

NO. 3 · 35c

ED 87 MCBAIN'S

every story new!

mystery book

Hampton Stone
Bruno Fischer
Frank Kane
Stuart Palmer

*a great new
story by
Irving Shulman*

the first
ED and AM HUNTER
novelette by
*Fredric
Brown*



SQUADROOM



FRANK KANE (Dead Drunk) is licensed to practice law, the result of his young wife's insistence that he secure a law degree as a safeguard in the event that he failed to earn enough at his typewriter to support them. Kane hurried through a law course, passed his bar examination and then—having gotten *that* over with—promptly broke into radio and became one of the highest-paid writers in the business, doing scores of scripts for such shows as "Gangbusters," "The Shadow" and "Nick Carter." Later, he became even more successful as the writer of the Johnny Liddell mystery novels, which have sold millions of copies and been translated into a dozen languages.



IRVING SHULMAN (Because We're Friends) began his career as a novelist with the publication of *The Amboy Dukes*, a harsh, compelling story of street gangs in Brooklyn. The book became a nationwide best seller and today is used in many colleges as a textbook and sociological classic. Since then, Shulman has written many other best sellers, including *Cry Tough!* and *The Big Brokers*. He lives in Hollywood and also writes screenplays; among his credits is *Rebel Without a Cause*, which starred the late James Dean.



FREDRIC BROWN (Before She Kills) worked for the Pinkerton Detective Agency before he became disillusioned with the lack of glamour in real-life detective work. He turned to writing in the early 1940's and his first book, *The Fabulous Clipjoint*, which introduced Ed and Am Hunter, won the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar award. Brown is one of the world's best writers of suspense novels, the latest of which is *Knock Three-One-Two*.



STUART PALMER (Cure for a Headache) is the creator of the famous spinster-schoolteacher-detective Hildegarde Withers. The attention he gained from the Withers books sent him West to write for the movies—often working on scripts with his good friend Craig Rice. Currently writing for TV in Hollywood and working on a novel, Palmer has also written a great deal in the field of nonfiction crime, and for many years has been a student of classic murder cases.

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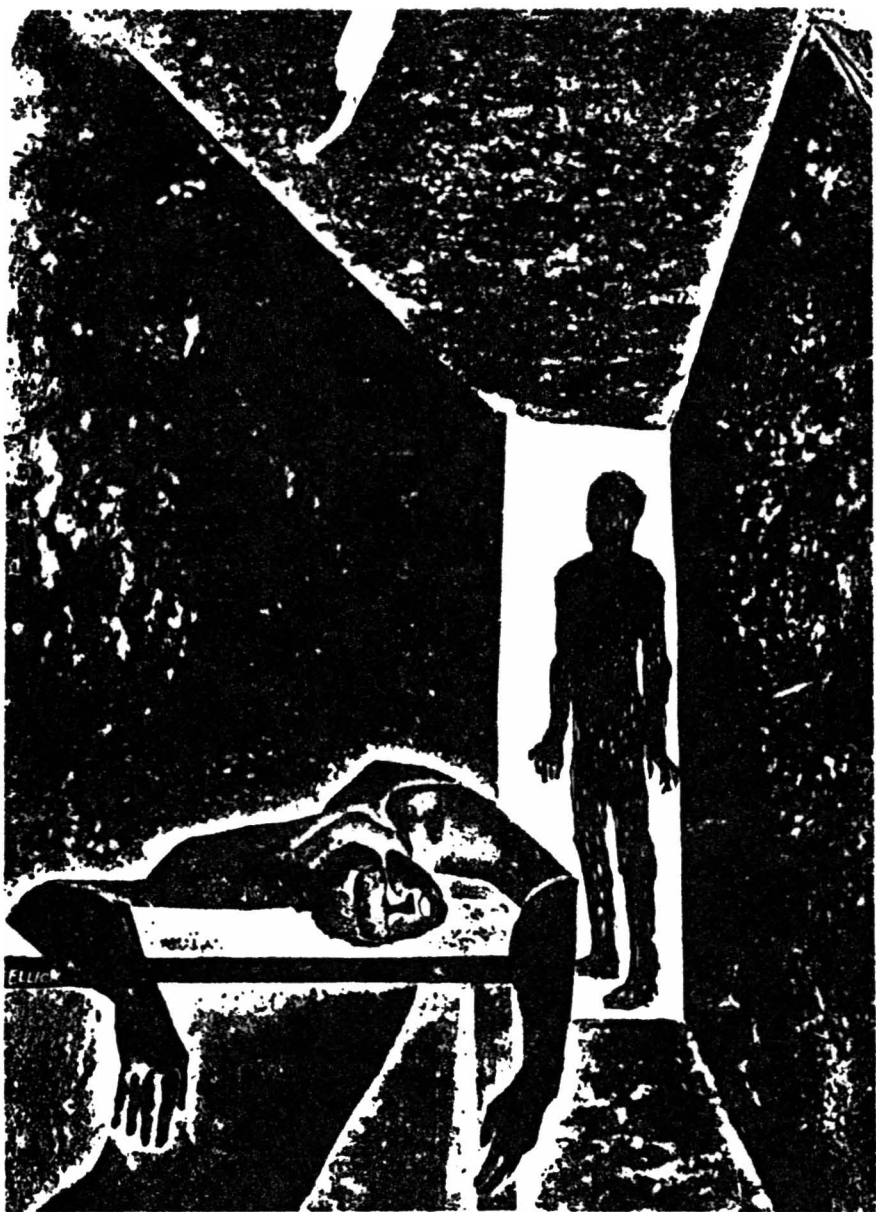
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Eve was a perfect wife. That's why Ollie's life was in danger....

