation. Mrs. Darlington expressed sympathy and said of course take as much time as necessary.

In the morning Ann dressed in a dark-gray suit and drove across the Golden Gate Bridge, through the hills of Marin County, to San Rafael. Inspector Thomas Tarr proved to be a man in his early thirties, of middle height, unobstrusively muscular, wearing gray flannel slacks, a jacket of nondescript

tweed, and a tie selected apparently at random. He had mild blue eyes, an undisciplined crop of sun-bleached blond hair, and an air of informality that Ann found disarming.

He greeted her with gravity. "Sorry I have to bring you here on such an errand, Miss Nelson. Shall we get the worst of it over? Then we can relax?"

He ushered her down a flight of steps, along a brightly lit corridor, into a chilly, white-tiled room. He slid out a drawer; Ann peered gingerly down into austere features, now blurred. She backed away, shuddering. Tears that she had never anticipated came to her eyes.

Inspector Tarr spoke in a sympathetic voice. "This is your father, Miss Nelson?"

Ann gave a jerky nod. "Yes."

They returned upstairs, Ann drying her eyes and feeling a little embarrassed. Tarr was understanding itself. He led the way to a small private office and seated Ann in a worn leather chair. "It's a job I never get used to."

"I don't know what came over me," said Ann with vehemence. "Certainly not grief."

"You weren't close to your father?"

"Not at all."

"I'm glad for your sake, Miss Nelson." Tarr rolled a pencil between his fingers. "Can you think of any reason why your father should have wanted to kill himself?"

Ann shook her head. "It's hard to believe that he did."

"There's not the slightest doubt."

"Couldn't it have been an accident? Or an act of violence?"

"Definitely not. You saw him last when?"

Ann gave Tarr a frowning inspection. Something in his manner suggested that he knew more than he

was telling. "Toward the end of last summer. I believe it was August." Ann described the episode, trying to convey its special flavor. Tarr listened with polite interest. When she had finished, he reflected a moment, staring at the pencil. "You don't believe, then, that he was broken up by his separation from his wife?"

"I've just finished telling you he wasn't."

"I'm sorry," said Tarr with patently spurious humility. "I'm sometimes a trifle dense. You know dumb cops."

Ann said with dignity, "I think he liked and respected Pearl, but apparently she got on his nerves. I wouldn't be surprised—"

"If what?"

"If there might not be another woman involved."

Tarr lounged back in his chair. "What makes you say that?"

"Something Pearl told me over the telephone."

"You don't know the identity of this other woman?"

"I wouldn't have the faintest idea. Even if there was another woman."

Tarr looked thoughtful. "According to his landlord, he's been living like a hermit. Going nowhere, seeing no one. Was that the way he usually lived?"

"He had no usual way of life. I think he just decided to live in the country. Since he had no friends, the result would be the life of a recluse."

Tarr reached into a drawer, brought out a wallet, and tossed it on the desk. "This is the extent of what he had in his pockets. I haven't gone through his papers yet."

Ann looked through the wallet. There were four ten-dollar bills, three fives and several ones. One compartment contained a driver's license, a pink automobile-ownership certificate for a 1954 Plymouth,

a receipt issued by Apex Van and Storage acknowledging responsibility for "Rugs and household effects as itemized," with an appended schedule.

A second compartment contained several business cards: *Martin Jones, General Contractor,* with a San Rafael address and telephone number; *Hope, Braziel and Taylor, Stockbrokers; The California and Pacific Bank, Mr. Frank Visig, Investment Management Department,* both of San Francisco; and to Ann's astonishment three snapshots of herself, at about the ages of four, ten, and sixteen. On the back of the latest, her current address and telephone number had been scribbed in pencil.

"You were pretty little girl," remarked Tarr, watching her.

"I can't imagine where he got these pictures," Ann exclaimed. "Unless my grandmother sent them to him. Dear old Granny, such an innocent thing." She looked through the other compartments. "Is that all?"

"That's all. Your father apparently belonged to no lodges, clubs, or organizations."

"Small chance of that."

"Didn't he have any close friends?"

"None I know of."

"What about enemies?"

"I wouldn't think so. But I really don't know."

Tarr laid the pencil carefully on his desk. "There's an indication that Mr. Nelson was being blackmailed."

"What!"

He clasped his hands, surveying Ann with the blandest of expressions. "I'll explain the circumstances. Your father's landlord, Mr. Jones, found the body. Jones came to collect the rent, which was past due. . . . Otherwise your father might have lain there dead God knows how long. Jones rang the bell and,

receiving no answer, looked through a window. He saw your father, obviously dead. He telephoned the sheriff's office, and I came out with another officer.

"The room, a study of sorts, was locked from the inside. The window looked the easiest way in. I broke a pane, cranked open the casement, and crawled through. Mr. Nelson was certainly dead, and I radioed for the coroner.

"While waiting, I made certain observations. As I mentioned, the room was a study. Mr. Nelson had apparently been shot by a thirty-eight revolver which lay on the floor; the laboratory has confirmed this. The door leading from the study into the living room was locked and bolted from the inside. There is no access to the study other than door and window, and both were locked. It has to have been suicide." Tarr glanced at Ann as if to guage her reaction. But Ann said nothing, and he continued. "There's a fireplace in the study. Among the ashes I found a crumpled sheet of paper—I can't show it to you just now; it's at the laboratory. But"—he consulted a notebook "—the message reads like this: 'I've been too easy on you. I want more money. From now on fifteen hundred dollars each and every month.'" Tarr replaced the notebook in his pocket. "It was made up of letters cut from newspaper headlines and pasted to a sheet of cheap paper. There were some fingerprints on the paper, all your father's. The implication is clearly blackmail." He leaned forward. "Do you know of anything in your father's background for which he might have been blackmailed?"

Ann laughed scornfully. "I don't think my father *could* be blackmailed."

"Why do you say that?"

"He had no shame."

"Well, if he'd committed a crime—"

"I don't think so. Because ... well, let me put it this way. My father was a very good chess player. You can't cheat at chess. Or rather, you can, but you don't. Because if you win, you haven't really won; if you lose, you've lost double."

"So?"

"My father wouldn't commit a crime for the same reasons he wouldn't cheat at chess. He was too proud."

"Nice if everyone thought like that," mused Tarr. "Except that I'd be out of a job. I wonder if the crime rate among chess players is below average.... Well, back to your father. You can't conceive a basis on which he could be blackmailed?"

"No."

Tarr flung himself back almost impatiently. "Your father seems to have been ... well, extraordinary. Even peculiar."

Ann felt a prickle of something like anger. Now that Roland Nelson was dead, she felt a need to defend him, or at least to explain the workings of that splendid, reckless, sardonic personality. "It all depends on what you mean by 'extraordinary' and 'peculiar.' He was certainly independent. He never adapted to anyone. You had to adapt to him or go your own way."

Tarr moved in his chair, as if the idea were a personal challenge. He brought out his notebook. "Your mother's name is what?"

"Mrs. Harvey Gluck."

"Where does she live?"

"In North Hollywood. Do you want the address?"

"Please."

Ann looked in her address book. "Eight twenty-eight Pemberton Avenue. I'm not sure she's still

there. In fact, I know she's not. I wrote her a card which was returned by the post office."

Tarr made a note. Ann noticed that he wore no ring on his left hand. "How long have your mother and father been divorced?"

"Years and years. When I was two they took off in different directions and left me in Santa Monica with my grandmother. I saw very little of either of them after that."

"Did your father contribute to your support?"

"When he felt in the mood. Not very often."

"Hmm. Now let's see. He married Pearl Maudley . . . when?"

Ann studied him a moment. "If you're so sure he committed suicide, why are you asking these questions?"

Tarr grinned as if Ann had made a joke. To her surprise, he tossed the pencil in the air with one hand, caught it with the other. Detectives were supposed to be grim and incisive. Tarr said, "There's still the matter of blackmail."

"He and Pearl were married a year and a half ago. She was a widow with a good deal of money—which may or may not have persuaded him."

"Were you at the wedding?"

"No."

"But you did meet the new Mrs. Nelson?"

"About a month after they were married she invited me to dinner. They had a beautiful apartment in Sausalito. After meeting Pearl, I felt that my father was very lucky."

"But they separated. When she died—since there was no divorce and she had no close relatives—he came into her estate. Is that correct?"

"So far as I know. I wasn't even aware Pearl was dead till my mother told me."

"And how did she find out?"

"I have no idea. It's something I wondered about myself."

Tarr leaned back, his eyes quite blank. "And now you'll inherit."

Ann laughed humorlessly. "If you're suggesting that I killed my father for his money . . ."

"Did you?"

"Would you believe me if I said I did?"

"I'd like to know how you arranged it."

"Just for the record," said Ann with a curling lip, "I did not shoot Roland."

Tarr asked carelessly, "You weren't blackmailing him?"

"I neither murdered nor blackmailed my father."

"What about your mother?"

"What about her?"

"Do you think she might have been blackmailing him?"

"No. I really don't."

Tarr frowned, put the pencil definitely aside. "You saw her when?"

"The early part of March—the first or the second."

"Which would be shortly after your father came into the estate. Did she tell you of her intentions?"

"She wanted money from him. I told her she was wasting her time, but she paid no attention."

"Wouldn't that suggest that she had some sort of hold over him? In other words, blackmail?"

"It seems utterly fantastic."

"You have the same reaction to the idea of suicide," Tarr pointed out, "which is demonstrable fact."

"It hasn't been demonstrated to me yet."

"Very well," said Tarr. He rose. "I'm going out to Inisfail now to check through your father's papers.

You can come along if you like; in fact, I'd appreciate your help. I believe I can also demonstrate the fact of suicide."

"Very well," said Ann with dignity. "I'll help in any way I can."

CHAPTER 3

Tarr conducted Ann to an official car and gallantly assisted her into the front seat. He drove out of town by the Lagunitas Road, which took a preliminary dip to the south, then wound westward over the flanks of Mount Tamalpais, eventually meeting the Pacific at Horseneck Beach.

"I spoke to your father's landlord last night," said Tarr. "He hasn't been too happy. Your father apparently failed to do some work he had promised."

Ann made no comment. The fact was of no interest to her.

Tarr glanced at her sidewise. "What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a schoolteacher."

"You don't look like any of my old school teachers," said Tarr. "I might still be in school."

"You don't look like any of mine, either," said Ann wearily.

After a moment Tarr asked, "Since you're Miss Nelson, you're not married?"

"Not now."

"I guess we all have our problems," said Tarr—a remark over which Ann puzzled for several minutes.

San Rafael fell behind. The road passed through a scrofulous district of housing developments, then

veered off across a rolling countryside of vineyards, copses of oak and eucalyptus, and old clapboard farmhouses. The hills became steeper and wilder; fir and pine appeared beside the road.

Ten miles out of San Rafael the road swung across an ancient timber bridge and entered the village of Inisfail. The main street housed the usual assortment of business enterprises; there were three or four tree-shrouded back lanes lined with spacious old dwellings. At the edge of town Tarr turned right, into Neville Road, which after a turn or two led down the middle of a long, wooded valley.

Tarr pointed ahead to a ranch-style house overpowered by four massive oaks. "That's where your father lived."

Ann, suddenly aware of an unpleasant sensation—expectancy? tension? oppression?—had nothing to say.

Tarr turned into the driveway and parked under the largest of the oaks. Ann got out slowly, the unpleasantness becoming ever more acute. She shut out of her mind the recollection of her father's dead face and, forcing herself to relax, looked around her. The house was neat and innocuously modern, quite devoid of character; it might have been a transplant from one of the tracts near San Rafael. The front wall was dark brown board-and-batten, the side walls bisque stucco. There was a shake roof, a used-brick chimney. The garden consisted of a straggling laurel hedge, a patch of lawn, and a line of new rosebushes. In the garage stood a battered green car, evidently the 1954 Plymouth of the ownership certificate.

If Tarr was aware of Ann's state of mind, he ignored it. Matter-of-factly he took several keys from his pocket, sorted through the labels, selected one, unlocked the front door, and stood aside for Ann to enter. She marched into the house, prepared for ... what? The odor of death?

The air was fresh.

Cautiously Ann relaxed. Her apprehensions were overfanciful. This was only a house, a sorry, ordinary house lacking even the echo of her father's personality. She looked around the living room. It seemed a trifle stuffed. The furniture, like the house itself, was impersonal and characterless, except for a large bookcase crammed with obviously expensive books. At one end of the room, beside the bookcase, a door led into another room, evidently the study where Roland Nelson had died. This was on her right hand. To her left were the dining area and kitchen; in the wall opposite, a sliding glass door opened onto the patio; behind her, a hall led to bedrooms.

Ann said tentatively, "It's not the house I'd expect to find my father living in."

"It's a pretty big place for one man," Tarr agreed. "I guess he liked plenty of room." He walked into the study. Ann followed gingerly.

The study was not large, the longest dimension corresponding to the width of the living room. To the left stood a brick fireplace. The single window, opposite the door, consisted of a pair of aluminum casements, each with six panes, each equipped with a detachable screen. One of the panes had been broken and the screen slit: the means Tarr had employed to gain entry. The wall separating the study from the living room was finished in mahogany paneling; the other three walls were textured plasterboard. A large bookcase stood back to back with, Ann judged, the bookcase in the living room, and was equally heavy with luxurious books. The other furnishings were an inexpensive metal desk on which sat a portable typewriter, two chairs, and a pair of card tables against the right hand wall supporting four chessboards with games in various stages of development.

Ann asked, "Where was my father when you found him?"

Tarr indicated the chair behind the desk. "The gun was on the floor."

Ann turned, closed the door, opened it, closed it again. It fitted the frame on all sides snugly. She said grudgingly, "I'll have to admit there's no conceivable way a string or wire or metal strip could have been worked through a crack."

Tarr looked at her quizzically. "Why do you say that?"

"I'm not convinced that Roland killed himself."

Tarr closed the door, shot a heavy bolt into place, and locked the bolt in place with an old-fashioned harness snap. "This is how I discovered the door. I can swear to it, and so can Sergeant Ryan, who was with me. Notice the bolt. It's fixed to the wall, not the door. Unusual, but more secure. This harness snap"—he demonstrated its action—"pins down the bolt. It is impossible for the door to be bolted shut except through the agency of someone standing *inside* this room. Then, for what it's worth, the door bolt was in the lock position—which in itself would very adequately secure the door."

"Then why the extra bolt? Doesn't it seem peculiar?"

"Yes. I suppose you'd say so."

"I thought detectives worried about odd, unexplained details?"

Tarr grinned ruefully. "I have worries enough with simple, ordinary details. The bolt is peculiar, yes. So I asked Martin Jones about it—the landlord. He didn't know it had been installed. This is a new house; your father was its first tenant. Jones was as annoyed as the devil."

"Why would Roland want a bolt on the door in the first place? It seems so strange."

Tarr shrugged. "I've seen a lot stranger things than that. By the way, notice that the hinges are here on the study side, too, and that the pins are as tight as they could be."

Ann went to the fireplace, stooped, peered up the chimney.

"I checked that, too," said Tarr, watching her. "There's a patent metal throat with a slit about four inches wide when the damper is open. The damper was closed, as it is now, with the handle firmly seated in a notch. Outside there's a barbecue grill, with about six inches of brick between." He stamped on the floor. "Under the rug here there's vinyl tile, and then a concrete slab. The walls, the ceiling"—he looked around—"they're ordinary walls: plywood, plasterboard. A ghost could get through without leaving a mark, nothing else. The window?" He motioned to Ann. "Look. When I push down this handle, a hook clamps the sash to the frame. Not even air can seep through the crack. In addition, the screen was securely screwed into place from the inside, as it is now."

"What about the glass? Could a pane have been broken out and replaced?"

Tarr shook his head. "Go outside and check for yourself. All the putty is uniform and several years old."

"Several years? I thought you said this was a new house."

"It's inconsequential. Jones might have had the window on hand. Or it might have been a used window. Or the supplier might have had it in stock for that long. The basic fact is that the putty is old and undisturbed. Until I broke the pane, of course." He turned, considered the chair behind the desk. "Do you know if your father owned a pistol?"

"No, I don't know."

"He was killed by an S and W thirty-eight revolver—little snub-nose job. It was lying on the floor under the fingers of his right hand. Don't tell me he was left-handed."

"No. He was right-handed."

"So it has to be either accident or suicide. The case for accident is weak to the vanishing point. It consists of the fact that there was no farewell note, and that you consider your father temperamentally incapable of suicide. Still, not all suicides leave notes, and every year thousands of people surprise their relatives by bumping themselves off."

"But *why?* Why should he do something so foolish? He had everything to live for."

"The fact that he was living out here like a hermit might indicate . . . well, moodiness, instability."

Ann laughed scornfully. "You never knew Roland, or you wouldn't say that."

"Well, I mentioned the very strong indication of blackmail."

"Perhaps so. Still—"

"You're not convinced?"

"I'm absolutely confused. I don't know what to think." She turned away, went to look at the card tables. Beside each of the four chessboards lay a stack of postcards. Ann glanced at the postmarks. "Amsterdam . . . New York . . . Albuquerque . . . Leningrad. Correspondence chess."

"He did that as a usual thing?"

"As long as I can remember." Ann thought back along the avenue of her life, recalling the infrequent occasions when it intersected with her father's existence. "He was a very talented chess player. Five years ago he placed second in the California Masters Tournament. He might have done better if he had studied more."

Tarr turned to the desk, moved the portable

typewriter to the side. "Let's get to work." He pulled up a chair for Ann; then, seating himself, he tried the drawers on the right side of the desk. They were unlocked, and he opened them one after the other. "Not much here." He returned to the top drawer, brought forth a sheaf of check-sized green papers. "Rent receipts. Eighty-five dollars a month, paid on the"—he looked through them—"well, toward the first of the month. There's one reason why he liked the house. Cheap rent."

Ann examined the receipts. They were standard printed forms, signed in a neat square hand *Martin Jones*. "The first is dated August forth of last year—just after he and Pearl separated." She ran through the forms, one after the other. "The last is dated April fifth. There's no receipt for May."

"Your father didn't pay his rent. If he had, we probably wouldn't have found him for another month. . . . Let's see what else we've got. A bankbook. Account opened March fourth. First deposit: sixty-eight thousand five hundred and twenty-five dollars. Nice chunk of cash. Rather unusual form for an inheritance."

"It might have been a savings-and-loan account," Ann suggested.

"March fourth. That would be six months after his wife died. The court apparently appointed someone else as administrator of the estate. Otherwise he would have had control of the money sooner."

"I wonder why he didn't pay his rent?" Ann mused. "With all that money . . ."

"That's when people get tight-fisted," said Tarr dryly. "Look here now. On March fifth, a withdrawal: twenty thousand dollars."

Ann reflected. "That would be about the time my mother visited me. Somehow she'd heard about his coming into money."

"Would Mr. Nelson be disposed to give your mother twenty thousand dollars?"

"Not likely." Ann laughed. "He was an easy man to irritate—and she's an irritating woman, to say the least."

"How long did they stay together?"

"Off and on, three or four years. It was never a very stable association."

Tarr returned to the bankbook. "Withdrawals on the first of April and the first of May, a thousand dollars on each occasion—which confirms the existence of blackmail. I'll have to inquire at the bank to see how he took the money." He wrote in his notebook. "A blackmailer would naturally want cash."

Ann snorted. Tarr ignored her, studied the bankbook a moment longer, then laid it aside. "What else do we have?" He sorted through the papers. "Nothing of consequence. Three books of blank checks, no stubs. And no checkbook in current use. It wasn't on his person, either. Just a minute." He jumped to his feet and left the room. Three or four minutes later he returned, looking puzzled. "No checkbook in his bedroom or clothes ... Oh, well. It'll show up. What's that you're looking at?"

"An address book." She handed it to him; Tarr leafed through the pages. "Hmm. Here's a local address: *Alexander Cypriano. Thirty-two Melbourne Drive, Inisfail.*"

"I've heard that name before," said Ann. "Something to do with chess, I think."

Tarr continued to go through the book. "These all might be chess connections. There's not another local address."

"I think you're right. Some of the names I half recognize."

"You're a chess player, too?"

Ann shook her head. "But because of my father

I've always been interested. Once when I was, oh, eight or nine, he took me to a tournament in Long Beach. I was very much impressed." She looked over Tarr's arm into the drawer. "There's the card I sent him last Christmas."

Tarr examined it. " 'Merry Christmas, Ann.' Not what I'd call effusive."

"I never felt effusive."

"But he kept the card. He also carried your photographs. Out of sentiment?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Still, you stand to inherit from him, unless a will providing otherwise turns up."

"Whatever's left after blackmail and taxes."

Tarr considered the bankbook once again. "There should be at least thirty thousand cash. A comfortable sum. There's another twenty thousand represented by that withdrawal. I'd like to know where it went. If your mother got it, she'd naturally claim it was a gift. Unless threats or duress could be proved, that's the last you'd see of it."

"She can keep it, as far as I'm concerned."

"I'll certainly want to talk to your mother."

He opened the bottom drawer. There was nothing in it but a ream of typing paper. On the left side of the desk was a single drawer that proved to be locked. Tarr brought the keys from his pocket and unlocked it. He withdrew a bulging nine-by-twelve-inch manila envelope and opened it. "Stock certificates issued to Roland Nelson." He sheafed through them. "Kaiser Aluminum, a hundred shares. Lockheed, two hundred shares. Pacific Gas and Electric, fifty shares. No, here's more—two hundred and fifty. U.S. Rubber, five hundred. Sinclair Oil, Southern California Edison, International Harvester, DiGiorgio Farms, Lykes Steamship, Koppers, National Cash Register, Fruehauf Trailer ... there must be a hun-

dred thousand dollars here. Good heavens, woman—you're wealthy!"

Ann tried to keep her voice even. "Unless there's a will."

Tarr reached into the drawer and brought out a long white envelope, from which he withdrew two sheets of typing paper. "Speaking of wills . . ." He read to himself with what seemed maddening deliberation. Ann forced herself to sit quietly, though her heart was pounding and she felt hot, stupid and greedy.

"Speaking of wills," said Tarr once again, "here it is. Holographic." He handed the will to Ann. Her eyes raced across the handwritten sentences:

Inisfail, California
March 11, 1963

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

I, Roland Nelson, being of sound mind, good health, and in a noteworthy state of sobriety, declare this to be my last will and testament. I bequeath all the property of which I die possessed to my daughter, Ann Nelson, and I nominate her to be executrix of this will, subject only to the following exceptions and provisions:

1. She must pay all my legitimate debts;

2. I bequeath my corpse to any medical or educational institution which will accept said corpse. If such institution is not conveniently to be found, I direct my executrix to dispose of said corpse by the least costly method consistent with the laws of California, without the intercession of participation of priest, dervish, witch doctor, seer, shaman, professional mourner, monk, fakir, exorcist, musician, incense-swinger,

or other religious practitioner, or cleric of any sect, cult, or superstition whatsoever;

3. She must by all lawful and practical means retain in her personal and immediate possession for a period of at least twenty years from the date of my death that article of medieval Persian craftsmanship presented to me by Pearl Maudley Nelson on or about February 2, 1962;

4. She must pay to Mrs. Harvey J. Gluck of North Hollywood, California, the sum of ten cents per annum, at the demand of the said Mrs. Harvey J. Gluck, for the duration of the life of the said Mrs. Harvey J. Gluck;

5. To each of all and any other claimants upon my estate, I bequeath the sum of one cent.

In witness whereof, on this eleventh day of March, 1963 I subscribe my signature:

ROLAND NELSON

This instrument, having been signed and declared by Roland Nelson to be his last will and testament, in our presence, on this eleventh day of March, 1963, in the presence of Roland Nelson and each other, we subscribe our names as witnesses.

RAYMOND SANTELL, *465 Linden Way, Inisfail, California*
MARTIN JONES, *2632 13th Street, San Rafael, California*

Ann replaced the will on the desk.

Tarr said, "That makes it official. You're rich."

Ann said, in a voice she tried to keep calm, "I'm surprised he went to all this trouble."

"It indicates," said Tarr, in what Ann thought a rather sententious tone, "that he had death on his mind."

Ann dissented. "It indicates that for the first time in his life he had property to worry about. If you'll notice the date—"

"I noticed. March eleventh. Immediately after he took possession of the estate." He sheafed once more through the stock certificates. "What'll you do with all your money?"

"Well, I've got obligations. There's ten cents a year to my mother—"

"If she asks for it."

Ann smiled. "He had fun writing the will."