BEFORE SHE

KILLS

FREDRIC BROWN

THE DOOR WAS THAT OF AN OFFICE IN an old building on State Street near Chicago Avenue, on the near north side, and the lettering on it read HUNTER & HUNTER DETECTIVE AGENCY. I opened it and went in. Why not? I'm one of the Hunters; my name is Ed. The other Hunter is my uncle, Ambrose Hunter.

The door to the inner office was open and I could see Uncle Am playing solitaire at his desk in there. He's shortish, fattish and smartish, with a straggly brown mustache. I waved at him and headed for my desk in the outer office. I'd had my lunch—we take turns—and he'd be leaving now.

Except that he wasn't. He swept

the cards together and stacked them but he said, "Come on in, Ed. Something to talk over with you."

I went in and pulled up a chair. It was a hot day and two big flies were droning in circles around the room. I reached for the fly swatter and held it, waiting for one or both of them to light somewhere. "We ought to get a bomb," I said.

"Huh? Who do we want to blow up?"

"A bug bomb," I said. "One of these aerosol deals, so we can get flies on the wing."

"Not sporting, kid. Like shooting a sitting duck, only the opposite. Got to give the flies a chance."

AN ED AND AM HUNTER NOVELETTE

"All right," I said, swatting one of them as it landed on a corner of the desk. "What did you want to talk about?"

"A case, maybe. A client, or a potential one, came in while you were feeding your face. Offered us a job, but I'm not sure about taking it. Anyway, it's one you'd have to handle, and I wanted to talk it over with you first."

The other fly landed and died, and the wind of the swat that killed it blew a small rectangular paper off the desk onto the floor. I picked it up and saw that it was a check made out to Hunter & Hunter and signed Oliver R. Bookman—a name I didn't recognize. It was for five hundred dollars.

We could use it. Business had been slow for a month or so. I said, "Looks like you took the job already. Not that I blame you." I put the check back on the desk. "That's a pretty strong argument."

"No, I didn't take it. Ollie Bookman had the check already made out when he came, and put it down while we were talking. But I told him we weren't taking the case till I'd talked to you."

"Ollie? Do you know him, Uncle Am?"

"No, but he told me to call him that, and it comes natural. He's that kind of guy. Nice, I mean."

I took his word for it. My uncle is a nice guy himself, but he's a sharp judge of character and can spot a phony a mile off.