"What about this article of medieval Persian manufacture?"

Before Ann could answer, the doorbell rang. Tarr jumped up and crossed the living room at a lope. Ann followed more slowly. Tarr opened the door. There stood a tall, slender woman, dramatically beautiful. She wore a dark umber skirt and a black pull-over sweater. She had pale-bronze skin, jet-black hair, clear hazel eyes. She wore no make-up; gold rings in her ears were her only jewelry. Her age was unguessable.

In a car, barely pulled off the road, a plumpish man watched attentively. His face was shrewd, shaped like an owl's; he had a choppy beak of a nose and a fine ruff of gray hair.

The woman seemed surprised at the sight of Tarr. She peered over his shoulder at Ann and spoke in a soft voice. "Is something wrong? We were driving past and noticed the police car. We naturally wondered . . ." Her voice dwindled.

Tarr looked from the man in the car back to the woman. "You're friends of Mr. Nelson's?"

"We live nearby, although we haven't heard from him for months. But seeing the police car . . ." Again her voice trailed off. She half turned, irresolutely, toward the watching man in the car.

"Mr. Nelson is dead," said Tarr.

"He's *dead?*"

"I'm afraid so. May I have your name, please?"

She looked back once more at the man in the car.

"Mr. and Mrs. Cypriano."

"First names?" Tarr brought out his notebook.

"Alexander and Jehane."

"How do you spell that last?"

The woman spelled her name, then turned and called to the man. "Roland is dead."

The man gave no visible sign that he had heard.

Tarr asked, "How long have you known Mr. Nelson?"

"Years. Since . . . well, it's been at least five years."

Ann spoke. "Your husband is a chess master, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Jehane Cypriano quickly, as if Ann had offered her unexpected support. "He's been California champion twice."

From the car Alexander Cypriano suddenly called, "How did he die?"

"Gunshot," said Tarr.

"Who shot him?" Cypriano might have been asking who won a chess game.

"Nothing is definite yet," Tarr called out.

"He probably deserved it."

His wife said, "Don't pay any attention to my husband. He likes to shock people."

Ann asked casually, "Do you know why Mr. Nelson chose this place to live? It seems such a big house for one person."

Jehane examined Ann with careful attention. "I really couldn't say. I haven't spoken to him since shortly after his wife died. He was living in a different house then." She pointed up Neville Road to a gray cottage just visible in a copse of oaks, horse chestnuts, and eucalyptus.

Tarr reflected a moment. "There's some indication that Mr. Nelson committed suicide," he said. "Have you any idea why he might have done such a thing?"

Jehane Cypriano's face became stony. "I find it very hard to believe."

Tarr once more opened his notebook. "May I have your address? I'll probably want to talk to you further."

"Thirty-two Melbourne Drive. The other side of Inisfail, up Blue Hill Road."

Another car turned up into the parking area, a green pickup, with *Martin Jones, Building Contractor,* painted on its side. Jehane Cypriano, at the sight of the pickup, returned to the car. Her husband immediately started the engine, and they drove away.

"That was fast," Tarr remarked. He put away his notebook.

Martin Jones got down from the pickup—a compact, sunburned man with a square face in which things rippled and twitched as if of their own accord. If Jones's temperament were as bellicose as his appearance, thought Ann, it was not surprising that he had clashed with her father. The man favored her with a single glance, which nevertheless seemed to encompass instantly every detail of her face, figure, and clothing.

Tarr said, "This is Miss Nelson, Mr. Nelson's daughter. Martin Jones."

Martin Jones acknowledged the introduction with a curt nod that dismissed her. He gave his entire attention to Tarr. "Find anything?"

"Nothing much. There's one or two points I'd like to clear up. Nelson was in this house how long?"

"Since February or thereabouts. Before that he rented the old family place up the road. I had a

chance to sell it; this house was empty, so I moved him in here."

"I see. Another thing. You witnessed his will?"

"I did."

"You didn't mention it when we spoke yesterday."

"You didn't ask."

"Who is Raymond Santell, the other witness?"

"The mailman."

"What were the circumstances?"

"I came out one day to find him talking to a man; in fact, they were having a hell of an argument. I didn't pay any attention, started to load the stuff I had come for. Pretty soon Nelson went into the house, leaving the other man outside. About five minutes later he came back out with a sheet of paper. He called me over and asked if I'd witness a will. I said I would. Then Nelson asked the other man if he'd also witness the will. The man said, 'What's in it?' Nelson grinned and let him read it. The man got even madder than before. He just turned around and stomped to his car and drove off. Just about this time Santell came past on his mail route. Nelson asked him if he'd be a witness, and Santell agreed. So Nelson signed, and Santell and I signed, and that's all there was to it."

"This other man—did you hear his name?"

"No. He was about fifty, I'd say—big soft guy in fancy clothes, with a trick mustache. Drove a black Mercedes sedan."

"You didn't hear what they were quarreling about?"

Jones gave his head a shake. "I couldn't have cared less."

"Anything else out of the ordinary ever happen that you recall?"

The building contractor considered. He said in a grudging voice, "Nothing particular. In fact, noth-

ing. He was a queer customer, a loner—wouldn't have anything to do with anybody. He played chess by mail—an egghead."

Ann decided that she disliked Martin Jones with great intensity. A boor, a cultural barbarian, and probably proud to be both.

Jones looked over Tarr's shoulder into the house. "When do you think you'll be through around here, Inspector?"

Ann said distinctly. "To what date is the rent paid, please?"

Martin Jones seemed surprised to hear her speak; he examined her once again before replying. "If he's dead, his tenancy is over. In any case, he hasn't paid the rent."

"He paid in advance?"

"Usually."

"So he actually owes you a month's rent?"

"That's right."

"It runs to the first of the month?"

"To the fourth."

"I'll see that you're paid. In fact, I'll write you a check right now—and you can come back on the fourth of June."

"In that case, skip the rent. I want to put the place on the market."

Tarr asked in an easy voice, "You're not going to rent any more?"

"No, sir. It's been nothing but a headache. Nelson got the place for peanuts because he said he'd put in a garden." Jones chuckled. "He planted those rose-bushes and that was it." He said it without resentment, as if this sort of conduct were only to be expected from Roland Nelson. Ann's irritation swelled.

The man looked around the yard. "I've got a lot to do around here." He moved off across the lawn to the rose-bushes, examined the leaves, then without a

backward glance returned to his pickup and drove away.

Ann glared after him. "There goes my candidate for most unlovable man of the year."

Tarr grinned. "You rubbed him the wrong way."

"I rubbed *him* the wrong way!"

"He's no diplomat, I'll say that." He took Ann's arm and steered her back into the living room. Ann pulled her arm free, stalked to the big bookcase, and pretended an interest in the titles. It presently became genuine.

"These must have been Pearl's books. I can't imagine my father's investing in books like these. They're all special editions."

Tarr pulled one out. "*Phaedra's Dream,* by Richard Maskeyne. Who's he?"

"I've forgotten, if I ever knew." Ann took the book. "Published in nineteen thirty-two. . . . Look at these illustrations. Even in nineteen thirty-two it must have cost ten or fifteen dollars. Now it would cost double that."

Tarr squinted along the shelves. "Not a paperback in the lot." He took the book back from Ann. "Eight inches wide, ten high, an inch and a half thick—a hundred twenty cubic inches. For convenience, let's say it's worth twelve dollars. That's ten cents a cubic inch. This bookcase now. It's just about six feet tall, eight feet wide, something less than a foot deep. . . ." He calculated on the back of an envelope. "Call it thirty-six cubic feet. Substract six cubic feet of air—thirty cubic feet . . ." He looked up with an expression of shock. "That's more than five thousand dollars stacked into just this one case! And there's a case just like it in the study!"

Ann said fatuously. "There's probably more than six cubic feet of air. And many of these books aren't that expensive."

"So knock off a couple of thousand bucks. It's still a lot of money."

But Ann shook her head. "If Roland could have sold them for half of that, they'd be gone." She couldn't believe her good fortune.

They went into the study again. Tarr seated himself behind the desk and picked up the bankbook. "Twenty thousand dollars paid out in a lump, then a thousand a month ... Did your father have any other income?"

Ann shrugged. "Sometimes he'd sell a so-called sculpture or non-objective painting. He had a knack for things like that. He tried writing, but I don't believe he ever got anything published. He'd work at odd jobs if he had to. By his own standards he managed to live pretty well. Meaning he had leisure to do what he wanted."

Tarr studied the bankbook. "This twenty thousand dollars. It's just possible he gave it to your mother."

"Mother and the blackmailer may be the same character," said Ann dryly. "I'm sure you've considered the possibility. If you haven't, you'd better."

"What could she know that would induce your father to pay her off?"

"I can't imagine."

"We'll certainly want to ask your mother some questions." Tarr gathered the papers together, rose. "That's all for today. Next comes the hard part—leg work."

"To find the blackmailer?"

"Yes."

"I still find your suicide theory incredible."

"Well, unless you can demonstrate otherwise ..."

Ann made a slow survey of the study. "I'd love to."

"If only to make me look a chump," Tarr laughed. "Be my guest."

"Ann went to the study bookcase. On the lower shelf, along with two or three large books lying flat, lay a large leather case. She pulled it out and, taking it to the desk, unfastened the snaps and raised the lid.

"What is it?" demanded Tarr.

Ann read the tarnished silver plaque fixed to the red plush interior.

Presented to
PAUL MORPHY
of the United States of America
in appreciation of his magnificent achievements
and to commemorate his notable triumphs
in competition against the most eminent chess masters
of Europe and the world
at the
GRAND MASTERS TOURNAMENT
Geneva Switzerland
August 23, 1858
by the patrons.

Ann lifted out a chessboard. The base was of carved rosewood, two inches thick; the playing surface was an inlay of black opal and mother-of-pearl. At the bottom of the case, fitted into appropriate niches, were the chess-men. Half the pieces were of carved ebony, on gold bases; the other half were of white jade, on silver bases. The black king carried a ruby in his scepter, the white king a diamond.

"That looks like a mighty valuable toy," muttered Tarr. "How long has he had it?"

"I've never seen it before. Perhaps it was Pearl's,

too." Ann suddenly shut the case. "I think I'll take it home."

"Better let me take charge of it," said Tarr. "Technically the estate is still unsettled." Tarr's informality evidently ended where regulations began.

"For all I know," he went on, "*you've* been blackmailing your father."

"Which is why he left me all his property," Ann said tartly.

"You could have worked it anonymously."

"Go ahead and prove it," said Ann; and she marched out to the police car.

They drove back to San Rafael in silence. Ann considered how best to carry out her father's instructions about the disposal of his body; Tarr presumably was sifting the discoveries of the day for hidden conclusions.

Tarr parked in front of the courthouse, in the section reserved for official cars. He switched off the ignition, but made no move to get out. Instead he swung around to face Ann. "There's something I want to say to you."

"What?"

"I'd like to take you to dinner. No ulterior motives. Just a social evening."

Ann was not altogether surprised. Tarr wore no wedding ring; apparently he was not married. Should she?

But just then a blond woman in a red coat alighted from a long tomato-pink hardtop parked two or three spaces away. Tarr saw her and sank low in his seat. The blond woman marched up. She wore heavy eye make-up and her hair was twisted high in the most extreme of styles; Ann thought she looked inexpressibly vulgar. The blonde stooped to look in at Tarr.

"Well, Luther?"

Tarr looked thoughtfully through the windshield, rubbing his nose. He turned to Ann. "Excuse me a minute—" he began in an embarrassed way.

"Excuse *me*," said the blond woman, acidly sarcastic. "I'm *sorry* if I've interrupted something. I thought you might like to know I've been waiting over an hour."

"A case came up. I just couldn't get away . . ."

The woman gave Ann a sugary smile. "Of course. I understand perfectly. I waited to tell you how terrible it is how they overwork you. And also—"

"Look."

"—and also, go to hell." The woman straightened up. "There. That's that." She sauntered to her pink car, backed out into the street, and sped away.

"Unfortunate," mumbled Tarr. "I forgot about her. She's just an acquaintance. Met her in a dark bar."

"Why 'Luther'?" inquired Ann in a silky voice.

"My middle name. I'm Thomas L. Tarr. Born in Tacoma of respectable parents, destined for the ministry, where I still may end up. A hundred seventy-five pounds of sheer decency. I wear white socks, don't smoke or curse, and I put out crumbs for the birds. Now, about us . . ."

Ann let herself out of the car. "I think not, Inspector Tarr. Thank you, anyway."

Tarr heaved a morose sigh. "Oh, well. You're going home?"

"Yes."

"If you hear from your mother, Miss Nelson, please let me know."

"I'll do that."

CHAPTER 4

Ann's apartment, so often her haven of peace, seemed drab when she got home. The sun, hanging low, shone under a reef of cloud, producing a strange watery light, the color of weak tea. Ann felt cross and restless.

She mixed herself a highball and, dropping onto the couch, stared out the window. She almost wished that she had accepted Tarr's invitation. Though, considering the circumstances . . . Inspector Thomas Tarr—Ann curled her lip, half in amusement, half in disdain—a blond, affable, woman-chasing lout. Though the affability might be only an act to lull wrongdoers. And suspects. There was no use deceiving herself. Until the whole truth about her father's death was known, she was a suspect—of blackmail, at least.

She ruminated upon the events of the day. Tarr had refused to consider any other possibility than suicide. Ann conceded that his case looked unshakable. It would be gratifying to prove him wrong, or at least to demonstrate that suicide was not the only possibility. She reviewed in her mind the various locked-room situations of which she had read. None of the devices, illusions, or gimmicks seemed applicable. The door and the window could not be manipu-

lated from the outside. Walls, floor, and ceiling were unquestionably sound. No one could possibly have been hidden within the room, to make his exit after Tarr arrived. The fireplace? Ann tried to imagine a long mechanical arm lowered ingeniously down the chimney, thrust across the room, finally to fire a bullet into Roland Nelson's brain. Fantasy . . . Here was a startling idea: suppose Inspector Tarr, Sergeant Ryan, and Martin Jones had banded together to kill Roland Nelson! As Sherlock Homes had pointed out, when the possibilities had been eliminated, what remained, no matter how improbable, must be truth. Still—Ann told herself regretfully—suicide looked like the answer. Accident? Of course that was always possible.

Ann put aside her conjectures. They were fruitless as well as tiring. Let Tarr worry about it; he was paid to do so. Except that Tarr was too amiable to worry—in notable contrast to the boorish Martin Jones. Ann wondered if Jones was married. If so, God help his wife! . . .

That made her think of her own marriage to the hypersensitive Larry. A mollycoddle. Though, to be sure, her mother had brought out the worst in him. A more virile man—Martin Jones, for instance—would very quickly have set things straight with Elaine.

The thought of Elaine prompted Ann to reach for the telephone. She dialed Operator and put in a call to Mrs. Harvey Gluck, at 828 Pemberton Avenue, North Hollywood. A peevish voice answered the ring: Mrs. Harvey Gluck was no longer residing there. She had taken off several months before, leaving no forwarding address. Ann shifted the call to Mr. Harvey Gluck, in Glendale. The connection was made, the phone rang. No answer.

Ann replaced the receiver and went back to star-

ing out the window. The sun had dropped from sight; the underside of the clouds burned with gold, deepening to persimmon as she watched. The room dimmed. Ann rose, switched on the lights, and mixed another highball.

She thought of dinner, but the idea of cooking ... Now, as a wealthy woman, she could call a cab and dine at any restaurant in the city. If she chose. She did not choose; it seemed a sordid thing to do, so soon after her father's death—the source of her good fortune.

She had never really been fond of her father, aware always of his subsurface streak of cruelty. "Cruelty" was not the word. "Callousness" was better—though it still failed to describe Roland Nelson and his devil-take-the-hindmost attitude. He had asked no quarter from life, and he gave none: a mocking, cynical man, austere, flamboyant, disliked by some women, irresistible to others ...

Jehane Cypriano. Ann's subconscious tossed up the name. She sipped her highball reflectively. Roland Nelson would be attracted. But what of the woman's husband? He looked like a tyrant. What of Jehane herself?

The telephone rang. Telepathy might well have been at work, because, lifting the receiver, Ann was sure that she would hear the voice of Jehane Cypriano.

"Hello?"

"Ann Nelson?" She had been right! "This is Jehane Cypriano. I haven't disturbed you?"

"Not at all. I was actually thinking of you."

"I couldn't speak to you today. It was such a shock to hear of your father's death."

"I was surprised, too, Mrs. Cypriano. Especially with the police convinced that he killed himself."

"It's very strange. Couldn't it have been an accident?"

"Inspector Tarr doesn't seem to think so."

"What do you think?"

"I don't know. I suppose it must have been suicide. Although I still can't believe it."

"I can't either." Jehane went on, rather hurriedly: "I wonder if you'd come to lunch tomorrow? There's so much to talk about, and Alexander is anxious to meet you."

Ann could see no good reason to refuse, although the invitation evidently was prompted by something other than the charm of her personality. She said, "I'd be glad to come."

"Good. Twelve o'clock? The address is thirty-two Melbourne Drive, off Blue Hill Road." She gave directions, which Ann noted on a scratch-pad, and the conversation ended.

Ann went into the kitchen and fried bacon and scrambled eggs. She ate, tried to read; but finding that her mind wandered, she took a hot shower and went to bed.

So many things had happened in the last few days. Her father's death, the sudden change in her economic status. Thomas Tarr, his effortless charm, his floozy girl friend in the red coat. Luther? Lothario was more apt, Ann told herself with a sniff. Then there was the odious Martin Jones: like Tarr physically attractive, even magnetic, with an air of repressed hostility in his every word and gesture ... She fell asleep.

At nine thirty the next morning Inspector Tarr telephoned. His voice was unembarrassed, official. "I can't locate your mother, Miss Nelson. She's no longer at the address you gave me—hasn't been there for

months. Can you think of anyone who would know her whereabouts?"

"Only her husband. He lives in Glendale. He's a dog trainer."

"I'll try him."

"Incidentally," said Ann, "Mrs. Cypriano telephoned me last night."

"So?"

"She invited me to lunch."

"You're going?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"No reason. But call me afterwards, will you? I like to know what's going on. I'll be at the office until three or four."

Ann agreed in a voice of dignified reserve.

She dressed with more than usual care, in a white sleeveless frock and light gray coat, and at eleven o'clock set forth. The day was sparkling and sunny with a cool breeze carrying the salt scent of the Pacific across the city. Ann could not help but feel an elevation of spirits.

She drove up Lincoln Way to Nineteenth Avenue, and turned left into Park Presidio Boulevard, which took her through Golden Gate Park, the Richmond district, the gloomy forest of the Presidio, to the Golden Gate Bridge. Sailboats wandered the bay; San Francisco's skyline rose as crisp and white as sugar icing. To the left the baby-blue ocean spread smooth and glistening, except for occasional cat's-paws. The hills of Marin County loomed ahead; the freeway swung through a tunnel and slanted down past Sausalito to San Rafael, where Ann turned west out Lagunitas Road, toward Inisfail.

Just before the timber bridge, she came to Blue Hill Road, a narrow lane twisting up a hillside heavy with fir trees. Melbourne Drive presently veered off to the left, a lane even narrower than

Blue Hill Road. At the mailbox marked *Cypriano,* Ann turned up a steep driveway and came out on a graveled parking area below a tall house that was all dark wood and glass.

She was early; it was ten minutes to twelve.

Jehane Cypriano appeared on the terrace, waving. She descended a flight of wide stone steps. The woman wore black slacks and a short-sleeved beige sweater; her step was as light as a young girl's.

She seemed genuinely glad to see Ann. "Did you have any trouble finding the place?"

"I followed your directions, and here I am."

"Apparently I got them right for once." Jehane led Ann up to the terrace, which was being extended or repaired. There was a fine view to the west over low hills and forested valleys, with a gray glint of ocean far beyond. They entered the house through a heavy oak door that opened into a vast high-ceilinged room built on three levels. The lowest served as a lobby or foyer, the second as a living room, the highest as a dining room. To the right, a half-octagonal rotunda running from floor to ceiling overlooked the view. The walls were paneled in dark wood, with details, accents, draperies, and rugs in unconventional colors: black, scarlet, mauve, purple, black-green.

A decidedly unorthodox house, Ann thought, like no other house she had ever seen.

She said as much, and Jehane seemed pleased. "I designed it myself for friends. Then two years ago we bought it from them."

"I think that's wonderful."

Jehane said, "When I was a girl I decided to become an architect. Ridiculous, of course; there simply aren't women architects. But I went to architectural school, anyway. This is what resulted."

"It's a beautiful house," said Ann. "It has a roman-

tic, impractical feel to it. Like a fairy castle. I don't mean," she hastened to say, "that it's *really* impractical."

"Oh, it probably is," said Jehane. "I'm both romantic *and* impractical. And who wants a house that's dull? As a matter of fact, I designed it for Rex and Pearl Orr. They were romantic and impractical, too. When Rex died, Pearl wouldn't live here.... But let me mix you a daiquiri. I've just acquired an electric ice crusher, and I love to play with it."

Ann accompanied her to the top level and into the kitchen.

"Alexander's still in bed," said Jehane. "Sometimes he gets up before dawn; sometimes he stays in bed till two. He'll never get up at a normal hour."

There was the faint far sound of a toilet flushing. Jehane listened, her head at a birdlike tilt. "Alexander is greeting the day. He'll be with us shortly."

Fresh lime juice, Cointreau, rum went into a shaker with a cup of shaved ice; Jehane gave the mixture a stir and served it in champagne goblets.

"Mmm," said Ann. "I suddenly see that I need an ice shaver."

"It's a foolishly expensive gadget. But it's fun."

"Foolish things are always the most fun," said Ann.

"Yes, the things in my life I regret the most are the wise things I've done."

After a moment Ann asked, "Is Pearl Orr the Pearl my father married?"

Jehane nodded. "Roland met her here after Pearl sold us the house. I think she half regretted it—the sale, I mean, not meeting Roland, because she was always visiting."

"I don't blame her. If I ever build a house, you can be the architect."

Jehane shook her head with a wistful laugh. "I

don't think I'll ever design another. You can run into the most frightful headaches. There's zoning, building inspectors, headstrong contractors—heaven knows what-all."

Ann had a sudden flash. "Was Martin Jones the contractor?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I didn't. But when he appeared yesterday, you left, and rather abruptly."

Jehane nodded slowly. "He built it."

"He's a surly brute. Good-looking, though."

Jehane made a neutral gesture. "He goes on the defensive with attractive women."

"He's not married, then."

Jehane shook her head. "There's quite a story about Martin. He was engaged to an Inisfail girl—I think they'd been sweethearts in high school. He built the house—where your father lived—for himself and his bride. Last winter the girl flew to San Diego to visit her sister, met a naval officer, and married him the next day. The sister gave Martin the news over the telephone. So now he loathes all women. The prettier they are, the more he hates them."

"I should be flattered," said Ann. "He practically snarled at me. Although, in a way, I can see his point."

Jehane shrugged. "Alexander can't bear the sight of him."

She raised her head. Ann, listening, heard languid footsteps. "Here comes Alexander now," said Jehane.

Alexander entered the room: a heavy-shouldered man with thin flanks, short legs, and a magnificent head. His hair was thick, dove-gray; his eyes were large, coal-black; his mouth and chin were small and almost dainty; his nose was a small parrot's beak. He wore dark-gray slacks and a shirt of maroon gabardine.

Not a man to inspire instant liking, thought Ann.

She wondered why Jehane had chosen to marry him. Still, the match was no odder than dozens of others she had wondered about.

Jehane performed a casual introduction, then said, "I suppose I should see to lunch."

Alexander nodded. "Exellent idea. It seems to be a beautiful day. Miss Nelson and I will go out on the deck." His voice was slow, deep, resonant. "Perhaps you'd bring us another round of drinks?"

He ushered Ann through a pair of French windows out to the second-level deck, which was cantilevered alarmingly over a rocky gulch.

"It's quite safe," said Alexander in a patronizing tone. "But I agree the first sensation is apt to be unpleasant." He drew up a chair for Ann and settled himself in another. The view was even more dramatic than from the terrace, with the full bulk of Mount Tamalpais looming to the south. "Do you smoke?" asked Alexander.

"No. I'm one of those annoying people who never acquired the habit."

Alexander fitted a cigarette into a long holder. "Jehane doesn't smoke, either. I must say that I derive an ignoble satisfaction whenever a nonsmoker contracts lung cancer.... I don't believe your father smoked."

"Not to my knowledge."

"A peculiar man. In many ways an admirable man. I suppose I knew him as well as anyone alive."

"I've heard him speak of you. In fact, five years ago, at the California Masters Tournament—"

"Alexander chuckled, a deep, fruity croak. "I remember that very well. Your father made one mistake—one little mistake. It was enough. Six moves later he resigned. It was a hard game, though to be honest I never found myself in serious difficulty."

Alexander Cypriano seemed more than complacent about it, thought Ann—pompous, actually.

"I've given up active competition. In fact, I rarely play these days. Chess is a young man's game, though of course a number of older men have played superbly. Steinitz . . . Lasker. Do you play?"

The suddenness of the question caught Ann off guard. She stammered, "I know the moves . . . Yes, I play. I've played a few games with my father. Naturally, he won."

"Your father was highly competent—a beautiful tactician. He played a resourceful end game, where most chess players are weak. My own end game is entirely adequate, and my opening game considerably sounder than your father's. When we played I usually won." He peered quizzically at Ann. "I hope I don't seem vain?"

"Not at all," said Ann, thinking, "Oh, don't you?"

"It's often hard to distinguish vanity from simple honesty. We played many an interesting game, your father and I. He exhibited three characteristic faults. First, he refused to study the openings, and often embroiled himself in a line which a more profound student would have avoided. Second, he loved the spectacular combination—he loved to astound, with lunges and sorties, gallops along the edge of a precipice, cryptic exposures of his king . . . These tactics were likely to outrage and confuse players of average ability, but a man maintaining the grand view could usually refute such gasconades. His third fault was his most singular and, I would say, paradoxical. I don't know how to describe it. Indecisiveness? At a crucial moment, when it came to administering the *coup de grâce,* he would falter, veer, temporize. Inexplicable. He lost otherwise brilliant games that way. By the way, my appraisal of your father's character does not include soft-heartedness. I would

judge Roland to have been a man quite cold and merciless where his own interests were involved."

Ann, listening with only half an ear, and wondering why she had been invited to lunch, was brought back to reality by the hardening of Alexander Cypriano's tone.

Rising, the man went to the edge of the deck. He took a long, slow sip of the daiquiri that Jehane had quietly brought out on a tray, and looked out toward the far gray sheen of the Pacific.

Ann could think of nothing to say.

Alexander swung around. "But enough of chess. To a nonplayer nothing is less interesting than the maunderings of an addict."

"I'm interested in anything that concerns my father," Ann said politely. "We weren't close, but now that he's dead . . ." She laughed in embarrassment. "I wouldn't call it remorse, because the neglect came from him, not from me—but, after all, he did name me his heir."

"He wrote a will, then? Odd."

"I'd say he had some motive other than simple practicality."

Alexander seemed fascinated. "What makes you say that?"

For no well-defined reason, Ann chose to be evasive. At least until she found out why she had been invited to lunch. "Oh, the general tone of the will. Certain of the bequests."

Alexander inquired humorously, "I take it I wasn't mentioned?"

"No."

He pursed his lips.

"I understand you knew my father's second wife well," said Ann after a moment's silence.

"Yes, she was an old friend of Jehane's. An impulsive, warmhearted woman."

"That was my feeling, although I met her only once. I never did hear how she died, except that it was in an automobile accident."

"To be blunt, she was driving while drunk and simply ran off Blue Hill Road."

"Oh." Ann hesitated. "This may sound like an extraordinary thing to ask. Is there any possibility that my father could have been involved?"

"Involved?" Alexander shot her a sharp glance.

Ann said steadily, "I mean, could he have been responsible?"

"I wouldn't put it past him," said Alexander in a brand-new tone. "But I don't see how he could have managed it. In the first place, Roland could have had no idea she was here. Why should the question occur to you?"

Ann reflected before answering. Alexander Cypriano clearly regarded Roland Nelson as a rival—possibly in more fields than chess—and seemed to relish any information to Roland's discredit, even after death. But if information was to be obtained from the man, Ann would have to prime the pump. So, reluctantly, she said, "The truth is, there's some indication he was being blackmailed."

"Blackmailed!" Alexander seemed genuinely startled. He turned as Jehane came out on the deck to announce that lunch was ready. "Miss Nelson tells me that Roland was being blackmailed."

Jehane became as still as death. "That's hard to believe. What could he possibly be blackmailed for?"

"In everyone's life there are dark corners," said Alexander. "There are one or two things about myself I wouldn't care to have known. And don't forget, Jehane, we haven't seen him for months. Anything might have happened."

"It's silly," said his wife abruptly. "Let's have lunch."

She had set a table on the cool eastern terrace with a green checked cloth and dishes decorated with green leaves. In the center stood a tall green bottle of white wine.

Lunch was as Ann had expected: simple, ample, beautifully prepared. There was a salad of shrimp and avocado; then breasts of chicken in individual iron skillets, swimming in a piquant buttery sauce, served with small round potatoes and watercress; then a dessert of strawberries and vanilla ice cream, with black coffee. Conversation was desultory. Alexander apologized for the clutter of lumber, sawhorses, reinforcing steel, and mesh. He pointed out the extent of the new terrace and indicated where repair work was being done on the foundations. "If the contractor had done his work properly to begin with," he grumbled, "all this mess could have been avoided."

The reference, thought Ann, was to Martin Jones.

After a second cup of coffee, Alexander slapped his hands down on the table. "Since you're interested in chess, I imagine you'd like to see my den."

Ann looked at Jehane, but her face was completely neutral.

"I'm a collector or sorts," Alexander went on. "I believe I have the finest set of chess portraits and photographs extant."

Ann dutifully rose to her feet. Alexander nodded to Jehane. "A delightful lunch, my dear." Ann hastily echoed the compliment. Jehane smiled faintly.

Cypriano led Ann to his den, a large room at the rear of the house. One wall was covered with drawings and photographs of chess masters of every age and physiognomy. There was Sammy Reshevsky perched on a high stool; the autocratic Dr. Tarrasch; Paul Morphy, leaning languidly over a piano like a young Oscar Wilde. Capablanca, suave and hand-

some, faced a brooding Alekhine; Frank Marshall stared off to the left; Tchigorin peered to the right. There were dozens of group photographs, including a two-foot by three-foot enlargement depicting the participants of the great AVRO tournament, with autographs beside each figure.

Alexander darted back and forth, pointing, declaiming, expounding. When he had exhausted the wall photographs he drew out albums of classic scores, autographed by the competitors. In a cabinet he drew Ann's attention to a group of trophies, cups, and medals. "My own small achievements." Another case held books in six languages.

"Can you read all these?" asked Ann in wonder.

"Oh, yes. I know German, Russian, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Serbian, a smattering of Chinese and Arabic—I'm what is known as a natural linguist."

Ann expressed her astonishment, and Alexander nodded his massive head in satisfaction. "I was trained for the bar," he said, "but I have always preferred music and chess. Hence"—he held out his hands—"you see me. No pauper, but by no means a rich man. Luckily I have a shrewd head for investments."

He took Ann to another cabinet, which contained perhaps two dozen sets of chessmen, in a number of styles and materials: wood, stone, ivory, pewter. "Notice these," said Alexander, "... Hindu, of the eighteenth century. And these, once used by Ruy Lopez himself. Which reminds me ... yes, before I forget. Among your father's effects you will find a handsome set of chessmen, which at one time belonged to me, and which he acquired under circumstances that are irrelevant. I'd like the set back, and I think he would want it so. I am naturally willing to pay any reasonable valuation you put upon it."

Could this have been the motive for the invitation? Why else? Ann temporized. "I'm still not in charge of my father's estate."

Alexander's eyes snapped. "Your father's possession of the set came as the result of a joke."

"I really can't make any commitments," said Ann. "I'm sorry, Mr. Cypriano, but so far I haven't had time to think."

He marched to the door of the den; the conducted tour was over. He had clearly hoped for an affirmative answer. After escorting Ann to the living room, he excused himself, saying that he had an important letter to write.

Even with Cypriano gone, the atmosphere seemed to cool in a manner Ann could not define. Jehane was as charming as ever, but the cordiality was gone. Ann presently took her leave. Her hostess accompanied her to the car and expressed the hope that Ann would call again. Ann proposed that she should telephone her on the next occasion she found herself in San Francisco. Jehane Cypriano promised to do so, and Ann drove away.

In her rearview mirror she caught a final glimpse of the woman looking after her: wistful, fragile, lonely.

Ann drove down the hill slowly. At Lagunitas Road she paused, then turned left, and drove into Inisfail—for no active reason other than her vague conviction that there was still much to be learned about her father's death.

She turned down Neville Road. Her father's nearest neighbor, she noticed, occupied an old white stucco house in a flourishing vineyard. The name on the mailbox was Savarini. Ann weighed the idea of calling at the house. But what could they tell her? That her father was unfriendly, eccentric, a recluse, without

visible means of support, of dubious morals and questionable politics? All this she already knew.

A car was parked at her father's house. Drawing near, she saw the car to be the green pickup. Martin Jones was in the front yard, guiding a roto-tiller. Ann turned into the driveway. Jones ignored her. He started the clattering machine on another furrow.

Ann compressed her lips. "Mr. Jones!" she shouted.

Martin Jones glanced at her sharply and frowned. He turned off the engine. The silence was sudden and vehement.

"Well? What am I doing that's so damned humorous?"

Ann shrugged. "You're working so intently."

"What of it?"

"There's no need to shout, now that the roto-tiller is off."

Martin Jones blinked. "If you've come to clear out the house, I'll let you in."

"The thought hadn't entered my mind."

"As I told you yesterday, the sooner the better."

"I'll have to wait till I have the authority to act."

"When will that be?"

"I don't know. Monday I'll see an attorney, who I believe must have the will probated. I don't know very much about these things."

The builder grunted and reached to start the engine. "I've just had lunch with the Cyprianos," said Ann.

"So?" His hand hovered and stopped.

"Since I was in the neighborhood I thought I'd drop by."

He studied her for a moment, the muscles in his flat cheeks twitching. "You knew the Cyprianos before?

"I never saw them until yesterday."

"What do you think of them?" His voice was sardonic.

Ann considered. "I don't know. They're rather puzzling people."

Martin Jones nodded, smiling grimly. Once again he made as if to start the engine.

Ann blurted, "I just can't believe my father killed himself."

This time he leaned on the handle. "What do you think happened to him, Miss Nelson?"

"I don't know. But he just wasn't the suicide type. He had too much vitality."

Jones gave a snort of amusement. "In certain ways, no doubt about it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"This garden, for instance. Nelson gave me to understand he was the world's most enthusiastic gardener. He painted a glowing picture—flowers, shrubs, hedges, lawn—"

"Oh, come now," Ann scoffed. "I *know* he never promised you all that."

Jones had the grace to grin. "Well, he said he'd put me in a nice garden. Otherwise I'd have charged him more rent. I could get a hundred and thirty for this house any day of the week."

"How did you happen to rent to him in the first place?"

"He was working for me and needed a place to live. I let him have the old shack down the road."

"He was working for *you?*"

"That's correct."

"As what?"

"A laborer. Union scale is over three bucks an hour. Last year I didn't do that well myself." He straightened up, looked impatiently at the roto-tiller. "Roland Nelson wasn't much of a laborer, ei-

ther. He didn't have enough 'vitality.' I fired him." He reached for the starting cord to the motor, gave it a yank. The motor caught. The blades spun, kicking up a shower of dirt. Ann jumped back, yelping her indignation. But Martin Jones either did not hear or did not care to listen.

Ann drove back to San Rafael seething. What an abominable man! Small wonder that his fiancée had chosen to marry someone else at the first opportunity.

CHAPTER 5

In San Rafael, Ann pulled into a service station, phoned the sheriff's office, and asked for Inspector Tarr.

Tarr's easy voice issued from the receiver, and into Ann's mind came an image of his solid body lounging at his desk. "This is Ann Nelson. You asked me to call you."

"Oh, yes." Tarr's voice took on a different note. "Where are you now?"

Ann told him.

"Wait," said Tarr. "I'll be right there. And if you're not too proud, I'll buy you a cup of coffee."

Ann returned to her car, of half a mind to drive off. Tarr's assurance was almost as infuriating as Martin Jones's boorishness. But she waited. Tarr, after all, was investigating her father's death.

Tarr took his time. Five minutes became ten, then fifteen. Ann's mood darkened. Then the detective appeared in the police car, parked, and jumped to the ground in great haste. "Sorry, Miss Nelson, but I got hung up on the telephone. Some tiresome old idiot. There's an ice-cream parlor just around the corner. Faster to walk than drive."

Ann got out of her car, ignoring Tarr's proffered hand.

At the ice-cream parlor she refused his suggestion of a fudge sundae, primly accepting a cup of coffee. To her surprise, he brought out his notebook. "I haven't been able to locate your mother. Harvey Gluck says that to the best of his knowledge she's still in the San Francisco area. States that he hasn't communicated with her for several months. He's indefinite as to the exact date. I'm wondering if you can give me any leads."

Ann shook her head. "I wouldn't have the slightest idea."

"Does she have any relatives? Sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles?"

"She has a married brother in New Jersey and some cousins in North Carolina, but I don't know their addresses."

"What are their names?"

Ann told him, and Tarr made note of them.

"What about friends? Any old cronies, school chums?"

Ann considered. "I don't believe she had any special friends, although I don't know for sure. Harvey Gluck would know better than I."

"He gave me some names, but they weren't any help. One of these people said that she'd been talking about Honolulu."

"That should be easy enough to check," said Ann. "She hated airplanes. Try the Matson line."

Tarr made a note. "Anything else?"

Ann said, "She was a hypochondriac. Belonged to the Disease-of-the-Month Club, as my father expressed it. She took her astrology pretty seriously, too."

"That doesn't help much." Tarr tucked the notebook back in his pocket. "How did your lunch with the Cyprianos come off?"

"Very nicely. I think it was at Mr. Cypriano's insti-

gation. He wants that chess set—it belonged to him at one time, he says. He's got practically a chess museum in his house."

"Are you going to let him have it?"

"I suppose so. It means nothing to me. Incidentally, Martin Jones wants me to clear out my father's belongings."

"He'll have to wait. I'm not finished there yet. When did you see him?"

"Today. I drove out past the house."

Tarr frowned. "If I were you . . ." He paused.

"Well?"

"I don't want to alarm you, but remember that a crime has been committed. A blackmailer usually isn't vicious or violent, but there are exceptions."

The warning startled her. Roland Nelson's death, though puzzling, had seemed remote. The thought that she might personally be in danger was shocking. Ann said in a subdued voice, "I guess I've led too sheltered a life. Do you mean that I shouldn't ever go anywhere alone?"

"If you'd like round-the-clock police protection, I could arrange it." At Ann's look, Tarr said with a grin, "I've got a two-week vacation coming up. I can't think of any way I'd rather spend it."

Ann finished her coffee. "For a minute I thought you were serious."

"I am," said Tarr, still grinning. He was an *idiot.*

"I'm going home," snapped Ann. "Martin Jones is a misogynist, and I'm a misanthropist."

"You two would make a good pair!"

Ann rose, marched to the counter, put down fifteen cents, and departed.

On her way back to San Francisco, Ann wondered why Tarr's gibe had got under her skin. It was so really inane. She wasn't a misanthropist; she merely disliked males who leaped at every female they met.

(An accusation that certainly could not be leveled against Martin Jones!)

Shortly after she got home her telephone rang. Ann told herself that it would surely be Tarr to apologize for his rudeness, but the voice was a stranger's.

"Miss Nelson?"

"Yes?"

"Glad to find you home. My name is Edgar Maudley—I'm the late Pearl Maudley Nelson's cousin. I wonder if you'd allow me to call on you. It's a matter of some importance."

"Now?"

"Now preferably, but of course if it's not convenient—"

"Now is as good a time as any, Mr. Maudley."

"Wonderful. I'll be there very shortly. From your address I gather that you live in the Sunset district?"

"Yes. Ten blocks from the beach."

"It shouldn't take me more than half an hour."

Twenty-six minutes later Edgar Maudley arrived. He was a large, pale, luxurious man smelling of lilac hair tonic. His hair was silver gray, precisely brushed; he had a regimental mustache, and altogether he looked urbane and distinguished.

Ann took his Tyrolean hat and burberry and indicated a chair. Edgar Maudley settled himself decorously.

"I was on the point of making a pot of tea," said Ann. "If you'd care to join me?"

"Oh, excellent," said Edgar Maudley. "This is so very kind of you."

"It'll be a minute or two. The water's only just starting to boil."

Edgar Maudley cleared his throat. "You no doubt are wondering why I'm calling on you."

"I suppose you're curious, or resentful. After all,

I'm inheriting money which was originally Pearl's, and that makes me something of an interloper."

"Not at all. You are who you are—an obviously intelligent young lady. The circumstances that occasion our meeting certainly are not your responsibility."

"Excuse me," said Ann. "I'll make the tea." She went into the kitchenette and busied herself with teapot, teacups, tray, and gingersnaps.

Edgar Maudley continued to speak in his cautious voice. "First of all, let me offer condolences on the loss of your father. I do so with complete sincerity. Although I *am* given to understand that you and your father were not close."

Ann set the tray on the counter and returned to the living room. "Who gave you to understand this?"

Maudley touched his mustache. "I hardly remember ... Village gossip, most probably. Your father, you must be aware, was something of a *rara avis*. He kept to himself—lived alone, saw no one."

"Antisocial, but not disreputable. Did you know him yourself?"

Maudley nodded briskly. "I met him several times. I won't conceal from you that I tried to dissuade Pearl from the marriage. She was my only cousin; and, like Pearl, I have neither sister nor brother. She took the place of a sister, and I was very, very fond of her. I considered your father much too ... undisciplined—shall we say?—for a woman who was actually inexperienced and naïve."

Ann wordlessly poured tea. Edgar Maudley took a lump of sugar and a slice of lemon, but refused the gingersnaps. He sipped, then sat back in his chair. "Perhaps I should tell you something about the Maudleys, Miss Nelson. My grandfather arrived in San Francisco in 1880 and began to publish *The Oriental Magazine*—now a rare and valuable collector's

item. He had two sons, my father and Pearl's father. In 1911 the brothers organized The Pandora Press, specializing in the printing of limited editions. I may say that they prospered—both became quite wealthy. When Grandfather died they sold *The Oriental,* which merged with another magazine and lost its identity. My father died in 1940, Pearl's father five years later. Neither I nor Pearl cared to continue The Pandora Press, and we sold it.

"This is beside the point. What is to the point is that, when her father died, Pearl naturally came into possession of a large number of heirlooms: books, pictures, ivories, vases, *objets d'art.* Many quite valuable."

Ann said, "I was admiring my father's books yesterday."

Edgar Maudley winced. "Legally, of course, they were his—just as, now, legally they're yours."

Ann nodded in profound understanding. "And you want me to turn these objects over to you, Mr. Maudley. Is that it?"

Maudley said in a vibrant voice, "Many of these articles have a deep, a very deep, sentimental value to me. Certain of the books are unique—not of vast monetary value, but I'd loathe seeing them pass into the hands of unappreciative strangers, or end up in a secondhand bookshop."

"That's quite natural."

"When your father came into the estate, I paid him a visit and made more or less the same representations to him that I am making to you. He was by no means so sympathetic."

"Do you drive a Mercedes?"

"Yes. How did you find out, may I ask?"

Ann smiled. "Village gossip, most probably."

Her visitor forced himself to smile. "In any event, you now understand the motive behind my visit."

"Not really. Just what is it you expect me to do?"

Maudley raised his eyebrows. "I thought I had made myself clear, Miss Nelson. By a set of unusual circumstances, you are now in possession of a number of Maudley heirlooms."

"Including some sort of medieval Persian artwork?"

"Including a set of medieval Persian miniatures in a carved ivory box inlaid with cinnabar, jade, lapis lazuli and turquoise."

"You want me to give you this item?"

"I would willingly offer you money. But I find it hard to put a price on sentimental attachment."

"My father, I understand, refused this request."

"He was not sympathetic at all."

Ann pictured Edgar Maudley expostulating with her father, and smiled. Edgar Maudley sipped his tea. Ann said, "I'd like to be fair about this. I can't give you any definite answer now, Mr. Maudley; I'm not yet in a legal position to say 'yes' or 'no.' Anyway, while I don't want to be mercenary, these are apparently articles of considerable value. There doesn't seem to be any reason why I should make a gift to you of what will be legally my property."

Maudley grew slightly excited. "But, Miss Nelson, the value of certain of these objects—the Persian miniatures, for instance—is incalculable. The miniatures have been in the family since 1729, when Sir Robert Maudley was in Persia."

"Unfortunately, it is precisely the miniatures which I can't let out of my possession."

He seemed puzzled. "How so?"

"Weren't you at my father's house when he wrote his will? I understand that he asked you to witness it."

"Oh, that. I refused to read the will. I knew it contained abuse or disparagement, and I did not care to

be insulted. To be quite frank, I never thought that your father, as a sensible man, would go through with a document composed in such haste and high feeling."

"He was angry, then?"

"I would say so. My requests appeared to irritate him."

"I can't tell you anything more until I've looked through the estate. Certain of the books I'm sure you can have—those dealing with metaphysics and Oriental religion, for example, which don't interest me in the least."

Maudley worked his lips in and out, as if he wanted to say more but was not sure of the wisdom of saying it.

"Let me pour you another cup of tea," said Ann. She felt a little sorry for him.

"Thank you." He spoke with the stiffish dignity of a man unfairly put upon.

"You knew my father well?" Ann asked.

"No. We had little in common."

"You must be acquainted with the Cyprianos."

"Oh, yes. Pearl thought very highly of Mrs. Cypriano. Girlhood chums, and all that. She sold the Cyprianos her lovely home for far less than its market value. I assume they've kept up the payments." His tone was half-questioning

" 'Payments'?"

"Yes. They paid eight thousand dollars down, I believe, and Pearl held a mortgage on the balance, about thirty thousand dollars. The mortgage would naturally be part of your father's estate."

"I haven't come across it," said Ann. "Thank you for mentioning it."

Edgar Maudley set his cup down and rose. "Well, I must be on my way. I'm sure we can work some-

thing out, Miss Nelson. If I were a rich man—which, alas! I am not—I could offer you what these articles are worth to me, although, as I mentioned, sentiment and value are incommensurable."

"Exactly. So if any of these articles should change hands between us, we'll have them appraised by an impartial authority. Will that be satisfactory?"

Maudley took his hat and coat. With a bitter smile he said, "I did think you might feel the slightest bit uncomfortable, coming into possession of an estate which, strictly speaking, was your father's by sheer chance."

"Not at all," said Ann. "It's the nicest thing that ever happened to me. And since my father had to die in any event, I'm glad I was able to profit by it."

Maudley seemed horrified. "I must say . . . Well, it might be wise not to count your chickadees before they're hatched."

"What do you mean, Mr. Maudley?" Ann asked very distinctly.

The man seemed sorry he had spoken. "Nothing, nothing at all," he said hurriedly. "Thank you for the tea, Miss Nelson. Here is my card, in case you should change your mind." He departed. Ann looked down at the card with a curling lip and tossed it aside.

She took the teacups to the sink thoughtfully. Edgar Maudley's visit had solved one mystery—the identity of the man who had quarreled with her father—but it posed another: Where was the mortgage to the Cypriano house? It had not been in the desk, where her father had kept his other important papers.

On Sunday Ann notified Mrs. Darlington that various contingencies associated with her father's death

would prevent her coming to work until the middle of the week. The principal pointed out with just a trace of tartness that since school ended Friday, she might just as well not bother. Ann said that if she possibly could, she would return to work, although perhaps it did seem a trifle foolish under the circumstances.

On Monday she engaged an attorney to deal with her father's will. She also learned that cadavers were no longer in short supply at medical schools. Only after diligent effort was she able to place the body of Roland Nelson with the Stanford Medical Center.

On Tuesday she signed various affidavits, obtained the signature of the Marin County Coroner, and arranged transportation of her father's remains from San Rafael to Palo Alto.

On Wednesday Ann returned to work at Mar Vista, and on Wednesday evening Edgar Maudley telephoned. He was anxious to learn what she had decided regarding the matters they had discussed. Ann informed him that she had not been able to give the situation much thought.

When might he expect her to reach a decision? Probably not before Saturday, Ann replied. This was the earliest she would find it convenient to sort through her father's effects.

Edgar Maudley said that he would make sure to be on hand, if only to assist her. Ann thanked him for offering to help, but said it might be better if she conducted the preliminary survey by herself.