He said, "He thinks his wife is try-

ing to kill him or maybe planning to."

"Interesting," I said. "But what could we do about it—unless she does? And then it's cop business."

"He knows that, but he's not sure enough to do anything drastic about it unless someone backs up his opinion and tells him he's not imagining things. Then he'll decide what to do. He wants you to study things from the inside."

"Like how? And why me?"

"He's got a young half brother living in Seattle whom his wife has never met and whom he hasn't seen for twenty years. Brother's twenty-five years old—and you can pass for that age. He wants you to come to Chicago from Seattle on business and stay with them for a few days. You wouldn't even have to change your first name; you'd be Ed Cartwright and Ollie would brief you on everything you'll be supposed to know."

I thought a moment and then said, "Sounds a little far out to me, but—" I glanced pointedly at the five-hundred-dollar check. "Did you ask how he happened to come to us?"

"Yes. Koslovsky sent him; he's a friend of Kossy's, belongs to a couple of the same clubs." Koslovsky is chief investigator for an insurance company; we've worked for him or with him on several things.

I asked, "Does that mean there's an insurance angle?"

"No, Ollie Bookman carries only a small policy—small relative to what his estate would be—that he took out a long time ago. Currently he's not insurable. Heart trouble."

"Oh. And does Kossy approve this scheme of his for investigating his wife?"

"I was going to suggest we ask Kossy that. Look, Ed, Ollie's coming back for our answer at two o'clock. I'll have time to eat and get back. But I wanted to brief you before I left so you could think it over. You might also call Koslovsky and get a rundown on Ollie, whatever he knows about him."

Uncle Am got up and got the old black slouch hat he insists on wearing despite the season. Kidding him about it does no good.

I said, "One more question before you go. Suppose Bookman's wife meets his half brother, his real one, someday. Isn't it going to be embarrassing?"

"I asked him that. He says it's damned unlikely; he and his brother aren't at all close. He'll never go to Seattle and the chances that his brother will ever come to Chicago are one in a thousand. Well, so long, kid."

I called Koslovsky. Yes, he'd recommended us to Bookman when Bookman had told him what he wanted done and asked—knowing that he, Koslovsky, sometimes hired outside investigators when he and his small staff had a temporary overload of cases—to have an agency recommended to him.

"I don't think too much of his idea," Koslovsky said, "but, hell, it's his money and he can afford it. If he wants to spend some of it that way, you might as well have the job as anyone else."

"Do you think there's any real chance that he's right? About his wife, I mean."

"I wouldn't know, Ed. I've met her a time or two and—well, she struck me as a cold potato, probably, but hardly as a murderess. Still, I don't know her well enough to say."

"How well do you know Bookman? Well enough to know whether he's pretty sane or gets wild ideas?"

"Always struck me as pretty sane. We're not close friends but I've known him fairly well for three or four years."

"Just how well off is he?"

"Not rich, but solvent. If I had to guess, I'd say he could cash out at over one hundred thousand, less than two. Enough to kill him for, I guess."

"What's his racket?"

"Construction business, but he's mostly retired. Not on account of age; he's only in his forties. But he's got angina pectoris, and a year or two ago the medicos told him to take it easy or else."

Uncle Am got back a few minutes before two o'clock and I just had time to tell him about my conversation with Kossy before Ollie Bookman showed up. Bookman was a big man with a round, cheerful face that made you like him at sight. He had a good handshake.

"Hi, Ed," he said. "Glad that's your name because it's what I'll be calling you even if it wasn't. That is, if you'll take on the job for me. Your Uncle Am here wouldn't make it definite. What do you say?"

I told him we could at least talk

about it and when we were comfortably seated in the inner office, I said, "Mr. Bookman—" "Call me Ollie," he interrupted, so I said, "All right, Ollie. The only reason I can think of, thus far, for not taking on the job, if we don't, is that even if you're right—if your wife does have any thoughts about murder—the chances seem awfully slight that I could find out about it, and how she intended to do it, in time to stop it."