Maudley made a noncommittal sound, something like "Hmm, hmm, hmm." Then he said, "Incidentally—and I ask from sheerest curiosity; it's no affair of mine—have you learned what disposition your father made of the Cypriano mortgage?"

"Not yet. I haven't checked things over."

"They didn't mention the mortgage?"

"No."

"Strange."

"There's probably some simple explanation," said Ann. "We spoke of other things." The thought came to her, was this the reason she had been invited to lunch? It seemed unlikely, since the mortgage had not been mentioned. No, it was about the chess set.

Maudley said, "I'll give you some advice, young woman, and that is—be businesslike! Your father and the Cyprianos were friends of long standing, but don't let this fact influence you. I hope you don't regard me as meddlesome."

"Of course not." Edgar Maudley apparently did not like the Cyprianos. Ann wondered why. Because Jehane had introduced Pearl to Roland Nelson?

Maudley reiterated his intention of helping Ann on the coming Saturday. Ann discouraged him once more, and the conversation ended.

On Thursday morning, as she left for work, she found a letter from her mother in the mailbox. It was postmarked Tuesday, June 4, at Beverly Hills. She read it, went back to the apartment, telephoned the Marin County Sheriff's Office, and asked for Inspector Tarr.

Tarr was not in, reported the clerk. Was there any message?

"No, said Ann, it was important that she speak to Inspector Tarr personally. She had important information for him.

The clerk promptly gave her a number at which she might be able to reach Inspector Tarr.

Ann dialed, listened. Finally, a woman answered. "Hello?"

Ann spoke in the most formal of voices. "May I speak to Inspector Tarr, please?"

"Who's calling?" The woman's voice sounded suspicious.

"Ann Nelson."

"Ann Nelson." The woman repeated the name, then grudgingly said, "I'll see if I can wake him up."

Several minutes passed. Ann, with not too much time to spare, was on the point of hanging up when Tarr's drowsy voice sounded in her ear. "Tarr speaking."

"This is Ann Nelson," said Ann, very distinctly. "I'm sorry to disturb you—"

"Not at all," said Tarr. "It's my day off. I'm at my sister's house."

"Oh?" Ann tried to convey in a single word the extent of her utter indifference—and disbelief. "I've received a letter from my mother. I thought you ought to know about it as soon as possible."

"A letter from your mother?" Tarr seemed puzzled and surprised. "Where was it mailed?"

"The envelope is postmarked June fourth, Beverly Hills."

"Can you read it to me?"

Ann read aloud:

My dear Baby Ann:

I have just learned of your good fortune, so to speak, from a person who chooses to remain nameless. For some reason he is interested in you, and also me, and is asking delicate questions about the past.

As you know, I am having a tough time financially as well as being miserably unhappy with my health. I have a practically continuous migraine which gives me *hell!* I hope that you will see fit to share your good fortune with me. I really need a stroke of good luck to boost my flagging spirits.

I plan to come north in a day or so and will drop in on you. I am sure we can come to a mutually happy settlement.

As ever,
ELAINE

After a short silence Tarr asked, "Do you recognize the handwriting, Miss Nelson?"

"It's definitely her handwriting."

"Is the letter itself dated?"

"No. She just starts writing."

"What does she mean: 'delicate questions about the past'?"

"I don't know."

" 'A person who chooses to remain nameless'—now who could that be?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"What about that 'Baby Ann' bit? Is that her usual salutation?"

"It might be almost anything: 'Snooks,' 'Toodles,' 'Brat.' I've seen 'You miserable little ingrate!' on occasion. Anything, in fact, but 'Dear Ann.' "

"This is certainly interesting. She doesn't give her address?"

"No."

"What about the envelope?"

"There's no return address. She just printed 'Ann Nelson, sixty-nine fifty Granada Avenue, San Francisco.' That's all."

Tarr grunted. "Do you consider that typical?"

"With my mother nothing is typical."

"I see . . . I definitely want to examine that letter. How about tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow is the last day of school; I should be finished about noon. If it's convenient I'll drop by your office. There's another matter about which I'd like your advice."

"So long as it's not about investing your money. I'm the lousiest businessman in the country."

Ann did not deign to notice Tarr's facetiousness. "It will probably be close to one by the time I arrive."

"I'll expect you at one."

On Thursday evening the attorney called to notify her that the Marin County Probate Court had issued a decree naming her executrix of her father's estate, and that he had also obtained an authorization for the transfer of the various stocks and securities to her name. There were papers to be signed, an inventory of possessions, assets, and obligations compiled and filed with the court. Ann made an appointment to meet him Monday.

On the following morning Ann took unusual pains with her clothes: this might well be the last day of her teaching career. Also, she'd be leaving directly for San Rafael. In spite of her disapproval of Tarr, his hypocrisy, and his lechery, she refused to appear at a disadvantage compared with his vulgar girl friends. Vulgar and *blowsy*. Perhaps he liked them vulgar and blowsy. So what? Tarr's tastes were of no concern to her.

Ann dressed in a spanking dark-blue and white frock with white accessories, an outfit in which she knew she looked her best.

The morning passed quickly; the pupils trooped home at noon. There was still a certain amount of paper work, which Ann would take care of next week. She bade her fellow faculty members goodbye and drove across the bridge to San Rafael.

Tarr greeted her with formality. She saw by his glance that the pains she had taken with her clothes had not been wasted. He escorted her into the little office where he had taken her before, and without preamble said, "Let's see the letter."

Ann produced the envelope. Tarr scrutinized it closely. Then, extracting the letter, he pored over it for several minutes. Ann finally became restless. "Well?"

Tarr said in a colorless voice, "May I keep it?"

"If you like."

He laid the letter with exaggerated care upon the corner of his desk, leaned back, and inspected Ann quizzically. "What do *you* make of the letter?"

"What do I make of it? It's self-explanatory, isn't it? Elaine wants in."

"Her prospects, I gather, aren't very good."

Ann smiled faintly. "I'm required to pay her ten cents a year."

Tarr nodded. "Don't you find it odd that your mother asks for money, but doesn't let you know where to find her?"

"No. According to the letter, she plans to see me in a few days. There'll be a flaming quarrel; she'll have hysterics; and she'll run from the apartment screaming that I'll never set eyes on her again." She watched Tarr, daring him to show disapprobation. But Tarr only lurched erect in his seat, once more examined the letter, again put it to one side. "I'll send this to the lab. There's one or two points . . ." His voice trailed off. Then he said, "I've found out where your mother stayed during her visit last March: the Idyllwild Motel on Highway 101. She arrived about seven o'clock and checked out the next morning. The proprietor's wife remembers her because your mother priced a house trailer they had for sale, talked about Florida and Honolulu, and burned three cigarette holes in a pillowcase. Another item of information, a rather peculiar one: your father's nearest neighbors live about two hundred yards up the road."

"The Savarinis."

"Correct. Simple people, but far from stupid. About two weeks ago they heard three shots. I wish they could be sure of the date, but they can't. The time was midnight; they remember that well enough. They had just turned off the TV and gone to bed."

"Three shots?"

"Three shots, at intervals of about a minute, from the direction of Roland Nelson's house. Mr. Savarini is positive that the sounds were shots, not backfires or firecrackers. He owns six guns and he insists that he knows what a shot sounds like. That's about all there is to it. Three shots at midnight, about the time your father died."

"Odd."

"I agree. Damned odd. Roland Nelson was killed by a single shot; we found a single empty cartridge. It's possible that someone totally unconnected with the case may have fired the shots, but it's certainly stretching coincidence. . . . Well, it'll all come out in the wash." He stretched lazily. "You mentioned a problem."

"I suppose it's a problem. Pearl's cousin called on me the other night, a man named Edgar Maudley. Incidentally, he's the man who refused to witness my father's will." Tarr looked at her reproachfully. "I suppose I should have telephoned you."

"For two days Sergeant Ryan has been out flagging down black Mercedes sedans, interviewing dealers, checking registrations—"

Ann said hurriedly, "He wanted some of Pearl's belongings, which he described as heirlooms. He tried to get them from my father, but had no luck." She described Edgar Maudley's visit in detail.

"Edgar Maudley has a grievance," mused Tarr. "If it hadn't been for Pearl's marriage to Roland, he

probably would have inherited. Still, that's not your problem. . . . By the way, what *is* your problem?"

"It's something Maudley mentioned. In addition to cash and securities, Pearl also seems to have held a first mortgage on the Cyprianos' house—presumably part of my father's estate. Where is the mortgage? It wasn't among his papers. Did Roland have a safe-deposit box? If so, why didn't he keep his stock certificates there?"

Tarr shook his head. "He rented no safe-deposit box in any local bank. I've checked. In addition, I've accounted for all his keys, so it's unlikely he had a box elsewhere. But in the matter of the mortgage, why not ask the Cyprianos?"

"I could, I suppose—but, oh, I don't know—it would make me seem avaricious."

Tarr pushed the telephone toward her. "Call right now. Maybe they paid the mortgage off. Better find out one way or another."

Ann reluctantly dialed the Cyprianos' number. Jehane answered. Ann said brightly, "I've been trying to find the mortgage my father held on your house, and it's in none of the obvious places. Inspector Tarr suggested I call you."

Jehane was silent for several seconds. Then she asked, "Where are you now?"

"In San Rafael."

"Can you drop up to the house? Alexander is in San Francisco today with the car; otherwise I'd come into San Rafael."

"I'll be glad to stop by."

"I'll see you shortly, then."

Ann hung up the telephone. "She wants to talk to me."

Tarr rose to his feet. "I'll come along for the ride."

"I don't think she expects you," said Ann dubiously.

"I'm investigating a crime. It makes no difference whether she expects me or not."

Ann shrugged. "By the way, what crime are you referring to?"

"Blackmail, naturally," said Tarr. "Has there been another?"

"I wish I knew."

"Don't wish too hard," said Tarr. "You might wish yourself out of a hundred thousand dollars."

Ann started to ask his meaning, then, like a coward, decided not to.

They went out into the street. "Let's go in my car," said Ann. "It looks so brutal, arriving in that police car."

Tarr laughed.

All the way out to Inisfail, Ann pondered the implications of Tarr's remark, and arrived at 32 Melbourne Drive in a rather unsettled state of mind. It *would* be terrible to lose a hundred thousand dollars now that she'd become accustomed to the idea of inheriting leisure and independence. . . .

She drove up the steep driveway to the parking area. As before, Jehane came out on the terrace; seeing Tarr, she swiftly became gracious.

Ann steeled herself for what could only be a difficult interview. At Jehane's invitation she entered the house, with Tarr, apparently oblivious to atmospheres, coming behind.

Jehane took them up the stairs to the middle level and arranged chairs. She asked, rather uncertainly, if they'd like a glass of sherry.

Feeling a pang of sympathy, Ann said, "Yes, please." Tarr echoed her. Jehane poured, then seated herself on a sofa, legs tucked beneath her.

There was an awkward pause. Ann could think of nothing to say.

"You asked about the mortgage," began Jehane with a shaky laugh. "I've tried to work out some simple way of telling you, without going into all the complications. But it's impossible. So I'll tell you everything. The exact truth."

CHAPTER 6

When Pearl Maudley Orr sold her house to the Cyprianos, she took a down payment of eight thousand dollars and a first mortgage on the balance—that was true enough. The mortgage, however, was at Jehane's insistence, she said. Pearl had been quite willing to sell for the eight thousand. "We're by no means wealthy people," said Jehane. "I have a small income, and Alexander a bit more, and he also does fairly well on the stock market. That's where he is today."

After the Cyprianos moved into their new house, Roland Nelson became a frequent visitor. He played an occasional game of chess with Alexander, but more often they would dispute the tactics of long-dead chess masters in the classic games. They would argue with great dash and vehemence; out would come the board, the pieces would be arranged, each would seek to demonstrate the accuracy of his judgment. Alexander generally got the better of these arguments. He had the more meticulous mind, and he played the careful positional game of the modern Russian masters. Roland's style being swash-buckling and adventurous, Alexander predictably won most of the games they played. On other occasions Alexander might be off on business, whereupon Jehane and

Roland would discuss their own affairs. Here a pinkness came into Jehane's cheeks.

Pearl, returning from a trip to Mexico, had met Roland at the Cypriano house. She was at first repelled, then by successive stages curious, interested, fascinated, infatuated. Jehane did nothing either to advance or discourage the situation. Roland's attitude was equivocal. No one could avoid liking Pearl: she was generous, modest, and not unattractive; though, beside Jehane, she looked like an English schoolgirl.

Jehane could not be certain which of the two put forward the idea of marriage; she speculated that it might well have been Pearl. In any event, the marriage took place. Pearl was quite aware that her money was the main attraction, Roland making no pretense, but she was naïvely sure that she could make it a successful marriage. And the marriage was far from unsuccessful. The Nelsons rented an apartment in Sausalito; Pearl did her best to avoid smothering Roland, who on his part could hardly have failed to recognize her virtues.

Edgar Maudley, Pearl's cousin and confidant, wholeheartedly disapproved of the marriage. He and Roland held contrary opinions about everything, and each detested the sight of the other. Whenever Edgar found the opportunity, he would hint to Pearl that Roland would do well to secure employment—"to make something of himself," as Edgar put it. Edgar himself was a quasi-professional bookdealer who bought and sold when the price was right. His resentment of Roland was enhanced by the fact that valuable books and art objects, originally the property of his grandfather, and subsequently divided between his father and Pearl's father, were now more or less in Roland's control. To put a final touch to

the situation, Pearl gave Roland as a wedding token the set of Persian miniatures.

Thinking only to demonstrate her trust and affection, Pearl had handed them to Roland wrapped in white tissue paper and tied with a pink ribbon. Edgar Maudley could scarcely contain his fury.

For several months after the marriage the Cyprianos saw nothing of Roland and Pearl. They were having troubles of their own, chiefly connected with their new house. The spring had brought heavy rains to Marin County, and the downhill corner of the house, under which there was a certain amount of compacted fill, had begun to sag. Alexander, investigating, found a crack in the foundation which caused him great concern. He wanted to complain to Pearl, but Jehane would not hear of it. Pearl, after all, had been more than generous about the mortgage, the interest being a mere nominal 3 per cent. Alexander had groused and sulked and spent the rest of that day in his study.

About this time, Roland showed signs of restiveness. Pearl was working too hard at keeping him happy. She had bought him a white Jaguar roadster as a surprise, conceiving it to be exactly the sort of car Roland would enjoy owning, and she was astounded and hurt when he showed no enthusiasm for it, referring to it, through some perverse logic of his own, as the bird cage. Pearl was an excellent cook. She devoted a great deal of effort to the concoction of imaginative meals, accompanied by the right wines. Roland took polite note of her efforts, but again and again he hurt her by wolfing down half a loaf of French bread with a can of sardines or a chunk of cheese an hour or two before dinner.

But Pearl had redoubled her efforts. It was evident, for example, that Roland enjoyed informality. Pearl bought a gay red-checked tablecloth, a pair of

saucy ceramic candelabra in the form of roosters, and milkglass goblets; and she served him a dinner the *pièce de résistance* of which was duck stuffed with wild rice, raisins, and glacé fruit, the whole garnished with oranges. Roland made no comment, but during dinner he appeared more than usually thoughtful. The next day he announced that he was going off by himself for a week or two.

Pearl was too stunned to expostulate. She pretended understanding. Roland departed and never came back.

About this time Alexander Cypriano, making another survey of the foundation, discovered that the crack in the foundation had widened. He probed with a hacksaw blade and could find no reinforcing steel in the concrete. This was too much. He strode into the house and, before Jehane knew what he was up to, telephoned Pearl and told her of the sorry state of the building. Pearl agreed in a dreary voice that of course she took complete responsibility for the soundness of the house, and she had driven out to Inisfail, inspected the crack, and said she would see that appropriate repairs were made. She stayed for dinner, and in her state of depression drank a great deal more than was usual for her. Jehane wanted her to spend the night, but Pearl insisted on leaving. On the way down the hill she ran off the road and was killed.

She died intestate, and Roland automatically inherited. After the death of her late husband, Rex Orr, Pearl had entrusted her investments to the Property Management Department of The California and Pacific Bank; and the Probate Court, taking cognizance of this fact, as well as of the circumstances of Pearl's marriage, appointed the bank administrator of the estate. Hence six months would

have to elapse before Roland Nelson could assume complete control.

If Roland felt guilt or grief, he gave no indication, though he attended the funeral decently dressed in a dark suit. Alexander took occasion to mention the faulty foundation and the fact that Pearl had undertaken to set matters right. Roland pointed out that as yet he had no title to the estate, that he was without financial resources of any kind—in fact, he was penniless. He ascertained the name of the contractor—Martin Jones—and said he would see if an adjustment would be made.

Roland kept his promise. He spoke to Martin Jones, but the sole result was that Roland went to work for Jones as a laborer.

To this point Jehane had been speaking in a soft unaccented voice, with an air of detachment. Now she became uncomfortable, twining her fingers, frowning out the window. "These are things I do not like to talk about. I'm sure you've suspected that Roland and I . . . well, frankly, we had been lovers. I use the word in a general sense, because I have no idea what emotion, if any, Roland felt. He never told me, and I never asked. I'm not even sure what kind of emotion I felt." Jehane pondered a moment. "The relationship was confused, and yet perfectly simple. I'm sure I was no more than a superficial incident in his life." She shrugged, and made an attempt to return to her previous detachment.

"The thing started when I first met Roland five years ago. You're wondering, what of Alexander? How is it that I obviously feel no guilt—that I can talk about it this way to perfect strangers? The fact is, Alexander and I have no physical relationship. We never have had. Before we were married he explained his . . . well, views, and I made no objection.

I think I was even relieved. I had been married once before, to a . . . well, I'll merely say that I agreed to Alexander's proposal. And our marriage hasn't worked out too badly. I'm a sister to him, an aunt, a mother. Psychologically, perhaps physically, he is not virile. I hasten to say that he has no peculiar inclinations; it's just that sex means nothing to him. I suppose the situation seems remarkable. Anyway, Alexander was fully aware of my relationship with Roland, and made no complaints."

Jehane's voice took on a tone of sad amusement. "Eventually, for some mysterious reason, Alexander became annoyed. It may be because Roland and I were too casual about our affair. In any event, Alexander insisted that the relationship come to an end. I obeyed him, at least until I decided whether or not to stay married to him. Roland just shrugged.

"A month or so later he married Pearl, and I saw very little of him—although he telephoned, asking me to meet him. Naturally I refused. When Roland left Pearl, he called me again and asked me to go to Ireland with him, of all places. Why Ireland? Who knows? Anyway, I said 'no,' and Roland became angry. He'd already written off his marriage to Pearl, and he thought of Alexander as a petulant child. There was no arguing with him. I simply refused.

"Pearl was killed," Jehane went on, "and Roland became moody. He rented an old house from Martin Jones and cut himself off from everyone. His whole life seemed to be in flux; he was determined to make some sort of change, but hadn't decided exactly how to go about it." Jehane laughed wryly. "Perhaps I'm projecting my own feelings into Roland, because this was exactly the frame of mind I was in. Why didn't I leave Alexander and go to live with Roland? First, there was Alexander; second, I was afraid. I'm sure Roland would have become

bored with me, just as he became with Pearl. And this takes us back to the cracked foundation and the mortgage. . . ."

Alexander had become preoccupied with a book he was writing—a critique of ancient Hindu chess—and seemed to forget the cracked foundation.

In March, Roland came into control of Pearl's estate, including the mortgage on the Cyprianos' house. The event prompted Alexander to make another inspection of the foundation; the crack had widened still further. Alexander at once composed a formal letter to Roland. He stated that the house had been bought with a warranty of sound construction, that Pearl had undertaken to honor this warranty, and Alexander now called upon Roland to perform in like manner. Jehane expected that Roland would throw the letter away.

But Roland appeared at the house on the evening of the day he received the letter. Alexander showed him the foundation, Roland took a cursory look, and they returned inside. Roland took the mortgage from his pocket, slapped it down on the table. "I'll play you a game of chess," he told Alexander. "I put up the mortgage—if you win, you can have it and make your own repairs."

"And what do I put up? If I lose?"

"Jehane."

Alexander's eyebrows rose. "*Jehane?*"

"Exactly. She's nothing to you but a housekeeper. If you lose, you can get yourself another."

Alexander had snorted; then, contemplating the mortgage, he massaged his chin and gave an excited laugh. "Very well. I agree to your terms."

Jehane, standing to the side, had turned slowly and gone out on the deck to stand in the gathering dusk. Through the window she could look down into the living room. Alexander brought forth the

Morphy Presentation set—a sign that he regarded the game as highly important. The two men seated themselves, the beautiful old pieces were set up. Alexander held out his closed fists, Roland touched one of them. He drew White.

Alexander Cypriano waited placidly while Roland Nelson considered his opening. If Roland played his usual game, it would be the Ruy Lopez, a King's Gambit ,the ancient Evans's Gambit, perhaps the Colle System, or some nameless dramatic irregularity which Roland might attempt on the spur of the moment. Alexander had few fears for the outcome. Whenever he concentrated on his close, careful game he defeated Roland; he expected no other outcome now.

Roland studied the board for two minutes. Alexander sat quietly. The chess pieces facing each other had come to life, each with its distinctive personality.

Roland played knight to KB3; Alexander smiled faintly and played pawn to Q4. Roland played pawn to QKt3. Alexander shrugged, played pawn to QB4. Roland played pawn to K3; Alexander, knight to QB3; and Roland fianchettoed his bishop.

Alexander finally made a comment. "I see you have advanced in your thinking by perhaps sixty years."

"When I play chess for fun, I play my game," said Roland. "When I play to win, I play your game."

"We shall see."

The game proceeded, infinitely cautious. Alexander exchanged pawns, and presently knights, but the game stayed even. Alexander maintained an imposing pawn mass in the center, while Roland's pieces had greater mobility. Jehane watched from the deck for perhaps half an hour; tension seemed to ride the

hunched backs of the two men in the room below. She turned suddenly and looked out toward the Pacific, where a peaches-and-cream sunset had faded to afterglow. Up the dark slopes of Mount Tamalpais there were occasional twinkles of light; out across the valley twinkled others—snug homes, and farmsteads, and a wan cluster where Inisfail lay.

Jehane turned back to the chess game. Alexander was reaching out; he made a move in his ponderous way, which somehow conveyed remorseless inevitability. He seemed calm and confident. Roland brooded.... A crisis was imminent: this Jehane could see, and it seemed to augur badly for Roland. Jehane turned away again. Her emotions could not be defined, or perhaps they constituted a single emotion that had never before existed.

She walked down the deck and went into her bedroom.

The game proceeded. Alexander with almost contemptuous disdain postponed castling in order to maintain his momentum—a strategy that yielded fruit when he forced an exchange of bishops, leaving Roland's king-side defenses in precarious balance. Then Roland suddenly thrust forth his queen.

"Check," he said.

Alexander studied the situation. The threat was not particularly alarming. In fact, it seemed pointless. He advanced a pawn, blocking the critical diagonal and attacking the queen. But Roland, rather than retreat his queen, moved out his knight. If Alexander took the queen, Roland would fork king and queen. Alexander chewed his lower lip and prudently moved his queen. Roland checked with his knight, and on the next move won a pawn that Alexander's retreat had left unguarded. The crisis eased. Roland was a pawn up, but the advantage was

balanced by Alexander's king's rook, which had seized an open file.

Jehane, in her room, tried to read. The words blurred. Her ears strained for sounds from the living room. She went back out on the deck. From what she could see of the board, the game seemed even. Looking down at the two men, she felt a great pity for both. Each in his own way was a helpless child, as helpless as one of the pieces on the chessboard, which now breathed such a defiant imitation of life.

She wandered down into the living room just in time to see Roland move a pawn forward and lean back in his chair, tension gone.

Alexander stared down at the board. He reached, his hand heavy. When he moved, Roland almost casually nudged his queen forward. Alexander's jaw dropped; he glanced at Roland in utter disbelief. He took the queen with a pawn, and Roland moved a knight. "Check." The black king fled. Another knight's move. "Check." The black king stood at bay, isolated from its queen by the pawn that had captured the white queen. The black king backed into the rook's square, and again the white knight loped forward.

"Checkmate."

Alexander's face was a pale mask of fury. He seized the black king and hurled it across the room. Then he jumped to his feet and turned on Jehane. "Pack your clothes," he snarled. "I've lost the game."

Jehane, standing in the shadow, shook her head. She spoke in a slow, calm voice. The words seemed to hang in mid-air. "I'm not yours to give. If either of you had asked me, this silliness would never have been played out."

Nothing more was said. Jehane's husband sat stunned; her lover seemed exhausted. Cypriano slowly packed the chessmen into their compartments. He

picked up the black king, brushed it with his sleeve and stowed it away with the others. Then he shut the case and handed it to Roland.

Roland took the case, expressionless. He went to the door, where he turned. He then tore the mortgage into eight pieces and laid the scraps gently on a table. And departed.

Alexander Cypriano from that moment had played no more chess. "And," said Jehane, "never again did I set eyes on Roland."

CHAPTER 7

"That," said Jehane, "is the story of what happened to the mortgage. I'm sorry it took so long, but I could hardly explain it any other way. . . . If you will examine the black king, you'll notice that the crown is bent."

"I noticed," said Ann.

Jehane made a gesture toward their glasses. "Sherry?"

Ann and Tarr both accepted.

"Roland was a strange man," said Jehane. "I'm sure I did what was right. Neither of us would have gained—though Roland might still be alive, which I suppose could be considered a gain. Things happened as they had to happen. Now that he's dead, I notice the gap he leaves, but I feel no grief. Certainly not as much as Pearl would have felt."

"Out of sheer curiosity, Mrs. Cypriano," asked Tarr in a peculiarly respectful voice, "what are your plans?"

Jehane smiled. "Perhaps you'll think me perverse, but I have an urge to go to Ireland. I don't know what I'll find there, but I think I'll be going soon."

"With your husband?" asked Ann.

"No."

Ann rose. "Thank you for being so honest."

"I had no choice. You would have thought us thieves otherwise."

In San Rafael, Tarr lured Ann into a coffee shop. He ordered two hamburgers and a milkshake, explaining that he had not yet had lunch. Ann ordered coffee, in spite of Tarr's insistence that she eat. "Have a sandwich, or a sundae, or pie. Shoot the works. It's on me."

"No, thanks. I'm not hungry."

"You're dieting?"

"Not at the moment."

"I'm relieved. It would be a terrible mistake. Every one of your pounds is important. There's not one wasted."

"I suppose you intend that as a compliment," said Ann. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. I'm not the heavy-handed lout I seem."

"You don't seem heavy-handed," said Ann. "Just light-headed."

Tarr grinned and ate his hamburgers. Presently he said, "Now you know what happened to the mortgage."

Ann shuddered. "If I were Jehane I'd have *hated* him."

"And Alexander wants his chess set back—which is rubbing it in."

"He's willing to pay for it, or so he says."

"Everyone is so fair," said Tarr cynically. "But somewhere among the group is a blackmailer."

"Why 'among the group'? It seems to me it might have been practically anyone."

"The blackmailer took great pains to conceal his identity—which argues that he, or she, is someone

your father knew well. I'd certainly like to talk to your mother."

"You probably can in a day or so."

Tarr looked up. "How come?"

"Her letter said as much."

"Oh, the letter." Tarr seemed to lose interest. He leaned back in the booth. "You're a wealthy gal now. A poor slob of a cop doesn't stand much of a chance."

Ann laughed. "Which slob did you have in mind?"

"I was referring to Inspector Tom Tarr. I have scruples, but luckily they don't stand in the way of living off my wife."

"My father tried it," said Ann. "He didn't seem to like it."

"I'm of a different temperament. More independent."

"*More* independent?"

"Certainly. Your father couldn't figure out how to adapt."

"You're confusing 'independence' and 'hypocrisy.' "

"There may be a difference," conceded Tarr. "Still, it all seems simple enough to me. Pearl served roast duck with oranges, admittedly a vile concoction, when he wanted bread and cheese. Why not tell her so in a nice way, instead of suffering so dramatically? He'd have had his bread and cheese; his wife would be happy. It seems to me your father was being unnecessarily difficult."

"He was a hard man to live with, no doubt about it."

"Now me, I'm not. If I wanted bread and cheese, everybody within twenty miles would know it, including my wife."

"That's not so good, either, unless you're married to somebody like Pearl."

A short, paunchy man came into the coffee shop. "My lord," muttered Tarr, "here's Cooley."

Cooley wore heavy black-rimmed eyeglasses; black hair rose in a tuft from a narrow forehead. "Hey, there, Tom!" he called cheerfully. "Out feeding the missus on the taxpayer's money, I see. That's the spirit! Show no mercy."

Tarr said to Ann, "This is Ben Cooley, photographer with the city police. Until they canned him."

"I never thought they'd do it," said Cooley without embarrassment. "*Nichevo*. I took the wrong kind of pictures of the wrong kind of people."

"Cooley put enterprise ahead of discretion," Tarr told Ann.

"In my business, enterprise is what counts," said the photographer. "Now what would you do? I ask you, Mrs. Tarr. Here's the situation. Picture a naked man running down the street, with a dog chasing him. You've got your camera ready. Would you take the picture or wouldn't you?"

"If I could hold the camera steady, I'd certainly take it."

"So did I. Turns out the man was visiting the home of a friend, and the friend arrives unexpectedly. So the man jumps out the window. I won't mention any names—that's not my style—but it turns out he's one of the big shots in the Police Department. I should have recognized him, but without clothes he didn't look the same. One thing led to another, and I was allowed to resign."

"Dirty shame," said Tarr.

"I'm through with this damned city. As soon as the Civil Service exams for the county go up, I'll try for special investigator, or maybe photo-lab technician. Who knows, Tarr? Maybe I'll ease you out. You've been on the gravy train long enough." He winked at Ann. "Except that I'd get in dutch with your wife."

Tarr rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. "This is Miss Nelson."

"Oh. Excuse me. You sure look like Mrs. Tarr. Same build. Even the face—"

"Here now!" expostulated Tarr. "There isn't any Mrs. Tarr! Hasn't been for four years!"

"Oh, come *on*, Tom. I saw you two at the department picnic last month. In fact, I've got pictures to prove it. One where she was standing on the beer keg on one leg, and another during the Charleston contest. Unless maybe it was Miss Nelson?" Cooley looked questioningly at Ann, who had risen.

"It must have been Mrs. Tarr," said Ann. "I don't have a very good sense of balance. Goodbye, Mr. Cooley. Goodbye, Inspector Tarr."

"Wait!" said Tarr.

"Don't go on my account," said Cooley.

But Ann went, clicking along on staccato heels.

"Cooley," said Tarr, "I ought to beat you up."

"Nice-looking number," said Cooley. "What is she, friend or criminal?"

"She might be either . . . or both."

"You always come up with cute ones," said Cooley.

"Just a natural talent, I guess." Tarr heaved to his feet. "I've got to get back to headquarters."

Ann arrived home in late afternoon. The apartment seemed unnaturally quiet. She made a pot of tea and sat down in the big chair by the window, wondering what to do with herself for the evening. Dinner downtown? A movie?

She snatched the telephone and dialed Hilda Baily, who taught fourth grade at Mar Vista. There was no answer; Hilda was probably celebrating the end of the term. While she was considering whom next to call, the phone rang. Ann lifted the receiver

and heard a careful baritone voice. "Miss Nelson? Edgar Maudley here. Please don't think me a nuisance, but I've been wondering if you've come to any decision."

"No. Wait, let me think. Tomorrow is Saturday. Maybe I'll go over tomorrow and check through things."

"About what time will you be going?" inquired Maudley.

"I'm not sure. Probably in the morning."

"I'd be glad to help you. It's quite possible—"

"No," said Ann. "I want to look things over by myself."

There was a moment of silence. Then Edgar Maudley said with dignity, "Certainly."

"I'll call you tomorrow evening, or Sunday, and we can make whatever arrangements need to be made."

"Very well, Miss Nelson."

Ann replaced the receiver. Perhaps she should have accepted Maudley's offer of assistance. There would be a great many books to move. Well, she'd manage. Inspector Tarr still had her father's keys; she should have taken possession of them. But Martin Jones could let her into the house. She ascertained Jones's number from Information, and called him. He grumbled but agreed to be on hand to open the house. So much for that.

The evening still remained a void.

Ann phoned two more of her friends, suggesting dinner downtown. Each was committed.

She showered, changed into a black cocktail dress, drove downtown, and dined alone at Jack's. The evening was still young; the Fairmont Hotel was nearby; the cocktail lounge was a dim sanctuary. Ann relaxed. Inisfail seemed far away; the circum-

stances of Roland Nelson's death were remote, and she was able to consider them with detachment.

The entire course of her life had been changed. She had not yet reckoned the total of her new riches, but it surely would exceed a hundred thousand dollars, even after taxes. With twenty-two thousand dollars still unaccounted for—the loot of the blackmailer. Or such was Tarr's contention. He also continued to espouse the suicide theory. One was as bizarre as the other, but Ann was forced to admit the lack of any convincing refutation. Her father had been found dead in a foolproof locked room; suicide was the only rational explanation. The note rescued from the fireplace, the withdrawal of twenty-two thousand dollars from the bank, as clearly indicated blackmail. Against facts and logic Ann could only oppose her conviction that Roland would never have paid blackmail or killed himself.

She took an envelope from her purse, wrote on the back: *Questions.* Gnawing on her pen, she sought to recall the various occasions she had been puzzled, surprised, mystified. Gradually she composed a list:

How did Elaine learn that Roland had inherited money?

Why was she so sure of collecting from him? Had she been really sure, or only optimistic?

Why had Roland put such secure locks on his study door?

While Roland was short of money, he paid his rent regularly (evidenced by the rent receipts). When he came into the estate he fell behind. Normal relaxation? Or other reasons?

Where had Elaine spent the time since March? Where was Elaine now?

Why had Elaine written so indefinite a letter,

without a return address, without information of any sort other than that she wanted money?

If Elaine had received $22,000 from Roland, why was she now complaining of financial stringency?

The Elaine questions suggested an answer as unthinkable as Roland's blackmail and suicide. Yet Ann was forced to admit that the three incredible ideas formed a plausible unity.

Suppose Roland had done violence to Elaine? Suppose someone knew of it and blackmailed Roland? Suppose Roland, half crazy with guilt, worry, or fear, had then decided to kill himself? In a burst of illumination, Ann realized that these were the premises on which Inspector Tarr was working. It was an obvious point of view for someone who did not know Roland Nelson. No wonder Tarr had been so skeptical of the letter!

Nevertheless, facts were facts. The letter *had* been written by Elaine, and postmarked only last Tuesday—evidence of Elaine's continuing existence. Why was she being so elusive? Was she afraid? Of whom? Of the blackmailer? Of whoever had told her of Roland's inheritance? Of the law?

Questions, questions, questions. So very few facts . . .

Ann ordered another drink from the cocktail waitress. Dance music floated in from the ballroom like smoke.

She threw up her hands. Suicide, accident, murder, blackmail . . . what difference did it make?

For five minutes she sat in blissful relaxation. No more school. No more second grade. Travel . . . Italy would be fun. Venice, Positano, Taormino: places she long had wanted to visit. Paris, Copenhagen, Vienna. Or Ireland, which must be charming. Ann

toyed with the thought that she might run into Jehane Cypriano on some Dublin street. . . .

The thought of Jehane reminded Ann of Alexander Cypriano and the Paul Morphy Presentation chess set by which he set so much store. In turning the set over to Roland, Cypriano symbolically, if not actually, had cut himself off from chess, the wellspring of his existence. And in tearing up the mortgage, Roland in effect had compensated Alexander for the long-term use of his wife. Not a nice gesture, but then, Roland had not been a nice man.

Ann was tapping her fingers to the music from the ballroom. She drank some more, feeling a little giddy. Another drink, and she would become reckless, perhaps flirt with one of the men at the bar. Wiser to go home and to bed . . . But she found herself in no hurry to leave. Here were color and shimmer and music, all to the tinkle of ice. The apartment was lonely.

Suddenly Ann recalled something Tarr had said about danger, danger to herself. Presumably he had not been talking idly. Ann considered the questions she had noted on the back of the envelope. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that she chanced upon a clue that would lead to the identity of the blackmailer. Then there might be danger indeed.

A frightening possibility existed that she was already in possession of the clue, and that the blackmailer knew it. The apartment seemed lonelier than ever. . . . She didn't have to go home. She could take a room for the night here at the Fairmont. But no, she told herself in a sudden reversal of mood, it was ridiculous; why should anyone want to injure her? She paid her check and left.

She drove out Geary Boulevard toward the Pacific.

Fog drifted across the street lamps. Ann began to wish that she had given in to her fears and remained at the Fairmont.

She crossed Golden Gate Park, turned right into Judah Street, then left into Granada Avenue. She drove slowly past her apartment building. She saw nothing unusual. Making a U-turn at the corner, she returned, parked, locked her car, then gave way to nervousness and ran at full speed up to her apartment. Looking over her shoulder, she fumbled with the key, unlocked the door, snapped on the light, and slipped inside, with panting relief. The apartment was exactly as she had left it.

Nevertheless, she checked bedroom and bathroom, and tested the lock of the service door, angry at herself for her childishness.

She hurried into the bedroom and could hardly shed her clothes fast enough and dive into her bed.

She awoke to find sunlight streaming into the room. Her fears of the night before seemed absurd. How could she ever have got herself into such a state?

It was almost nine o'clock; she would have to hurry. She dressed in blue jeans, a yellow polo shirt, and sneakers; scrambled an egg, made toast and a cup of instant coffee; and, taking an orange to eat on the way, Ann ran down to her car.

She was in the best of moods. On this sparkling day the job ahead of her seemed not too formidable. Martin Jones? More bark than bite, no doubt highly sensitive underneath his glowering façade. She'd be especially nice to him. And she'd let Edgar Maudley have his darned old books . . . maybe.

She laughed.

Ann did not arrive at the house on Neville Road

until twenty minutes past ten. Martin Jones was already here, raking the area he had cultivated the previous week. In his pickup lay flats of dichondra. He greeted her almost with civility. "I see you've come to work. What are you going to do with the stuff?"

"Sort everything into three piles. For myself, for the Salvation Army, and for Edgar Maudley."

"Maudley?" Jones gave a contemptuous snort. "Why Maudley?"

"Oh, he has an understandable desire to retrieve a few odds and ends. After all, he was my father's wife's cousin."

"Your father told him to go to hell."

Ann changed the subject. "How much garden are you going to put in?"

"Not much, just enough to make the place look nice. Your father wasn't much of a gardener. . . Who's this?"

"It looks like Edgar Maudley," said Ann.

"He's sure come prepared," Martin Jones observed.

Into the driveway swung a glossy station wagon, towing a trailer in which were nested a number of cardboard boxes.

Maudley climbed down from the car. He was dressed informally, in tweed trousers and an old tweed jacket. "Good morning, good morning," he called cheerfully. "I see you're here."

Ann eyed him coldly. "I thought I'd made it clear . . ." Then she shrugged. It was too nice a day to wrangle.

"I decided I could be of help," said Maudley, "so I came along. Clear the whole thing up in one fell swoop, you know."

Ann turned toward the house. "Is it open?" she asked Martin Jones.

Jones nodded and, going to the front door, threw it open. "The desk in the study goes, also the two big bookcases. The rest of the furniture belongs to the house."

CHAPTER 8

The house smelled warm, dusty, and stale. Ann left the front door open and slid back the living-room door that opened to the patio. A pleasant current of air flowed through the room.

Edgar Maudley looked frowningly around the room. "Yes, there are the books. Some of them. I wonder what happened to the rugs."

"They're in storage."

"Indeed. Just as well. Certain of them are quite good, notably the two Kashans." He surveyed the walls, and said gloomily, "There's the Monet."

Ann had not previously noticed the painting, a little confection of pink, blue, and green. "A real Monet?" She went over to look at it.

Maudley seemed to regret having spoken. "You hadn't known of it?"

"No."

"Uncle Dan bought it in Paris in 1923."

"Your family seems to have run to collecting."

"I'm afraid so. Shall we start? I'll bring in boxes, then I can point out the books not specifically part of the Maudley collection . . ."

Ann decided to establish a position immediately. "You certainly may bring in the boxes," she said. "Then I'd like you to sit down somewhere while I

sort through things. That way there'll be no confusion."

Maudley assumed a stiff stance. "I can't see how confusion can result—"

"Also, I want to work at my own speed—which I'm afraid means slowly."

Maudley glanced at his watch. "The more reason for us both to pitch in and separate the Maudley books from Rex Orr's, which I don't care about."

"Please, Mr. Maudley, bring in the boxes. We'll do this my way. If any of your father's books are among those I don't care to keep, I'll be happy to let you take them."

Pearl's cousin swung on his heel and went out to his car, exuding unhappiness. Ann resolved not to let his avarice influence her decisions, though it was impossible not to sympathize with him. In his place, she supposed, she'd feel the same way.

The books, she found, could be divided into five general categories. First, children's books, for the most part with Christmas and birthday inscriptions: *To little Pearl, on her fifth birthday; may she learn to be as brave and pure as the little girl whom this book is about. Love, Aunt Mary.* Second, volumes dealing with metaphysical subjects: mysticism, Oriental philosophy, spiritualism, the Bahai and the Rosicrucian doctrines, telepathy, clairvoyance, even hypnotism. These books apparently had been the property of Rex Orr. Third, luxuriously bound and illustrated uniform editions: Shakespeare, Robert Louis Stevenson, Alexandre Dumas, Goethe, Balzac, Flaubert, many others. Fourth, a potpourri of books printed by The Pandora Press of San Francisco: genteel erotica, flamboyant works by obscure authors, volumes of poetry, collections of graphic art, *belles-lettres* of various lands. Fifth, standard modern works, those normally accumulated by the literate

upper- and upper-middle-class families: Proust, Joyce, Mann, Cary, assorted best sellers of the past two or three decades.

The entire group seemed to include no volumes of extraordinary value or even special antiquarian interest. The children's books Ann decided not to keep; they exhaled memories of a childhood of happier times. They were keepsakes that meant nothing to Ann. She packed them for Maudley in a box.

The second category, expounding the occult and the doctrines of the Orient, Ann likewise put aside for him. She had no interest in yoga or the powers conferred by hypnotism. A thought wandered through her head: Could chess-playing ability be enhanced by hypnosis? From somewhere her father had dug up the resources to beat Alexander Cypriano. Had he been benefiting from a study of Rex Orr's books?

The third category, the uniform editions, she decided to keep. Maudley, who with saintly patience had composed himself on the couch, uttered a feeble bleat when he saw Ann's intention. Ann ignored him.

The books from The Pandora Press posed the most serious problem. Some of them she wanted to keep, and Maudley was watching like a distraught mother. Ann could not restrain her guilt pangs. To him these books represented irreplaceable treasures. An unpleasant dilemma. Ann wondered, were their positions reversed, how generously Maudley would have dealt with her. But this was a sterile line of thought.

The front door opened and Martin Jones peered in. He clumped into the living room, staring first at Edgar—composed with glacial self-discipline on the couch—then at Ann. His grin comprehended every-

thing. He asked Ann, "What are you planning to do with the bookcases?"

Ann inspected the living-room bookcase dubiously. Like its twin in the study, it was a massive mahogany piece resting on six short legs. Two beautiful pieces of furniture, but far too big for her apartment. "I don't have any particular use for them."

"I'll take them off your hands," said Jones, "provided the price is right. The fact is, I don't want them very much."

Ann shrugged. "Twenty dollars apiece?"

"That's high."

"Oh, hell, I'm not going to haggle with you. They're worth lots more. You keep them. They're yours. No charge."

"That's all they're worth to me. I own three books," Jones said calmly, "the telephone directory, a Sears-Roebuck catalogue, and the Marin County Building Code"

"You must plan to acquire a lot more directories and catalogues."

He inspected the bookcases sourly. "I don't intend to use them for books."

"What else can you use them for?"

"Storage. Tools, nails, hardware, things like that."

Behind them, Maudley shuddered. Ann stared in horror. "I won't let you have them. It's *desecration*."

Martin Jones was not abashed. "To put something to honest use? Look at those books. Do you suppose Nelson read them? Do you think *anybody* ever read them? I'll bet a hundred dollars most of them weren't opened more than once. If at all."

Ann was momentarily silenced. She probably would have lost the bet, she thought.

"Books," intoned Edgar Maudley, "are a repository of knowledge, of ideas, of inspiration, which otherwise would be lost."

Jones grinned. He picked up one of the books, turned to the title page. "*Stones of Venice,* by John Ruskin." He flipped some pages, and read a passage aloud in a nasal, mincing voice:

> And well may they fall back, for beyond those troops of ordered arches there rises a vision out of the earth, and all the great square seems to have opened from it in a kind of awe, that we may see it far away;—a multitude of pillars and white domes, clustered into a long low pyramid of colored light; a treasure heap, it seems, partly of gold and partly of opal and mother-of-pearl, hollowed beneath into five great vaulted porches, ceiled with fair mosaic and beset with sculpture of alabaster, clear as amber and delicate as ivory,—sculpture fantastic and involved, of palm leaves and lilies, and grapes and pomegranates, and birds clinging and fluttering among the branches, all twined together into an endless network of buds and plumes; and in the midst of it the solemn forms of angels, sceptered and robed to the feet, and leaning to each other across the gates, their figures indistinct among the gleaming of the golden ground—

He broke off. "Doesn't this guy ever run out of breath? He must have written when ink was a penny a quart."

After a pause, Ann said, "You might use the cases to hold your collection of comic books and *TV Guides.*"

And Edgar Maudley said, "Ruskin wrote to a cultured and discriminating audience who, whether they agreed with his ideas or not—and most of them did not—at least had the grace to recognize the felicity of his style."

Jones angrily tossed the book down. "What burns me about you people is that first you invent a club, then you pull the plug on anybody who doesn't want to join. I'm not interested in walking around with a lily in my hand, or sobbing over a dead mouse."

"Neither were the Neanderthals," retorted Ann. "All they cared about was cramming food into their gullets and bashing other people with clubs."

"Not entirely apropos," said Maudley primly. "You probably mean Zinjanthropus or Eanthropus."

"What it boils down to," growled the contractor, "is that you're calling me an ignorant peasant—which bothers me not one bit, coming as it does from a schoolmarm whose biggest decision is whether to play blind-man's-bluff or tic-tac-toe with the kiddies. But—"

"My word, you're an offensive man," declared Maudley. "I think you should apologize to Miss Nelson."

Martin Jones laughed. "Sure. If she apologizes for calling me an ignorant peasant."

"First convince me otherwise," said Ann, tossing her head.

"That would involve reading a lot of stupid books about pomegranates and angels' wings. I'd rather remain ignorant."

Ann took up *The Stones of Venice*. "Read this book, and I'll give you the bookcases."

Jones's flat cheeks twitched sardonically. "You already gave them to me."

"I took them back, Mr. Jones."

"It would be nice," said Jones. "But I don't have the time."

"Just turn your TV set off two hours early tonight," suggested Ann. "That should get you well started."

"TV? I don't have one."

"What do you do with your spare time?"

"Lady, I don't have any spare time. I'm running a big construction job. I have thirty-eight men on my payroll. I'm fighting architects, building inspectors, subcontractors, the bank, four unions, the planning commission, and the customers. When I have a minute I figure new jobs. And now you want me to recline in a hammock reading about angel wings?"

"You've got time to come over here and putter around the garden."

Jones chuckled. He hefted the book. "It's a lot to ask for two beat-up old bookcases. Still . . . why not? Maybe you'll make a cookie-pusher out of me yet."

Ann often amused herself by imagining an adult as he must have been as a child. She now saw Martin Jones as a handsome, rebellious little boy, perhaps in fear of a heavy-handed father, but stubbornly defiant, who grew up to remain defiant of authority, in much the way Roland Nelson had defied social dicta. Then his abortive love affair. She wondered what the girl was like. A tramp, probably. Oh, well, it was no affair of hers.

She went into the study to the companion bookcase and emerged with several dozen chess manuals, texts, compendia—her father's own books, which she would keep. Edgar Maudley no longer occupied the couch. Ann assumed that he was visiting the bathroom and continued with her work. . . . Edgar came out of the hall leading from the bedrooms, and stalked out to his car. He walked, so it seemed to Ann, rather stiffly.

He returned and resumed his seat on the couch.

With both cases empty, Ann considered the Pandora Press Books. Maudley frowned as Ann sorted through the books, putting to one side those that attracted her, perhaps one in three. He could no lon-

ger restrain himself. "May I ask what you are doing?"

"Picking out the books I want from the ones I don't."

Maudley became almost tearful. "Do you realize that The Pandora Press was my grandfather's creation? That these books are extremely rare, that with them I would have a complete file of Pandora publications?"