He nodded. "I understand that, but I want you to try, anyway. You see, Ed, I'll be honest and say that I *may* be imagining things. I want somebody else's opinion—after that somebody has lived with us at least a few days. But if you come to agree with me, or find any positive indications that I'm maybe right, then—well, I'll do something about it. Eve—that's my wife's name—won't give me a divorce or even agree to a separation with maintenance, but damn it, I can always simply leave home and live at the club—better than get myself killed."

"You have asked her to give you a divorce, then?"

"Yes, I— Let me begin at the beginning. Some of this is going to be embarrassing to tell, but you should know the whole score. I met Eve . . ."

2.

He'd met Eve eight years ago when he was thirty-five and she was twenty-five, or so she claimed. She was a strip-tease dancer who worked in night clubs under the professional

name of Eve Eden—her real name had been Eve Packer. She was a statuesque blonde, beautiful. Ollie had fallen for her and started a campaign immediately, a campaign that intensified when he learned that off-stage she was quiet, modest, the exact opposite of what strippers are supposed to be and which some of them really are. By the time he was finally having an affair with her, lust had ripened into respect and he'd been thinking in any case that it was about time he married and settled down.

So he married her, and that was his big mistake. She turned out to be completely, psychopathically frigid. She'd been acting, and doing a good job of acting, during the weeks before marriage, but after marriage, or at least after the honeymoon, she simply saw no reason to keep on acting. She had what she wanted—security and respectability. She hated sex, and that was that. She turned Ollie down flat when he tried to get her to go to a psychoanalyst or even to a marriage consultant, who, he thought, might be able to talk her into going to an analyst. In every other way she was a perfect wife. Beautiful enough to be a showpiece that made all his friends envy him, a charming hostess, even good at handling servants and running the house. For all outsiders could know, it was a perfect marriage. But for a while it drove Ollie Bookman nuts. He offered to let her divorce him and make a generous settlement, either lump sum or alimony. But she had

what she wanted, marriage and respectability, and she wasn't going to give them up and become a divorcee, even if doing so wasn't going to affect her scale of living in the slightest. He threatened to divorce her, and she laughed at him. He had, she pointed out, no grounds for divorce that he could prove in court, and she'd never give him any. She'd simply deny the only thing he could say about her, and make a monkey out of him.

It was an impossible situation, especially as Ollie had badly wanted to have children or at least a child, as well as a normal married life. He'd made the best of it by accepting the situation at home as irreparable and settling for staying sane by making at least occasional passes in other directions. Nothing serious, just a normal man wanting to live a normal life and succeeding to a degree.

But eventually the inevitable happened. Three years ago, he had found himself in an affair that turned out to be much more than an affair, the real love of his life—and a reciprocated love. She was a widow, Dorothy Stark, in her early thirties. Her husband had died five years before in Korea; they'd had only a honeymoon together before he'd gone overseas. Ollie wanted so badly to marry her that he offered Eve a financial settlement that would have left him relatively a pauper—this was before the onset of his heart trouble and necessary semiretirement; he looked forward to another twenty years or so of earning capacity—but she refused; never would she

consent to become a divorcee, at any price. About this time, he spent a great deal of money on private detectives in the slim hope that her frigidity was toward him only, but the money was wasted. She went out quite a bit but always to bridge parties, teas or, alone or with respectable woman companions, to movies or plays.

Uncle Am interrupted. "You said you used private detectives before, Ollie. Out of curiosity, can I ask why you're not using the same outfit again?"

"Turned out to be crooks, Am. When they and I were finally convinced we couldn't get anything on her legitimately, they offered for a price to frame her for me." He mentioned the name of an agency we'd heard of, and Uncle Am nodded.

Ollie went on with his story. There wasn't much more of it. Dorothy Stark had known that he could never marry her but she also knew that he very badly wanted a child, preferably a son, and had loved him enough to offer to bear one for him. He had agreed—even if he couldn't give the child his name, he wanted one—and two years ago she had borne him a son: Jerry, they'd named him, Jerry Stark. Ollie loved the boy to distraction.

Uncle Am asked if Eve Bookman knew of Jerry's existence and Ollie nodded.

"But she won't do anything about it. What could she do, except divorce me?"

"But if that's the situation," I

asked him, "what motive would your wife have to want to kill you? And why now, if the situation has been the same for two years?"

"There's been one change, Ed, very recently. Two years ago, I made out a new will, without telling Eve. You see, with angina pectoris, my doctor tells me it's doubtful if I have more than a few years to live in any case. And I want at least the bulk of my estate to go to Dorothy and to my son. So— Well, I made out a will which leaves a fourth to Eve, a fourth to Dorothy and half, in trust, to Jerry. And I explained, in a preamble, why I was doing it that way—the true story of my marriage to Eve and the fact that it really wasn't one, and why it wasn't. And I admitted paternity of Jerry. You see, Eve could contest that will—but would she? If she fought it, the newspapers would have a field day with its contents and make a big scandal out of it—and her position, her respectability, is the most important thing in the world to Eve. Of course, it would hurt Dorothy, too—but if she won, even in part, she could always move somewhere else and change her name. Jerry, if this happens in the next few years, as it probably will, will be too young to be hurt, or even to know what's going on. You see?"

"Yes," I said. "But if you hate your wife, why not—"

"Why not simply disinherit her completely, leave her nothing? Because then she *would* fight the will, she'd have to. I'm hoping by giving

her a fourth, she'll decide she'd rather settle for that and save face than contest the will."

"I see that," I said. "But the situation's been the same for two years now. And you said that something recent—"

"As recent as last night," he interrupted. "I kept that will in a hiding place in my office—which is in my home since I retired—and last night I discovered it was missing. It was there a few days ago. Which means that, however she came to do so, Eve found it. And destroyed it. So if I should die now—she thinks—before I discover the will is gone and make another, I'll die intestate and she'll automatically get everything. She's got well over a hundred thousand dollars' worth of motive for killing me before I find out the will is gone."

Uncle Am asked, "You say 'she thinks.' Wouldn't she?"

"Last night she would have," Ollie said grimly. "But this morning, I went to my lawyer, made out a new will, same provisions, and left it in his hands. Which is what I should have done with the first one. But she doesn't know that, and I don't want her to."

It was my turn to question that. "Why not?" I wanted to know. "If she knows a new will exists, where she can't get at it, she'd know killing you wouldn't accomplish anything for her. Even if she got away with it."

"Right, Ed. But I'm almost hoping she will try, and fail. Then I'd be the happiest man on earth. I *would* have grounds for divorce—attempted mur-

der should be grounds if anything is—and I could marry Dorothy, legitimize my son and leave him with my name. I—well, for the chance of doing that, I'm willing to take the chance of Eve's trying and succeeding. I haven't got much to lose, and everything to gain. How otherwise could I ever marry Dorothy—unless Eve should predecease me, which is damned unlikely. She's healthy as a horse, and younger than I am, besides. And if she should succeed in killing me, but got caught, she'd inherit nothing; Dorothy and Jerry would get it all. That's the law, isn't it? That no one can inherit from someone he's killed, I mean. Well, that's the whole story. Will you take the job, Ed, or do I have to look for someone else? I hope I won't."

I looked at Uncle Am—we never decide anything important without consulting one another—and he said, "Okay by me, kid." So I nodded to Ollie. "All right," I said.

3.

We worked out details. He'd already checked plane flights and knew that a Pacific Airlines plane was due in from Seattle at ten fifteen that evening; I'd arrive on that and meanwhile he'd pretend to have received a telegram saying I was coming and would be in Chicago for a few days to a week on business, and asking him to meet the plane if convenient. I went him one better on that by telling him we knew a girl who sometimes did part-time work for us as a

female operative and I'd have her phone his place, pretend to be a Western Union operator, and read the telegram to whoever answered the phone. He thought that was a good idea, especially if his wife was the one to take it down. We worked out the telegram itself and then he phoned his place on the pretext of wanting to know if his wife would be there to accept a C.O.D. package. She was, so I phoned the girl I had in mind, had her take down the telegram, and gave her Ollie's number to phone it to. We had the telegram dated from Denver, since the real Ed, if he were to get in that evening, would already be on the plane and would have to send the telegram from a stop en route. I told Ollie I'd work out a plausible explanation as to why I hadn't decided, until en route, to ask him to meet the plane.