Ann nodded. "I won't give them to you outright, but I'll sell them to you. This pile goes for, say, five dollars a book. *This* pile, the books I'd like to keep, I'll let you have for twenty dollars a book."

Martin Jones had returned. "You're letting him off cheap," he told Ann. "Those books ought to go for three times that."

"No such thing!" exclaimed Maudley. "Merely because they're rare doesn't automatically make them valuable."

"*Some* of these books are valuable," said Ann. "And you're getting them cheap. Do you want them?"

"Oh, I want them, all right."

"All of them?"

"Yes."

"Very well, you can take them out to your car, and I'll figure out what you owe me."

To Ann's surprise, Martin Jones assisted. While the two men carried out books, Ann calculated. There were forty-six books at $5 each and nineteen books at $20 each—a total of $610. Not bad, thought Ann spitefully.

The two bookcases were now empty. They were really handsome pieces of furniture. What a shame if Martin Jones did use them to store tools and hardware. He could not have been serious.... She wondered about him. Perhaps he had been teasing her—

perhaps he occupied his spare time reading. His vocabulary was good; his outlook seemed broad. He was an interesting man, she thought—a tough, uncompromising fighter. Roland Nelson had been tough and uncompromising, too.

She wandered back into the study. In that chair her father had died. She tried to imagine the scene: Roland Nelson somberly gazing out the window, then raising the revolver, holding it to his head, pulling the trigger. Unthinkable. But how else? Ann's brain raced, seeking an answer. The floor? Concrete. Ceiling? Without mar or scar. Door? Window? Almost hermetically tight. Fireplace? A marmoset might have gained entry—if the damper had been open, as it had not been. Walls? Sound as the ceiling, everywhere that she could see, unmarred, unbroken, unsullied. The single area not yet investigated was that section of the paneled wall separating study from living room, between the back-to-back bookcases. Ann returned to the living room and called to Martin Jones. "Would you do something for me?"

"What?"

"Nothing contrary to your principles, like reading. I'd like you to move this bookcase away from the wall."

Jones approached warily. Ann snapped, "I won't bite you. Just move the corner of the bookcase out into the room."

"Why?"

"Look, Mr. Jones, either do it or don't."

Edgar Maudley came into the living room. Two boxes of books remained, a large and a small. He scowled, lifted the small box, gave a pitiful groan, and staggered out the front door. "What's wrong with him?" Ann asked. "He seems angry."

Jones chuckled. "He's sore because I didn't carry

out that big box." He put his shoulder to the bookcase, eased it three or four feet out across the vinyl tile that covered the floor.

"Thank you." Ann peered behind the bookcase.

Martin Jones watched her curiously. "What's the reason for all this?"

"I had a fantastic idea that someone might have broken through the study wall, pushed the bookcase aside, shot my father and got back out the same way."

"A good trick," said Jones. "Especially since the bookcases loaded with books weigh a ton or so apiece."

Ann frowned. "I just can't *imagine* my father shooting himself. He wouldn't do it."

"A man sometimes chooses his own time and place to die. Why be conventional and die of cancer? Everybody has to die sooner or later."

"Preferably later," said Ann. "I'm conventional."

"I've noticed that. 'Read a nice book, Mr. Jones. Be cultured like me and Mr. Maudley.' " But the mockery was good-natured, and Ann felt no obligation to retort.

"You can push the bookcase back if you like. No, wait a minute." She got down on her knees, looked at the floor. "That's strange."

"What's strange?"

"The dents in the vinyl tile where the feet of the bookcase rested. It has only two legs, but there are three dents."

" 'Two legs'? Six legs."

"I mean the two at this end. And there are three dents from the middle pair, too." Ann crawled to the other end of the case. "And three here as well."

Edgar Maudley came back into the room. He said in a peevish voice, "Mr. Jones, I'd be obliged if

you'd help me with the big box. I've got a weak back—"

"Sure. Just a minute."

Maudley came over to where Ann was examining the floor. "What now?"

"These marks in the tile," said Ann. "Notice the three sets of feet on the bookcase. Each pair is about nine inches apart. See where they've dented the vinyl? But notice that between each two there's the print of a third foot. How can that be?"

"The things women bother their heads about," said Maudley. "What are you charging me for these books?"

"It comes to six hundred and ten dollars."

He winced. "For my own books!"

"They're not your books," said Ann acidly. "They're my books. You don't have to take them."

Edgar produced his checkbook and carefully wrote out a check. "There," he whined. "Six hundred and ten dollars. I don't have any choice."

"I won't thank you," said Ann, "because the books are probably worth two or three times that."

"Conceivably," said Maudley. "In any event, the deal is consummated, and I'll say no more about it." Martin Jones seized the box that Edgar had found too heavy, hoisted it without effort, and carried it outside.

Ann made a last puzzled inspection of the impressions in the tile. There was undoubtedly some pedestrian explanation, but what it was she couldn't fathom.

She took stock. The books were sorted; Martin Jones would take care of the bookcases; and she decided to give him the desk in the study. Maybe she'd insist that he read another book to earn it. It was fun to tease him, the surly brute.

Where was that "article of medieval Persian crafts-

manship" presented to Roland by Pearl, which Ann had been enjoined to keep? She inspected a china closet in the dining area, which contained a few inexpensive dishes. They could stay with the house. There was no other storage area in the living room.

She went to inspect the bedrooms.

The first bedroom was starkly empty; the second contained little more than a bed and dresser. In the wardrobe hung two or three men's suits, a jacket or two. The dresser held underwear, socks, handkerchiefs. The barest minimum of personal belongings. Roland Nelson all over.

The Persian miniatures were nowhere to be found. She went outside. Martin Jones was setting out dichondra. "All through?"

"Almost. You've been through the house, of course."

Jones's eyes narrowed. "I cleaned up the kitchen, straightened up here and there."

"Did you notice a set of Persian miniatures? In a carved ivory box?"

"It's in the bedroom, on the dresser."

"It's not there now."

He frowned and led the way to the bedroom. He pointed to the top of the bureau. "That's where the thing was. I saw it only this morning."

Ann swung around and marched ouside. Edgar Maudley was preparing to leave. Ann said evenly, "I don't seem to find the miniatures, Mr. Maudley. Have you seen them?"

Maudley said in a lofty voice, "If you're referring to an item which since 1729 has been a prized heirloom of my family—"

"And which is going to be a prized heirloom of *my* family. Where is it?"

"As you can see, I don't have it on my person."

"Very funny. Let's look in your car."

"I don't enjoy the implication. And I don't care to have you prowling through my car."

"I think I'll prowl anyway. Those miniatures were in the bedroom; you went in there, then you went out to the car carrying something under your coat. You swiped those miniatures."

"Think what you like. The subject, so far as I am concerned, is closed."

Ann walked to his car. The doors were locked. Ann swung around. "Please unlock your car. If you don't have the miniatures I'll apologize. If you do, I want them back."

"My dear young lady, I must insist that you drop the subject. In any event, I remind you that by every moral right they're my property—that they passed into the possession of Roland Nelson only through the misguided generosity of my cousin Pearl."

Ann turned to Martin Jones. "I want you to witness this, Mr. Jones. I have reason to believe he has the miniatures in his car . . ."

Jones eyed Maudley with dislike. He stepped forward, held out his hand. "Let's have the key, Maudley."

Maudley eyed him nervously. "You'll get no keys from me, sir. Stand aside."

Martin Jones gave his head a slow shake. "I could take them away from you. But it's easier to break a window."

"You do that, sir, and I'll charge you with vandalism."

"If the miniatures are there," declared Ann, "I'll charge you with theft."

White with fury, Maudley reached in his pocket for the car keys, unlocked the door, opened the glove compartment, and brought forth an ivory box, which he thrust at Ann. "Here you are. I let you have them

under protest. And I assure you your possession will be only temporary."

"Oh?"

"You have no right to *any* of this. *Nor* the money. I've been a gentleman so far, but no longer! The money, the books, the rugs, the miniatures belong to *me,* not *you,* and I intend to recover! The estate should never have gone to Roland Nelson in the first place."

"And why not, pray?"

"Why not? I'll tell you why not! *Because the marriage of Roland Nelson to Pearl Maudley was not valid.*

Ann was astonished. "How so?"

"Because," snapped Maudley, "he never divorced your mother."

Ann leaned back on the fender of Maudley's car. She controlled her voice. "Where did you hear this?"

"Never mind where I heard it."

"At last," said Ann, "it becomes clear where my mother got her information."

"You don't deny it, then?" Maudley asked in a triumphant blat.

"Deny what?"

"That Pearl Maudley never was the legal spouse of Roland Nelson?"

"Certainly I deny it."

"How can you? He never divorced your mother."

Ann could no longer control her laughter. "Why should he? He never married her."

Maudley started to speak, clamped his mouth shut. His face was red. Finally he stuttered, "This is not the situation as I understand it."

"Where did you get your information? From my mother?"

"Yes, if you must know!"

"Where is she?"

"Where is she? How should I know? Los Angeles, I suppose."

"How long has it been since you've seen her?"

"Several months. Why do you ask?"

"Inspector Tarr has been trying to locate her."

He chewed his lip. "She made no mention of non-marriage to your father. In fact, she gave me definitely to understand . . ." His voice trailed off.

"How much did you pay her?" Ann asked gently.

He chose to ignore her question. Instead, he said pompously, "You know, of course, that a murderer can't inherit from his victim."

"What of it?" Ann instantly perceived the drift of Maudley's thoughts.

"There's a line of investigation which in my opinion the police have neglected."

Ann pretended to be puzzled. "Investigation of what?"

"The death of my cousin Pearl. From Roland Nelson's point of view, she could not have died more conveniently."

Ann's voice blared her contempt. "He didn't see her the night she was killed. She died on her way down the hill from the Cyprianos."

"Oh? He lived nearby. Suppose she had called on him, mentioned where she'd been? He had only to knock her unconscious, drive back up the hill, run the car off the cliff, and walk home—a matter of twenty minutes."

"You," said Ann, "have a dirty mind!" She walked back toward the house. Edgar Maudley drove off with a jerk, the trailer groaning and rumbling at his bumper.

At the door Ann paused to take her first thorough look at the Persian miniatures. They were contained in two intricately carved ivory trays, hinged to form the box. A silver filigree emanating from the hinges

divided the exterior into medallions, inside which the filigree branched and elaborated into a thousand twining tendrils, and these were garnished with leaves of turquoise, flowers of lapis lazuli, cinnabar, and jet.

The miniatures themselves were cemented to the interior of the trays. They depicted a garden on a hillside overlooking a city: in the bright light of noon on the one side, in the blue dimness of midnight on the other. In the daylight garden a warrior prince walked with four advisers. A Nubian slave proffered sherbet; on parapets stood stiff men-at-arms. In the night garden the prince reclined with a languorous odalisque. She wore diaphanous trousers; black hair flowed over her shoulders.

Ann unfolded a slip of paper: *Garden of Turhan Bey: Behzad of Herat. 1470-1520.* Ann closed the box and carried it over to her car. A beautiful, authentic treasure; she could well understand Edgar Maudley's covetousness.

She went back into the house. Martin Jones stood in the middle of the living room. Ann saw that his mood had changed; he once again had become hostile. Because they were alone? Was he afraid of her? Or of women in general? She picked up an armload of books and took it out to her car. With surly grace Jones helped her. When the books were loaded, Ann packed the four chessboards and the chessmen, feeling a twinge as she broke up games that would never be finished. She must remember to notify the four chess-playing correspondents of her father's death.

She made a final survey of the study, the desk, the empty bookcases. Nothing she wanted to keep. She returned to the living room, warm and tired. Jones asked curtly, "What are you planning to do with the clothes?"

"Give them away."

"Leave them here. One of my laborers is just about your father's size."

"What about Roland's car—would he take that, too?"

"I imagine so."

"I'll mail the ownership certificate to you." Ann felt reluctant to leave, though now there was nothing to keep her. "I'm making you a present of the desk," she said.

"Thanks." Jones had not forgotten. "Since I agreed to read that idiotic book, I will. But I don't have to like it."

"It'll do you good. You might even want to visit Venice. Or, heaven help us, read another book."

He grinned his sour grin. "Fat chance."

"You can mail me the book when you're finished with it."

"I don't have your address," he growled.

"Sixty-nine fifty Granada Avenue, San Francisco."

He made a note of it. "Don't expect it for about three months. I might want to read it backwards to see if it makes more sense."

"I'm sure you'd find it so. Oh, and thank you for your help, Mr. Jones."

Jones seemed about to say something catastrophic. Instead, he turned on his heel and re-entered the house. Ann could have kicked him.

She strode over to her car and drove away fast.

CHAPTER 9

Ann arrived in San Rafael shortly before three, ravenously hungry; she stopped at a drive-in for a sandwich. No question but that she should report the events of the day to Inspector Tarr. Tarr, in his vanity, would of course assume that infatuation had induced her to call him. The notion irritated her. Let him assume anything he liked.

At a service station she freshened up, then telephoned the sheriff's office. Tarr got on the phone and said yes, he would like to see her. Could she stop by the office? Or would she prefer to meet him elsewhere?

The office was perfectly satisfactory, Ann said in a tone she hoped would put the Don Juan of the force in his place.

But when she arrived at the sheriff's office, Tarr seemed anything but abashed. He took her into his cubbyhole and seated her with gallantry. "I've been in communication with the Los Angeles County authorities. No sign anywhere of your mother. Harvey Gluck says he knows nothing. He hasn't seen her for two months and professes great concern."

"What about Beverly Hills?"

Tarr looked puzzled. "Beverly Hills?"

"That's where the letter was mailed from."

"Oh, the letter." Tarr pursed his attractive lips. "It might have been mailed by almost anyone. A friend, a mailing service, even the postmaster. The postmark doesn't mean much."

"Do you think something happened to her?"

He ran his fingers through his blond hair. "Anything might have happened. We can't rule out illness or accident. Hospitals report negative, there's no police information, but she'll turn up. Don't worry about that."

"It seems she's been working in cahoots with Edgar Maudley."

"How's that again?"

Ann told him what Maudley had said. "She sold poor Edgar on the idea that she could prove Roland's marriage to Pearl invalid—in which case Edgar would have inherited as next of kin."

"Could she do it?"

"I don't see how. Though, when I saw her," said Ann, "she seemed pretty sure of herself."

Tarr was unimpressed. "Unless she had irrefutable proof that Roland Nelson had made a bigamous marriage, she couldn't pressure him."

"How could he have married Pearl bigamously?" asked Ann. "He wasn't married to my mother."

"Unless he'd married still another woman, whom he hadn't divorced—I mean, between your mother and Pearl."

"I don't know of any such woman. Of course, that doesn't mean she doesn't exist."

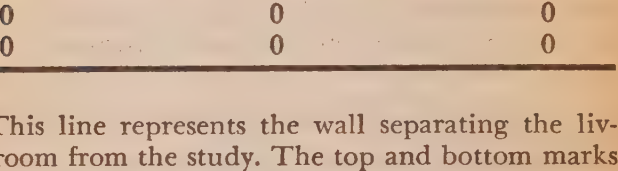
"Still, suppose this hypothetical in-between woman was also putting pressure on him," suggested Tarr, "so that he had to pay off two women instead of one. This would explain the bank withdrawals. Twenty thousand to one of them, a thousand a month to the other."

Ann shook her head skeptically. "Not that I have

any better explanation . . . Oh, I've run into another mystery."

"What mystery?"

Ann drew on a sheet of paper:



"This line represents the wall separating the living room from the study. The top and bottom marks are where the feet of the living-room bookcase rested before the case was moved—about nine inches apart. Between is the dent of an extra foot, in the position I've indicated, about five and a half inches from the front leg."

Tarr examined the drawing intently. "What about the other bookcase, the one in the study? Did that show a similar set of dents?"

"No. I looked."

"It's certainly a queer one. . . ." Tarr kept staring at Ann's little diagram. He seemed far away. Then he shook his head violently. "I'll have to think about this. Oh, before I forget, Miss Nelson. I'll release that fancy chess set to you, also your father's wallet." He scribbled on a form. "Sign here."

Ann signed, and Tarr brought the chess set and wallet from a cabinet. She opened the case and took out the black king with its dented crown. "Poor Alexander Cypriano."

Tarr chuckled. "Losing that game probably hurt him more than the prospect of losing his wife. Speaking of wives, that fool Ben Cooley, the photographer—don't pay any attention to what he said. There is no Mrs. Tom Tarr. There was one in the dim

past, and I mean dim. The way Cooley talks you'd think I'm running around with five women at a time."

"I don't know why you think it concerns me." She rose. "I'll have to be going."

Tarr said with engaging boyishness, as if the thought had just occurred to him, "Oh, what about having dinner with me next week?"

"I don't think that would be wise, Inspector."

"Come on, now . . ."

But Ann took the chess set and wallet, and departed.

Back in her car she scowled down at the chess set; she supposed she ought to return it to Alexander Cypriano. It meant another trip to Inisfail. She sighed, started her car, drove west on Lagunitas Road, and presently turned into the driveway of the house on Melbourne Drive.

Ann walked up the stone steps to the front door and rang the bell. The door opened slowly; Jehane, pale and serious, looked out from the gloomy interior.

Ann held out the leather case. "I brought the chess set back to your husband."

Jehane stepped back quickly, as if the box were infected. "Come in, please," she said in a pale voice. "I'll call Alexander."

Ann reluctantly went up with her to the second level. Jehane disappeared down the hall, and Ann heard her rapping at a door, then the mutter of conversation.

Jehane returned. Her face was expressionless. "He'll be out in a moment." After a pause she said, "I'm afraid Alexander feels that I never should have told you and Inspector Tarr what happened to the mortgage." She broke off as Cypriano appeared in the hallway. He wore a red satin dressing robe with

black lapels, and black leather slippers. His hands were in his robe pockets. He glowered at Ann from under threatening eyebrows.

Ann said, "I've brought you the chess set."

"I see." His voice was supercilious. "And what price have you set on it?"

"Nothing. I'm giving it back to you."

Cypriano's eyes went yellow. He seized the case, ran out on the deck, swung his arm. Far out over the rocks flew the leather case, sailing, spinning, disappearing into the gulch.

CHAPTER 10

As Ann crossed the bridge into San Francisco, a wall of fog was building up at the Golden Gate. The fog overtook her at the Presidio and she was forced to slow down to a crawl. Somewhere unseen, far to the west, the sun had set, and an eerie, monochromatic twilight had fallen over the city. The fog grew thicker, blearing vision; the mercury lamps above the freeway glowed sullen lavender, with a scarlet corona.

At her apartment the fog was almost a drizzle; little cold drops with the tang of the ocean brushed her face. A cab groping along the street stopped by the curb, and a short, plump man got out.

Ann, starting up the steps, paused as the man approached. She recognized him. "Harvey!"

"Bless my soul," said Harvey Gluck. "Am I glad to see you! I was wondering if you'd be home. I telephoned from the airport, but there was no answer. I took a chance, and here I am."

"I'm glad to see you, too," said Ann, with an enthusiasm totally unfeigned. She had always considered Harvey Gluck, whom her mother had so patently hoodwinked and exploited, the most patient and harmless of men. His devotion to Elaine Ann found incomprehensible; it was as uncritical and un-

demanding as the love of one of Harvey's dogs for Harvey.

"Come on up," said Ann. "I'll mix us a drink and find us something to eat."

"Well." Harvey looked back at the waiting cab. "I thought you could tell me where to find Elaine."

"I've no idea. Don't you know?"

"No. A while back she told me she'd come into money, and that's the last I've seen of her." A trace of uncharacteristic bitterness crept into her voice. "Actually, Elaine and I are washed up. She can't stand my dogs. When I first met her she was the world's greatest dog lover. Goes to show how people change."

"Why are you looking for her, then?"

"If she's come into money, I want what she owes me—which is thirteen hundred bucks. But I didn't come here to bother you with my troubles. What do you say we go to Chinatown? I'll buy you an oriental dinner."

"In these clothes? I'm filthy."

"You look just fine to me."

"I'd love to, Harvey. But let me change."

"Okay. I'll tell the cab to wait."

"Of course not! We'll go in my car."

He looked relieved, and trotted across the sidewalk; money changed hands, and the cab blinked away through the murk and was gone.

They climbed the steps. Ann said, "I was wondering what to do with myself; it's such a dreary evening. You appeared just at the right time."

"I'm Johnny-on-the-spot where the ladies are concerned," said Harvey gallantly. "What's this I hear about your father?"

"It's a long story." Ann unlocked her door. "The police are calling it suicide. Maybe it is, but I don't believe it."

"I never knew him," said Harvey. "Elaine was always talking about him. Sometimes what a great hero, but mostly what a heel."

Ann sighed. "He was both. But I can't understand what's happened to Elaine. Hasn't she written you?"

"Not one word." Harvey surveyed the apartment. "Nice little place you've got here."

"It's a place to live." Ann shivered. "Doesn't it seem cold? Almost as if the fog has seeped in through the windows."

Harvey hunched his plump shoulders. "It does seem a bit nippy."

"I'll turn up the heat. How about a highball?"

"Don't mind if I do." Harvey looked around. "Excuse me, but where is it?"

"The bathroom? Through the bedroom, to the right."

Harvey slunk out. Ann went into the kitchenette, brought out her bottle of bourbon, two glasses . . . She turned her head. Had Harvey called? She took a step, listened. From the direction of the bathroom came a peculiar bumping, scraping sound. "Harvey?"

The bumping, scraping sound diminished. There was silence. "Harvey?" called Ann in an uncertain voice. She peered across the dark bedroom at the line of light under the bathroom door.

The light snapped off. The door opened, very slowly. In the darkness loomed a shape darker than dark. Ann's knees wobbled; she gasped, whirled, and ran for the front door. Behind her pounded footsteps. She clawed for the door handle; the door opened at last, and she ran screaming out into the hall—and, screaming, tumbled down the steps, and, screaming, picked herself up to hammer at the door of the manager's apartment on the ground floor.

He was maddeningly deliberate in answering his door. Ann kept watching over her shoulder, trem-

bling all over. No one appeared. She held her finger on the button, knocked, thumped.

The door opened. The manager looked guardedly out. "Miss Nelson! What's the matter?"

"Call the police," Ann cried. "There's someone in my apartment!"

The manager, an ex-Marine named Tanner who had left an arm on Guadalcanal, said, "Just a minute." He went to a cupboard, brought out a large black automatic pistol. "Let's go look, Miss Nelson."

He bounded upstairs.

Ann's door was shut. She said in a terrified whisper, "I left it open. I'm sure I did."

"Stand back." Holding the gun between his knees, Tanner brought out his passkey, unlocked the door fast; then snatching up his gun he thrust the door open. Once more warning Ann back, he peered into the living room.

Empty. On the kitchen counter was the bottle of bourbon and the two glasses.

"Be careful," breathed Ann. "There's something terribly wrong." Her voice caught in her throat. Whatever had happened to Harvey would have happened to her. . . .

Tanner sidled into the bedroom. He reached in with the hook of his artificial arm, switched on the lights. Ann's neatly made bed sprang up, the dresser, the night table. Tanner peered under the bed, looked suspiciously at the wardrobe. Holding the gun ready, he slid aside first one of the wardrobe doors, then the other. The wardrobe contained only shoes and clothes.

"Stand back, Miss Nelson," he said quietly.

The bathroom door was ajar. The light from the bedroom shone on a polished black shoe, a plump ankle in a black and red silk sock.

Tanner backed slowly off, spoke over his shoulder.

"There's a man's body in the bathroom. Call the police."

Ann fled to the telephone. Tanner went into the kitchen and looked out on the service porch. After a moment he returned, waiting till Ann finished. "He's gone. Broke open the back door to get in, probably took off the same way. What happened? Who's the man in the bathroom?"

Ann sank into a chair. "My mother's husband. We'd just come in. He had to go to the bathroom. It was someone who was waiting for me." The full horror of what had happened to Harvey Gluck—and almost to her—struck her like a blow.

"Easy now," said Tanner. He stood alertly contemplating the door into the bathroom. Someone might still be lurking there in the dark, undecided whether to make a lunge through the apartment or essay the twenty-five-foot drop from the bathroom window. Better to wait out here, he decided, with the gun trained on the doorway.

A few frozen moments later sirens began to moan, first faintly, then growing in volume, finally dying down outside. A pair of officers appeared from the stairway, burst into Ann's living room. Tanner briefed them in a low voice, motioned with his one arm toward the bathroom. One of the officers tiptoed over and, covered by the gun of his mate, reached in and jabbed on the light. Then he ducked back. Using a mirror from Ann's dresser they surveyed the bathroom.

Its sole occupant was Harvey Gluck. Harvey lay on his back with bulging eyes and protruding tongue. In his neck there was a bloody crease, where a wire had jerked tight.

Detective Inspector Fitzpatrick presently descended to the manager's apartment, where Ann sat cud-

dling a cup of coffee she did not want. Fitzpatrick brought forth his notebook and spoke in a bored voice. "Name?"

"Ann Nelson."

"Married?"

"No."

"Employed where?"

"I teach school. Mar Vista Elementary."

"The deceased is who?"

"My mother's husband. His name is Harvey Gluck."

"Tell me what happened."

Ann described the events of the evening. Fitzpatrick took one or two notes.

"Why had Mr. Gluck called on you?"

"He was looking for my mother." Ann hesitated, then said, "Perhaps you had better get in touch with Inspector Tarr at the Marin County Sheriff's Office."

"Why?"

"My father died a week or so ago. Inspector Tarr has been in charge of the investigation."

Fitzpatrick's black eyes snapped. "Homicide?"

"You'd better ask Inspector Tarr," said Ann. Then with a trace of cheerless humor she said, "He thinks it was suicide."

"And what do you think?"

"I don't know what I think. Except that someone was waiting to kill me." Ann bit her lip to keep it from trembling.

"Easy now, Miss Nelson. How do you know Mr. Gluck wasn't the intended victim?"

"How could he have been?" Ann asked wearily. "He'd only just arrived in town. No one knew he'd be here. But they knew I'd be home, and alone.... Poor Harvey. When he went into the bathroom, whoever was there had to kill him to keep him quiet." Then the tears came.

Fitzpatrick asked permission to use the Tanners' telephone. When he hung up he turned back to Ann.

"If it's any comfort to you," said the detective, "Mr. Gluck never knew what struck him. That kind of garrote works like greased lightning.... By the way, was he friendly with you?"

The implication was too clear to be ignored. "What do you mean?" said Ann with as much indignation as she could muster.

Fitzpatrick was not daunted. "Just what I asked."

"Yes. He was friendly with me."

"How friendly?"

"I liked him. He was a kind, generous man."

"He ever make a pass at you?"

"Certainly not."

Fitzpatrick nodded without interest. "Has he ever been here before?"

"No"

"What about your mother? Where is she?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?" Fitzpatrick's tone was incredulous.

"I haven't seen her since early March."

The telephone rang; Fitzpatrick answered as a matter of course. The conversation continued for several minutes. Then he hung up and said to Ann, "That was Inspector Tarr. He's on his way." He considered a moment. "Where are you planning to spend the night?"

"I don't know. I hadn't thought."

"A friend's house?"

"I'll go to a hotel."

"She can stay right here," said Mrs. Tanner.

Ann thanked her. She would have preferred the impersonal calm of a hotel, but she was too upset to argue.

Mrs. Tanner said, "You tell me what you'd like; I'll run upstairs and get it for you. And you can be taking a nice hot shower."

"That sounds wonderful, Mrs. Tanner; you're very kind," said Ann. "If you'd just bring some pajamas and my bathrobe."

When Ann emerged from the shower, Mrs. Tanner had a bowl of split-pea soup and a grilled cheese sandwich waiting for her. Ann remembered that she had eaten neither lunch nor dinner. She suddenly felt famished.

While she was eating, Inspector Tarr arrived. She heard his voice in the living room and felt an almost frantic sense of relief. Tarr looked in at her. "Good evening, Miss Nelson." Ann looked up in surprise. His voice was as coolly indifferent as Inspector Fitzpatrick's had been. She flushed with resentment. What a hypocrite! Trying to make a date with her one moment, the next speaking to her as if she were some whore picked up in a raid!

Tarr sat down beside her. Ann moved away. "This is a very serious matter," he said.

Ann made no reply.

"Assuming someone broke into your apartment—"

Ann demanded angrily, "Is there any other possibility?"

"Of course. You might have garroted Harvey Gluck and faked a break-in at the back door. A woman could easily do the job. Once that wire gets snapped tight, it's all over."

Ann curled her lip in ridicule. "Why should I want to hurt poor Harvey?"

"I don't know." And Tarr added blandly, "Incidentally, if you plan to confess, please confess to me. I'm bucking for promotion, and I could use any help at all."

Ann sipped her tea, too outraged and emotionally limp to react.

"Assuming," Tarr went on, "that someone broke into your apartment, planning to attack and kill you, the question is, Why?"

"I can't imagine."

"Any jealous boy friends?"

"No."

"How about your ex-husband?"

Ann smiled wanly at the idea. "He's in Cleveland."

"We'll check to make sure. Anyone else sore at you?"

"Not seriously."

"So we're back where we started—in Inisfail. You're a threat to someone, or someone profits by your death, or someone hates you. Who?"

"I can't imagine."

"The blackmailer?"

Ann shrugged.

"Who would stand to inherit from you?"

"My mother."

"You haven't written a will?"

"No. It seems—seemed—premature."

"Who stands to inherit from Harvey Gluck? Your mother again?"

"Harvey has nothing except two or three dozen dogs, which Elaine has always hated."

"Suppose your mother were dead, who would inherit from you then?"

"Some cousins, I suppose. People I hardly know. Do you think Elaine is dead?"

"I don't think anything. The fact is, we can't find her."

"What about the letter?"

"It's interesting," said Tarr, "but inconclusive." He got to his feet. "You'd better try to sleep while

you have the chance. Fitzpatrick may or may not want to question you some more tonight. He'll certainly put you through the wringer tomorrow."

"Should I tell him about my father?"

"Of course."

Ann cowered in her bathrobe. "I wish I'd never been born."

Tarr surprisingly patted her head. "Oh, come now; it's not as bad as all that. Life goes on."

"Not for poor Harvey. If I'd gone into the bathroom first—or come in alone—it would have been me. He was killed in my place, and I feel as if I am to blame."

"I don't see how you could have saved him. Unless you did it yourself."

Ann glared up at Tarr, uncertain whether he was serious. She read nothing from his face and returned to her tea. Tarr patted her head once more and departed. Ann looked stonily after him.

Mrs. Tanner, who had been in the kitchen, not quite out of earshot, poked her head in. "What a funny policeman!"

CHAPTER 11

A few minutes after Tarr left, Inspector Fitzpatrick returned and, taking Ann to the privacy of a bedroom, interrogated her at length. Rather to Ann's surprise, he seemed primarily interested in Elaine and her previous romantic attachments, and in Ann's own history. Ann repeated that Harvey Gluck's visit was totally unexpected; she spoke of the circumstances of her father's death. After about an hour and a half Fitzpatrick rose to leave. "What are your plans now? Are you going to stay on here?"

Ann shook her head decidedly. The mere thought filled her with revulsion.

"Where are you going, then?"

"For a week or two, to a hotel. After that ... I don't know."

"Which hotel?"

"I haven't thought. Downtown somewhere."

"Take my advice," said Fitzpatrick. "Don't tell anyone where you're going. And I mean *anyone.* With the exception of the police, of course."

"I won't."

"Because," Fitzpatrick went on matter-of-factly, "if someone has it in for you, there's nothing to prevent him from giving it another try."

The next morning Ann engaged a pair of neighborhood boys to unload the books from her car and carry them up to her apartment. Meanwhile she packed a suitcase and telephoned the St. Francis Hotel. Then she set off downtown.

After unpacking at the St. Francis, she telephoned the Marin County Sheriff's Office. She was irritated to learn that Sunday was Inspector Tarr's day off; somehow she had pictured him at his desk waiting anxiously for her call. She left a message and petulantly hung up. Tarr was probably off at another picnic, enjoying himself in the company of his newest paramour.

She lunched at the Blue Fox, wandered along Post Street window-shopping, then returned to the hotel. There was no message for her. Feeling neglected, she went to her room, changed into an afternoon frock, and returned to the lobby. She bought a magazine, leafed through it, watched passers-by, went into the bar for a cocktail, and absently rebuffed the gambit of a handsome young man with white teeth and a suntan.

The afternoon passed, by and large pleasantly, or at least uneventfully. The night before seemed a nightmare; indeed, she was unable to think of it as having actually happened.

She dined, lingered over her coffee, visited the cocktail lounge for a liqueur, fended off a lingerie salesman from New York, and presently went up to bed.

The next day was Monday. Ann breakfasted in her room, wondering what to do with herself. As she was dressing her phone rang. Inspector Thomas Tarr asked, "How are you this morning?" His voice was cautious and subdued.

"Very well, thanks."

"No incidents?"

"None."

"You haven't told anyone where you're staying?"

"No one at all."

"Good. Just sit tight for a while."

"For how long?"

"I don't know." Tarr spoke with a harshness Ann had not heard before. "Sooner or later there'll be a break."

"Do you still think Roland committed suicide? After last night?"

"I haven't any reason to think otherwise."

"Then you must think it was the blackmailer who killed Harvey."

"It seems to follow," Tarr admitted. "Assuming, of course, that you were the intended victim."

"But why? I've been racking my brain. Why should anyone want me out of the way?" The words brought a sudden return of the nightmare. Ann's voice blurred; she looked fearfully about the room. "Who could do such a thing?"

"We'll find out," said Tarr in a soothing tone. "Eventually. In the meantime—"

"I know. Don't walk along the edge of any cliffs."

"With anybody. Inspector Fitzpatrick seems to think it was some thief who panicked, but I don't."

Ann laughed nervously. "It would be a shame to be slaughtered by chance."

"Sit tight and you won't be slaughtered at all. I'll keep in touch with you."

Ann hung up and sat still for a few minutes. She felt stifled and frustrated. What a detestable mess! She had no responsibilities; she should be off and away—anywhere but where she found herself now. . . . She sat down by the phone and telephoned Mrs. Darlington.

"I won't be back at Mar Vista next fall," said Ann. "I thought I should let you know now."

Mrs. Darlington's voice softened. "I appreciate your thoughtfulness in notifying me now. We shall miss you, of course; but under the circumstances it's undoubtedly the best and wisest course for all of us."

With a shock Ann realized that Mrs. Darlington had been casting about for some means, preferably polite, to achieve this very end. She wanted none of her staff involved in murders. "Naturally you can look to me for references," said Mrs. Darlington. "I'm sure that with your competence you'll have no trouble—"

"I'm *not* resigning because of the death of Mr. Gluck," said Ann.

"Of course not, certainly not; but under the circumstances ... well, the school has an image to live up to, and we can't let it be tarnished. By the way, did your mother get in touch with you?"

"My mother?"

"Yes. I told Operator that I had no idea as to your current address. You'd better leave it with me in case—"

"Exactly what happened, Mrs. Darlington?"

"Last evening there was a person-to-person call for you—here, to my home, of all places. I gave Operator your address on Granada Avenue, but she said that you weren't there, that your mother wanted to get in touch with you, and did I know where you could be found. Naturally I said I had no information."

"You didn't hear anyone's voice but the operator's?"

"No."

Hanging up, Ann immediately telephoned the Marin County Sheriff's Office. Inspector Tarr was out, but he would call back as soon as he returned.

She dressed and descended to the hotel lobby, her brain seething with conjectures. She had planned to

spend the morning shopping, but perhaps she had better wait for Tarr's call. Half an hour passed. She became restless and went out into Powell Street.

It was a typical San Francisco summer morning. The air was cool, fresh, lightly salt; the sunlight tingled. Over Union Square pigeons fluttered; a cable car clattered past on its way up Nob Hill. In this same bright world, thought Ann, lived the animal who had skulked in her bathroom, waiting to kill her!

She spent an hour or so window-shopping, then telephoned San Rafael, only to learn that Inspector Tarr had not yet returned. She lunched on a sandwich, returned to the hotel, and once again failed to reach Tarr. Twenty minutes later, hearing herself paged, she went to the telephone. It was Tarr.

"I understand you've been trying to get in touch with me."

"Yes." (Ann wondered about his voice, which sounded very grim.) She described her conversation with Mrs. Darlington. Tarr uttered a soft cluck, as if the news corroborated some expectation of his own.

"You don't sound surprised," said Ann.

"Who do you think was calling you?" asked the detective.

"My mother, I suppose. Unless . . . Do you think . . ."

"I don't think, I know. I found your mother."

"You found her! Where?"

"Dead?"

"For about three months."

Ann could not restrain a sudden flow of tears. As in the case of her father, she felt neither grief nor remorse, but there was a sundering of *something,* a loss ... "How did she die?" Her voice sounded strange to her own ears. They had had no relationship at all, and yet ...

"Wire around her neck. Indications are that she was struck on the head first. I'm sorry I have to sound so brutal."

"She was murdered, then. Where did you find her?"

"To the north of San Rafael a concern called the Guarantee Auto Wreckers has a field full of old cars waiting to be junked. Elaine's car was driven onto the field and parked among the junkers. The tires were deflated, the windows rolled down. The mehanics, if they noticed the car at all, thought it had been acquired in the usual way. The proprietor wasn't aware of its existence. It might have sat there a year. Except that this morning a customer came in wanting a part for a Buick. The owner couldn't find the part in stock. A mechanic named Sam said, 'What about that old Buick out back?' The proprietor investigated, and in due course we were notified."

"Was there anything else? Money? Luggage?"

"Her suitcase and handbag. We're still not absolutely sure, of course, that the woman we found is Elaine Gluck. We'll need you to identify her."

"I can't!"

"Someone who knew her has to do it. Your father is dead, Mr. Gluck is dead." His voice grew quite soft. "I'm sorry."

"Must I?"

"I'm afraid so, Miss Nelson."

Ann breathed deeply, once, twice. "I'll be right over."

CHAPTER 12

The room swam before Ann's eyes. She managed to say, "It's my mother."

"It's easy to make mistakes in a case like this," said Tarr. "You're sure this is Elaine Gluck?"

Ann shuddered. "Yes."

Tarr took her upstairs to his cubbyhole. Ann collapsed in a chair.

"It must have happened just after she saw me."

"Within a few days. Probably the next day."

"But that letter . . . It was certainly her handwriting; it was certainly her signature!"

"The report on that letter came in just after I spoke to you. About an inch had been cut from the top of the page, probably to remove the date and the sender's address. The salutation had been altered. Originally it read 'Dear Bobo.' The two *o*'s had been carefully changed to *a* and *y*, and your name was added: 'Baby Ann.' Quite simple."

" 'Bobo' . . . of course," said Ann. "One of Elaine's politer names for Roland."

"So it appears that the letter was originally addressed to your father."

"But why send it to me?"

"Apparently to preserve the illusion that your mother was alive. Did she own property?"

"Property? My mother?" Ann shook her head. "She was chronically broke."

"What about your grandmother? Is she alive?"

"No." Ann, comprehending the direction of Tarr's inquiry, became frosty. "If you think I strangled my mother and somehow beguiled my father into shooting himself"—her voice trembled in indignation—"you can think again."

"I made no such accusation," said Tarr. "Consider my job, Miss Nelson. Naturally, we've got to consider every possibility."

"In that case consider the possibility that I did *not* strangle my mother and Harvey Gluck."

"Oh, I have. Harvey Gluck's death is the monkey wrench. If it hadn't occurred, we could reasonably suppose that Roland Nelson strangled Elaine Gluck, was seen doing it by a person we shall call X, and was blackmailed by X until in desperation Nelson killed himself." He ignored Ann's mutter. "The death of Harvey Gluck creates no end of complications. Fitzpatrick leans toward the theory of a chance intruder or a sex criminal. I don't think so. I see X, compelled by some urgent reason, breaking into your apartment intending to kill you, but by a stroke of fantastic bad luck being forced to kill Harvey Gluck instead. This seems the most logical explanation, but brings us face to face with a blank wall: Why? Have you come up with any ideas?"

"No. None of it seems real."

Tarr looked at her quite unprofessionally. "It's real enough. I have to repeat—you mustn't take any chances."

She shivered. "I don't plan to.... I don't really know what to do with myself."

"Don't you have a friend you could visit? Somebody completely unconnected with this business?"

Ann considered. "There's Barbara Crane in Sonoma. I might drop in on her."

"Try to be back before dark," said Tarr. "I don't want to frighten you or limit your freedom, but facts are facts. Somebody went to considerable trouble to try to kill you. He might try again."

Ann turned north on Highway 101, toward Sonoma, a town twenty or thirty miles away. After a few miles her interest in visiting Barbara Crane began to dwindle. Barbara taught sociology at Sonoma Junior College; she would demand a detailed explanation for Ann's presence, which would lead to hours of hashing everything over. Martin, Barbara's husband, taught geology and was inclined to absolute judgments. The visit lost its attraction.

She turned off the freeway and drove westward, over a gently rolling landscape, once placid and rural but now blotched with housing developments. Meanwhile "Martin Crane" had suggested "Martin Jones." Or perhaps the housing developments had worked to this end; whatever the cause, Ann found herself occupied with the image of that dour individualist engrossed in Ruskin's *Stones of Venice.*

Perhaps she should have been surprised, but it seemed quite natural to come upon a sign reading:

PLEASANT VALLEY ESTATES
Top Value for Discriminating Home Buyers
A MARTIN JONES Development

Ann slowed and halted. From the road she could see two dozen houses in various stages of construction, with as many more lots in the process of being graded. On one of these she spied the contractor, sighting through a transit toward a young man in carpenter's overalls who held a surveyor's rod.

Ann watched for several minutes. Then Jones straightened up, jotted something on a clipboard, called to the rodman—who drove a stake, wrote on a label, and tacked it to the stake—and moved on to another location. Martin Jones bent once more over the transit and the process was repeated.

Ann backed her car into the driveway. Martin Jones spotted her, scowled, and returned to his transit. "Five inches low!" he called to the rodman. "That's all for now." He walked over to Ann.

"What brings you out here?"

"I was driving past, noticed your name, and stopped."

His attention was distracted by a pickup loaded with doors pre-hung in their frames, and he jerked as if he had been struck with a pin. "Hey, Shorty, not *there!* Does that house look like it's ready for doors?"

"It's where Steve told me to bring them," the truck driver said defensively.

"Where? House fourteen? Or house four?"

"It might have been four."

"You bet your life it was four. What good are doors here? The roof isn't even framed yet. Use your head!" The pickup moved on; Jones turned back to Ann. "You got to watch these guys every minute. About one in ten knows what he's doing."

"You're busy," said Ann politely, "so don't let me keep you."

"I'm always busy," he growled. "I'd go broke in a week if I weren't." He glanced up and down the street. "I've got to make the rounds. Come along if you like," he said, looking everywhere but at Ann. "I'll show you around."

"If you're sure you can spare the time."

"No time lost. I'd let you know."

"I don't doubt it." Ann climbed out. The sun-

light was bright; the new lumber smelled clean and fresh; the clatter of hammers, the whine of power saws, made cheerful sounds. Ann found it impossible not to relax.

Martin Jones seemed to sense her mood and became almost cordial. "Let's walk down this way. I'll show you the whole thing, from beginning to end." He led her to a lot where a loader was scooping up two tons of red-brown earth at a thrust. "Incidentally," said Martin Jones, "I read your book. Or most of it."

"How did you like it?" He *had* read it!

"Hard to say. He writes like somebody building one of the old-time houses, full of stained glass and gingerbread. If you like that kind of thing, I suppose it's great."

"Do you like it?'

Jones's smile turned sheepish. "Parts of it are interesting. About the tides, for instance, and the mud flats. If they were just a bit different there wouldn't be any Venice.... The tide flats along Black Point aren't much different. They'd cost a lot to build on when you figure in a causeway, dredging, piles. It could always be worked into overhead, I suppose. The houses would sell; that's the main thing...."

They moved on to another lot, where carpenters were setting foundation forms, while laborers laid out reinforcing steel for the concrete. The sight of the steel reminded Ann of the cracked footing at the Cypriano house. She said, "I understand you built the Cypriano house."

He nodded shortly. "I did. While I was still young and easygoing."

"They're having trouble with the foundations," said Ann sweetly. "They seem to blame you for the trouble."

"They blame *me?*"

"So I understand."

"That's a laugh."

"How do you mean?"

"Blame Rex Orr, not me. He wanted a forty-thousand-dollar house on a twenty-thousand-dollar budget. I told him I'd have to cut corners awful close. He said to go ahead, just so long as it didn't show. I used all utility lumber in the framing. The house stands up, but the floors squeak here and there. No harm done. Wherever I dared, I cut down on reinforcing in the footings. If the ground is solid, it makes no big difference. If the ground settles, though, there's trouble. I explained this to Orr, but he gave me the green light. I guessed wrong. After the rains the ground began to go. I don't feel too bad. I took a beating on that house."

"Don't the building inspectors check on things like that?"

"Sure. But there's angles you can work. You put the steel in the forms, the inspector looks, signs the permit. As soon as he leaves you yank out the steel and pour concrete. Nine times out of ten you're in business, with no harm done. But once in a while there'll be trouble. I don't have any remorse. Orr asked for a jackleg job where it wouldn't show and he got it. The Cyprianos tried to make me the goat; in fact, Cypriano got nasty. He was going to bring out the building inspector, but Mrs. Orr backed me up.

"Do you know something? Cypriano is a kook. I was sitting out there talking to him; he gave me a drink and then, sitting across the table, he began letting his keys swing back and forth. Slow and easy. And he'd say, 'My, but it's a peaceful day. How calm it is. How peaceful. Don't you feel sleepy?' " Jones gave a bark of savage laughter. "The so-and-so was trying to hypnotize me! Then he'd convince me that

I should fix his house. I just laughed at him. He slammed off into one of the back rooms."

Ann listened in surprise and amusement. The taciturn Martin Jones was talking as if a dam had broken. They walked on to where a truck was discharging concrete into footings. Martin Jones became abruptly silent; stopping, he ran his eye along the forms that delineated the outer edge of the house-to-be. He called, "Hey, Pete!" But his voice was inaudible over the rumble of the concrete truck, and he strode off, beckoning to one of the carpenters, pointing to the offending form. Ann, sighting along the edge, saw that it was just a trifle crooked.

While the contractor watched, the carpenter drove a stake with a sledgehammer, and wedged in a brace to straighten the form to Jones's satisfaction.

He rejoined Ann. "As I say, you've got to watch these guys every minute."

"It seems like an active life," smiled Ann.

"I don't get bored. Ulcers, yes. Boredom, no."

"Do you really have ulcers?"

He grinned, shaking his head. "It's the building contractor's occupational disease. But I'm too ornery for ulcers. Ask one of these carpenters what they think of my disposition." He stopped abruptly to face Ann. "Let's go somewhere tonight. A show . . . opera . . . circus . . . dog races . . . public library . . . you name it; I'll take you."

Ann was so astonished she almost permitted herself to show it. Martin Jones asking for a date! He *did* have a potential. She was pleased, very pleased. More than very pleased. "Oh, I'd like to, but darn it, I can't, not tonight."

Martin Jones's mouth twisted at the corners. "Okay."

"Next week, perhaps," Ann said hastily. "The po-

lice don't want me going anywhere until they clear up these deaths."

"That might take a long time if that fellow Tarr's running things."

"Just for a week or so." Ann wondered if she was sounding overanxious, so she composed herself and became interested in the next lot. Here a crew of carpenters worked on the concrete slab, laying down redwood two-by-fours along the line of the eventual partitions, fixing them in place with a device which, after being loaded with a cartridge and a heavy nail, shot the nail through the wood into the concrete.

"All four-bedroom houses," said Jones, noting Ann's interest. "Four bedrooms, two baths, playroom, and dining area. They should go fast. I won't be a millionaire, but I'll be out of the woods."

"You're going to sell the Inisfail house?"

"As soon as a buyer shows up."

"And your old family house, too?"

"That shack." He pursed his lips. "I don't know. Maybe I'll remodel it."

"I like it better than the new house."

"Your father liked the old place better, too.... What's so interesting?"

Ann had been watching the carpenters, conscious of a vague tickling at the back of her head. A laborer approached Jones, one hand aloft, blood streaming down his black wrist. "What happened to you?" asked Jones in disapproval. "You trying to cut your hand off?"

"Just a scratch; some of that sharp wire went and dug me. I thought I'd better get a bandage."

"Right. If you don't and you catch blood poison, there's no insurance. Come along to the shack; I'll fix you up." He turned to Ann, and for once his expression was boyish, almost wistful. "Can I telephone you?"

The word "insurance" had triggered a new set of thoughts. Ann said vaguely, "I'm moving; I don't know where I'll be. Perhaps I'd better call you. I think I'd better be going."

Martin Jones nodded brusquely. "Come along, Joe."

Ann returned to her car. Insurance . . . The answers to one or two questions could illuminate the entire case. Though now she knew—or thought she knew—how her father had been murdered.

In San Rafael she stopped at a pay telephone and dialed the Cypriano house. Jehane's voice came languidly over the wire.

"Forgive me for bothering you," said Ann, "but do you know if Pearl carried insurance?"

"What kind of insurance?"

"Life insurance."

Jehane considered. "I don't know. It's possible, I suppose."

"When she owned your house she undoubtedly carried fire-and-theft."

"Yes, certainly."

"Do you know the name of her agent?"

"Arthur Eakins, in San Rafael. We just took over the policy. Why do you ask?"

"It's something connected with my father's death."

"Oh. Incidentally, have you seen the afternoon papers?"

"No. And I don't plan to. Are they . . . bad?"

"Not yet. But I advise you to stay out of sight if you don't want reporters descending on you."

"That's a good idea. Thanks."

Jehane said, "I'd offer you the use of our guest room if I thought you'd accept. Would you?"

"That's nice of you. But I don't think I'd better."

"You're not still at your apartment?"

"No."

Jehane's voice became thoughtful. "You could stay with us. Alexander really isn't so awful. He's been all morning crawling around over the rocks gathering up the chess set after his grand gesture."

"It was wonderful. But I do think I'd better stay where I am, at least for a while."

"Just as you like." She sounded brusk.

"Goodbye."

Ann looked up the address of Arthur Eakins in the telephone directory and drove to his office. Eakins proved to be an energetic little man with round, earnest eyes and a button nose. When Ann introduced herself, he became guardedly cordial. Yes, Pearl Maudley Orr had insured with him, both before and after her marriage to Roland Nelson. Roland Nelson had done likewise. He supplied particulars, and an opaque window blocking Ann's perception was smashed.

There was now very little about the case that she did not understand. She knew how her father had been murdered. She knew why. She even understood the reason for the abortive attempt on her own life; and she could guess the motive for the strangling of her mother.

Leaving Eakins's office, walking toward her car, she thought: What a simple, ingenious plot! And how evil, how selfish the perpetrator! She looked uneasily over her shoulder, thrilling with a sense of danger.

She gained the comparative security of her car and sat thinking. There should be a graphic way to demonstrate her conclusions. After a moment a possibility suggested itself. In a nearby drugstore she once again consulted a telephone directory and located the office out of which the building inspectors worked.

A three-minute walk took her there. At a counter she inquired if blueprints to all new construction were kept on file. The clerk admitted that such was the case. Ann asked to see those prints relating to the house at 560 Neville Road, near Inisfail, and was informed that such plans were not available for public inspection.

Using the office telephone, she called Inspector Tarr, who expressed surprise at finding her still in San Rafael. "You'd better be sticking to home base till we tie this business up," he warned her. "You had one pretty close call, remember? It could happen again."

"I don't think anything is going to happen where I am now which is at the Building Department."

"What in the world are you doing there?"

"Doing your work for you. Detecting."

"Well, well," said Tarr. "And what have you detected?"

"If you'll meet me here, I'll show you."

"Well, well, well," said Tarr. "I'm not proud, lady. I'll be right over."

Five minutes later Tarr appeared in the doorway. Ann rose from the bench where she had been waiting. "What's this all about?"

"I had an idea," said Ann. "I came here to verify it, but the clerk won't help me. Perhaps you have more influence."

"Influence to what end?"

"To look at some blueprints. Specifically those to the house on Neville Road."

"Why this sudden interest in architecture?"

"I think I can explain the death of my father. If I'm right, the blueprints will prove it."

Tarr stared at her, then went to the counter, and flashed his credentials. The blueprints were promptly forthcoming.

He spread them out on the counter. Ann bent forward, peered closely, and gave a choked laugh of mingled triumph and tragedy. Her theory was now demonstrable fact.

"Well?" asked Tarr.

Ann pointed. "Look there."

Tarr frowned. "I must be dense. What are you trying to prove?"

"First, how a bookcase with six legs can show nine dent marks. Second, how my father was murdered in a locked room."

Tarr ran his fingers through his hair. "Are you still on that kick? Look, no one has any murder motive but you. And if you did it, why aren't you soft-pedaling the matter?"

"I didn't kill him. But Arthur Eakins, the insurance agent, can tell you who did."

"I hate to feel like a chump," said Tarr. "Why not explain in words of one syllable?"

Ann did so. Tarr's expression shifted through disbelief, skeptical interest, reluctant conviction, and finally disgust at his own stupidity. "Now I can't claim any credit for breaking this case," he said.

"Do so anyway, by all means," said Ann. "Personally, I just feel sick."

Tarr glanced at his watch. With sudden energy he said, "Let's go get Eakins. It's two o'clock. With any luck we can clear this thing up right now."

CHAPTER 13

In the conference room adjoining the sheriff's private office they had been assembled by ones and twos: first Ann with Arthur Eakins; then Edgar Maudley and Martin Jones, who exchanged glances of mutual detestation; then Alexander and Jehane Cypriano. The room was long, with dark oak wainscoting and a high ceiling, from which hung two frosted glass globes—a formal room incorrigibly ugly. Pushed against one wall was an oak table of institutional solidity at which sat a pair of uniformed deputies. The laity sat on straight-backed chairs ranged along the walls. There was little conversation. Edgar Maudley leaned toward Jehane once or twice to utter an earnest remark, to which Jehane responded politely. She wore a sheath of beige wool with a coat the color of black coffee; gold loops in her ears were her only jewelry; as usual she looked dramatically, wanly beautiful. Alexander Cypriano wore a dark-blue blazer with a scarf of maroon foulard knotted at the neck. Martin Jones had not bothered to change from his work clothes: tan whipcord trousers, a green windbreaker over a white shirt. He sat sulkily aloof, favoring first Edgar Maudley, then Alexander with bitter glances.

The door from the sheriff's office opened; into the

room came Sheriff Metzger with Robinson, the district attorney; then Inspector Tarr and a young bespectacled assistant to the district attorney. The deputies straightened in their chairs.

District Attorney Robinson and his assistant took seats at the table. Tarr pulled a chair away from the wall, seating himself like a boxer awaiting a bell.

Sheriff Metzger leaned against the table and spoke, looking at no one in particular. "I apologize for assembling you in this rather dramatic fashion. I assure you it's not our customary procedure in cases of this kind."

"Cases of what kind?" demanded Edgar Maudley, who apparently had resolved beforehand to put up with no nonsense.

Metzger examined Maudley with detachment. "I refer to the death of Roland Nelson, and also"—he consulted a list—"the deaths of Elaine Gluck, Harvey Gluck, and Pearl Nelson, which I hope will be clarified. To this end I'll appreciate the help of all of you. Inspector Tarr has been in charge of the case, and he has a few questions to ask." The sheriff settled into a seat beside the district attorney, who muttered something to him. The sheriff nodded.

Tarr consulted some notes he had scribbled on a piece of paper. He rose to lean on the back of his chair.

"This thing starts with the marriage of Pearl Maudley Orr to Roland Nelson. It was not a successful marriage; it lasted only a few months. Shortly after the separation, Mrs. Nelson died in an automobile accident. I think everyone here is familiar with the circumstances, and I'll say no more except to point out the obvious fact that Roland Nelson profited greatly by her death. He inherited money and securities worth more than a hundred thousand dollars, as well as valuable books, rugs, and art objects.

"Mrs. Nelson died intestate; The California and Pacific Bank, which managed her affairs, was appointed administrator of her estate, and an interval of six months elapsed before Roland Nelson came into his inheritance. During this six months Mr. Nelson had very little cash. He rented an old house from Mr. Jones, and he also worked for Mr. Jones. I understand that he was not a very satisfactory employee. Right, Mr. Jones?"

"Right," said Martin Jones.

"You fired him?"

"Correct."

"How did this affect your personal relations with Mr. Nelson?"

"No difference. I got along with him just as well after I fired him as before. He wasn't making any money for me, and he knew it."

"You rented him your old family home for eighty-five dollars a month."

"Correct."

"During this time you completed the house at five sixty Neville Road and allowed Mr. Nelson to move in?"

"Correct."

"Why did he want to move?"

Jones shrugged. "I didn't give him any choice. I wanted to sell the old place. He had no complaints; I let him have the new house for the same rent."

"Do you know if he had any visitors during this period?"

Jones grinned. "While he was still at the old house I think he once conducted a séance, or something of the sort. Mr. and Mrs. Cypriano were there. I watched for a few minutes, but nothing much happened."

Tarr turned to Alexander Cypriano. "Do you recall such an occasion, Mr. Cypriano?"

"Naturally." Alexander was clearly uncomfortable.

"What happened?"

"Very little. Mr. Nelson, after reading certain books belonging to his wife, had become interested in psychic phenomena. The occasion Mr. Jones refers to was not a spiritualistic séance, but an experiment to see if a person's natural telepathic powers are enhanced by special conditions."

"What sort of special conditions?"

"Hypnotism."

"Who was the subject?"

"My wife."

"Were your experiments successful?"

"Not to any significant degree. My wife is not a good hypnotic subject."

"How long did these experiments continue?"

"On this single occasion. None of us was more than superficially interested. In fact, I'd forgotten the incident until Mr. Jones just recalled it."

"This experiment took place in the first house Mr. Nelson rented from Mr. Jones—the old house?"

"That's right."

"Did you ever visit him in the new house?"

"No."

"How about you, Mrs. Cypriano?"

"No. Never."

"Mr. Maudley?"

"I visited him once," said Maudley with dignity, "in an attempt to arrange an equitable division of Mrs. Nelson's property."

"Did you actually enter the house?"

"No. Mr. Nelson was insulting and offensive, and we remained outside. We did not come to any understanding. At any rate, no understanding satisfactory to me."

"In fact, to emphasize his position he wrote out a will and showed it to you?"

"He had the insolence to ask me to witness it. The effect, of course, was to cut me off completely from my cousin's property."

"Which you had hoped to inherit?"

"Naturally. Mr. Nelson practically gave my cousin's house to the Cyprianos, though it was as much a liability as an asset because of faulty construction."

Martin Jones said gently, "That sounds like slander to me. You asking for a bust in the nose?"

"Slander?" Edgar Maudley snorted. "Truth is a completely adequate defense against a charge of slander. Only an incompetent or worse would omit reinforcing steel from the foundations."

"Those were my instructions."

"Nonsense. There was no need to skimp. My cousin was a wealthy woman. Mr. Orr, her husband at that time, was not only wealthy but a cautious and conservative man."

"Who studied ghosts and mind reading and hypnotism. He was a screwball."

Tarr broke into the exchange. He asked Alexander Cypriano, "When Mrs. Nelson learned of the faulty foundation, what was her attitude?"

Cypriano darted a quick, malicious look at Jones. "She was surprised and angry. She said that she would see that repairs were made. After she died, Mr. Nelson and I came to an understanding, and I agreed to perform the necessary repairs."

Tarr examined his notes. "On March third, Elaine Gluck visited Roland Nelson and disappeared. On May twenty-fifth, approximately, Roland Nelson died. He was discovered on May thirtieth in circumstances strongly suggesting suicide. During my investigation I found evidence of blackmail. It crossed my mind that Nelson might have murdered Mrs. Gluck—a notion that was reinforced when we eventually found Mrs. Gluck's strangled body. I might

say here that Miss Nelson"—he nodded toward Ann—"insisted from the first that her father would neither pay blackmail nor commit suicide. I could see no alternative theory.

"On the evening of Saturday June eighth, Miss Nelson, arriving home, encountered her mother's husband, Harvey Gluck, who had arrived unexpectedly from Los Angeles. They went up to her apartment together. Mr. Gluck had occasion to use the bathroom and was garroted by someone waiting there. Under the circumstances it's clear that Miss Nelson was the intended victim. But why should anyone wish to kill Miss Nelson? Well, she is now a girl of considerable wealth. Who would inherit from her if she died? She has no close relatives; her mother and father are both dead. Her nearest kin live in North Carolina. The money cannot revert to the Maudleys. So gain is not a credible motive.

"It would seem, then, that Miss Nelson is a threat to someone. Remember that she has never accepted the theory of suicide in connection with her father's death, even though no other theory presented itself. The study in which Mr. Nelson died was almost hermetically sealed. The door was bolted securely, the windows clamped shut, the damper in the chimney fixed in the 'shut' position. Murder seems impossible. In fact, I'll go so far as to say this: to shoot someone and leave the room in the condition in which I found it *is* impossible.

"Could Mr. Nelson somehow have been persuaded to raise a pistol to his forehead and pull the trigger? There are conceivable circumstances where this might be the case—an elaborate practical joke to astound someone watching through the window, perhaps. But surely Mr. Nelson would have checked and double-checked the gun to make sure he was in no danger of shooting himself.

"In any event, whatever the plot—if such a plot existed—the fact that Miss Nelson was a victim of attempted murder makes it appear that she either suspected or was in a position to suspect it. Hence, by a kind of backward reasoning, we must take very seriously the idea that Roland Nelson was indeed murdered.

"What did Miss Nelson learn? What was she about to learn? In the first place, she was baffled by a series of peculiar events and circumstances. One was the three shots heard by Mr. Nelson's neighbors, the Savarinis, about the time or shortly after Mr. Nelson died—never satisfactorily explained. Another was: Why hadn't her father paid his rent when he had ample funds?

"She was also puzzled by the fact that the bookcase standing along the wall that separated the living room from the study—the case facing into the living room—had made nine dent marks in the vinyl flooring, although it had only six legs—three sets of two each, the two in each set being nine inches apart from back to front. The extra dent marks were approximately five and a half inches from the front legs, between the front and back legs.

"Obviously, that bookcase had once stood in a different position. Away from the wall—further out into the room? But in that case there should have been *twelve* dents in all, not nine—two sets of six. So it couldn't have been that."

Tarr fixed them with a glittering eye. "That the bookcase had once stood in a different position had to be, from those extra three dents. But if it wasn't because the bookcase stood *away* from the wall, it had to be because the bookcase extended *into the wall.* Obviously, that's impossible . . . *unless there hadn't been a wall there.*

"The solution came to Miss Nelson this morning,

when she noticed carpenters fastening two-by-four partitions to concrete slabs using a stud driver—a kind of tool, almost a gun, which shoots nails through wood into concrete. The sound of the shots suggested her father's death—the three shots heard by the Savarinis. *Could it be that the three shots had been not the reports of a gun but the reports of a stud shooter? Somebody building something? A wall?"*

Tarr glanced at Ann with unabashed admiration. "Miss Nelson pictured the dents the bookcase had left in the flooring. She eliminated the further-out-into-the-room theory because it would have left three more marks than were actually there. She embraced the back-into-the-wall theory because that's the only theory that explains those three extra dents where there should have been six—*the wall stood where the missing three marks lay.* In other words, again, somebody had built a wall. That wall, the wall that turned the end of the living room into apparently a second room, the study. And for the wall to be built, the bookcase in the living room obviously had to be shifted the thickness of the wall, out further into the living room, where it now stands."

Tarr was all business now; Ann had never seen him so cold and inevitable-looking.

"I consulted a carpenter an hour ago. He tells me that a wall like the one in the house where Nelson lived would typically consist of framing three and five-eighths inches in thickness, with half an inch of plasterboard on one side, a quarter inch of plywood on the other, and two baseboards half an inch thick—adding up to five and three-eighths inches ... in other words, just about the distance between the front dents and the extra dents in the vinyl tiling.

"So it now becomes clear—thanks to Miss Nelson—how her father could have been murdered in such a

way that suicide seemed the only answer. That living room was originally a single room; *there was no study.* Nelson was shot; then a wall was constructed across that end of the living room *to create a study,* sealing him in.

"According to my carpenter consultant, the wall would have to be braced upright. The study side would be finished, the plywood varnished, the door hung and bolted securely. Then the inner baseboards—those on the study side of the wall—would be nailed to the floor, along the line the wall would eventually occupy, and molding would similarly be attached at the ceiling line.

"Next, the killer would clean the study carefully, sort through Roland Nelson's papers, leave a note suggesting blackmail. He would shift the study bookcase back to the wall line. He would slip around the edge of the wall to the living room side, shove, slide and pry the wall into place, so that it fitted squarely across the room, tight against the moldings and baseboard inside the study. He would then nail the studs at each side into the living-room wall; and then, to secure the bottom plate, he would use a stud driver. One shot to the right of the door, two shots into the longer section to the left of the door would be necessary. He would then apply plasterboard, tape the joints and the angles where the new wall met the ceiling and side walls, paint the plasterboard, install a length of baseboard. Lo and behold, the corpse of Roland Nelson would thereupon repose in a room that was truly locked."

Tarr looked around the room from face to face. "Incidentally, this is not just speculation. Today Miss Nelson and I examined the original blueprints of the house on Neville Road. These blueprints show no study—only a long living room. When Roland Nelson came into possession of his wife's books,

he arranged the bookcases back to back to function as a kind of partition, thus creating a sort of open-face study. This fact may have planted the locked-room idea in the murderer's mind. And he sure succeeded! He created a true locked-room, without gimmick, illusion, sleight of hand—without person or agency concealed in the room." Tarr gave a slow nod of respect for the still unnamed craftsman's ingenuity.

He again consulted his notes. "I asked my carpenter consultant how long such a job would occupy a man, and I asked how the noise could be muffled—because if a chance passer-by, or the Savarinis, heard sounds of hammering and sawing, the game would be given away.

"An expert craftsman, I was told, could probably complete the job in three or four days, working hard. By precutting the lumber, by predrilling nail holes, and driving home the nails with a rubber mallet, he could both speed up the job and reduce the noise to nearly nothing. Only the sound of the stud driver driving nails into the concrete would have to be heard.

"After the wall was in place only two jobs remained: to move the living-room bookcase back against the new wall—and to arrange for the corpse of Roland Nelson to be found. Because Mr. Nelson lived a very secluded life, he might have remained locked in that 'study' for years."

Tarr's voice had been easy, pleasant, pitched at a conversational level. Now he leaned forward, and his look lost all its geniality. "Miss Nelson was faced with another puzzle: *Why* was her father killed? Well, something turned up to satisfy all the conditions. A chance word supplied the key to the puzzle: *insurance.*

"Miss Nelson paid a visit to Albert Eakins, the

gentleman sitting to my right. Mr. Eakins, did Roland Nelson ever call on you?"

"He did," said the insurance man.

"What was the purpose of his visit?"

"He wanted to take out a comprehensive policy: fire, flood, vandalism, public liability—the works—on a house he had just bought."

"Did you visit the house?"

"I happened to drive past one day and found Mr. Nelson in the front yard planting rosebushes. I stopped to chat a moment. Mr. Nelson asked me what I thought a fair price for the house would be. I told him probably thirty thousand dollars. He told me that he had bought it for twenty-two thousand because the owner was in financial difficulties. I assured him he'd made an excellent buy and could certainly sell the house at a profit."

"So there was never any blackmail, you see," said Tarr. "Roland Nelson had merely bought a house." He turned to Martin Jones. "That's our case, Mr. Jones."

Martin Jones rose. "I've heard all I'm going to hear. I've got to get back to my job."

"I don't think so," said Sheriff Metzger pleasantly.

Martin Jones darted toward the door. Tarr sprang after him, and Jones whirled and knocked Tarr down. As the deputies jumped forward, Jones, his back to the door, flashed a heavy clasp knife, the steel as brightly cold as his eyes. "Anybody want to get cut?"

Sheriff Metzger got ponderously to his feet. "Here, put that thing away. You're likely to hurt somebody." He lumbered over to the contractor and simply took the knife.

Ann's abiding image of Martin Jones was to be that of a sullen small boy discovered in an act of mischief by a stern and sorrowful father.

The deputies seized Jones's arms.

"Lock him up," said the sheriff. "Or maybe you'd like to make a statement first?"

Martin Jones said dully, "All right, I confess. I'm only sorry I didn't get *her*." He nodded toward Ann. "She's been in my hair ever since I first laid eyes on her."

Tarr was wiping blood off his lip. "How did you talk Roland Nelson into giving you twenty thousand cash and a thousand a month? He could as easily have given you twenty-two thousand cash."

Martin Jones's mood of co-operation had departed. "It's your story, not mine. Tell it any way you like."

"Here's a guess. You gave him a deed, but asked him not to register it for a few months. Perhaps you admitted that you'd used the house as collateral on a loan and needed twenty thousand to clear title, or you gave him other security for his money. In any event, you asked Nelson to keep the deal secret. Nelson agreed—though naturally he had to tell the insurance agent."

Arthur Eakins said in a deeply solemn voice, "Mr. Nelson asked me to say nothing about the situation."

The deputies tugged at Martin Jones's arms. Jones took a deep breath and for a moment seemed to exude his old air of sullen purpose. Then his shoulders sagged, and he was led away.

CHAPTER 14

After the Cyprianos and Maudley left, Ann, torn by a dozen conflicting urges, went to sit in Tarr's office. An hour later he came in and flopped into his chair. He showed no surprise at Ann's presence.

"Did he say anything more?" asked Ann.

"He talked. He's a queer one—doesn't seem to give a damn. He hasn't even asked for a lawyer."

"He's probably worried more about his men loafing on the job than anything else. Did he say anything about Elaine's murder?" Ann's hands twisted.

Tarr nodded. "He called at the house on Neville Road, he says, which he'd just sold to your father. He found Elaine sitting at your father's desk going through his papers, including the bill of sale. Mr. Nelson apparently was in San Francisco on business connected with his stocks. Jones had been brooding about money, and he'd already formulated his plans to make your father appear a suicide. But Elaine had seen the deed, so she had to go.

"Jones also saw that he could embellish his original idea with blackmail. He talked to Elaine a few minutes, then knocked her out, strangled her with a length of wire, stuffed her in the trunk of her car, and drove it to the old family house, where he

parked it in the garage. There it stayed for almost three months, until Jones collected the final payment, whereupon he shot your father.

"Jones had his preparations all made. He went through Mr. Nelson's papers, leaving only those that were meaningless or misleading. Naturally he burned the deed. He prepared the blackmail note, half-charred it, and wrote false rent receipts for the months of March and April—all this with the corpse of Roland Nelson sitting in the chair." Tarr shook his head in wonder. "Then he started on the wall. He had pre-cut his material during the day, then brought it in at dusk and worked all night. He hung the door with special care, fitting it tightly—almost too tightly—to emphasize the locked-room illusion. The extra bolt was an afterthought. He didn't realize it would have the effect not of calming suspicion but of arousing it.

"Finally he drove your mother's Buick to the wrecking yard and ditched it. That was all there was to it—until you noticed the extra dents in the vinyl under the bookcase."

"What about Pearl?"

"He denies killing her, and I believe him. He couldn't have foreseen that her death would help him. Pearl probably died by accident."

"And Harvey Gluck?"

"Jones only said two or three words which I won't repeat. He saw that you were fascinated by the prints of the bookcase. Edgar Maudley, who was also there, hardly glanced at them, so he was safe. But Jones was afraid you'd work the thing out, and he decided you had to go, and right away, before you could tell me about the dents."

"Poor Harvey," said Ann. "Poor mother. Poor daddy." It was a sort of requiem.

"It's been a long day." Tarr glanced at his watch.

"The few loose ends can wait till tomorrow." He reached over and took her hands. "What about it? Let's have a few drinks and forget this thing. I'll even take you to dinner."

"All right," said Ann listlessly. "I can use some relaxing."

"I'm just the man to relax with," Tarr declared.

"Yes," said Ann, coming to life. "We must call your friend Cooley and have him take photographs.... Oh, well. What difference does it make to me? Thank the Lord I'm not married to you."

"You think that's such a bad idea?" said Tarr. "I've always yearned for a rich wife."

"Is that a proposal?" asked Ann tartly. "If so, it's as disgustingly casual as the rest of you."

"I'm a casual guy," said Inspector Thomas Tarr. "But that doesn't necessarily make me a heel. Where do you want to go, Miss Millionbucks?"

"I don't care. As long as it's quiet."

"I know just the place."

"You would!"

Then a peculiar silence fell. And something happened. How it happened, why it happened, almost to whom it happened. Ann was never afterward able to pin down precisely. All she knew was that she was swept up by a sort of hurricane in a pair of strong male arms, and that a delicate but vigorous kissing game began, and whoever was playing it was enjoying it very, very much.