Actually, we arranged to meet downtown, in the lobby of the Morrison Hotel an hour before plane time; Ollie lived north and if he were really driving to the airport, it would take him another hour to get there and an hour back as far as the Loop, so we'd have two hours to kill in further planning and briefing. Besides another half hour or so driving to his place when it was time to head there.

That meant he wouldn't have to brief me on family history now; there'd be plenty of time this evening. I did ask what kind of work Ed Cartwright did, so if necessary I could spend the rest of the afternoon picking up at least the vocabulary of whatever kind of work it was. But it

turned out he ran a printing shop—which was a lucky break since after high school and before getting with my Uncle Am, I'd spent a couple of years as an apprentice printer myself and knew enough about the trade to talk about it casually.

Just as Ollie was getting ready to leave, the phone rang and it was our girl calling back to say she'd read the telegram to a woman who'd answered the phone and identified herself as Mrs. Oliver Bookman, so we were able to tell Ollie the first step had been taken.

After Ollie had left, Uncle Am looked at me and asked, "What do you think, kid?"

"I don't know," I said. "Except that five hundred bucks is five hundred bucks. Shall I mail the check in for deposit now, since I won't be here tomorrow?"

"Okay. Go out and mail it if you want and take the rest of the day off, since you'll start working tonight."

"All right. With this check in hand, I'm going to pick me up a few things, like a couple shirts and some socks. And how about a good dinner tonight? I'll meet you at Ireland's at six."

He nodded, and I went to my desk in the outer office and was making out a deposit slip and an envelope when he came and sat on the corner of the desk.

"Kid," he said. "This Ollie just *might* be right. We got to assume that he could be, anyway. And I just had a thought. What would be the safest way to kill a man with bad heart

trouble, like angina pectoris is? I'd say conning him into having an attack by giving him a shock or by getting him to overexert himself somehow. Or else by substituting sugar pills for whatever he takes—nitroglycerin pills, I think it is—when he gets an attack."

I said, "I've been thinking along those lines myself, Uncle Am. I thought maybe one thing I'd do down in the Loop is have a talk with Doc Kruger." Kruger is our family doctor, sort of. He doesn't get much business from either of us but we use him for an information booth whenever we want to know something about forensic medicine.

"Wait a second," Uncle Am said. "I'll phone him. Maybe he'll let us buy him dinner with us tonight to pay him for picking his brains."

He went in the office and used his phone; I heard him talking to Doc. He came out and said, "It's a deal. Only at seven instead of six. That'll be better for you, anyway, Ed. Bring your suitcase with you and if we take our time at Ireland's, you can go right from there to meet Ollie and not have to go home again."

So I did my errands, went to our room, cleaned up and dressed, and packed a suitcase. I didn't think anybody would be looking in it to check up on me, but I thought I might as well be as careful as I could. I couldn't provide clothes with Seattle labels but I could and did avoid things with labels that said Chicago or were from well-known Chicago stores. And I avoided anything that was monogrammed, not that I particularly like

monograms or have many things with them. Then I doodled around with my trombone until it was time to head for Ireland's.

I got there exactly on time and Doc and Uncle Am were there already. But there were three Martinis on the table; Uncle Am had known I wouldn't be more than a few minutes late, if any, so he'd ordered for me.

Without having to be asked, since Uncle Am had mentioned it over the phone, Doc started telling us about angina pectoris. It was incurable, he said, but a victim of it might live a long time if he took good care of himself. He had to avoid physical exertion like lifting anything heavy or climbing stairs. He had to avoid overtiring himself by doing even light work for a long period. He had to avoid overindulgence in alcohol, although an occasional drink wouldn't hurt him if he was in good physical shape otherwise. He had to avoid violent emotional upsets as far as was possible, and a fit of anger could be as dangerous as running up a flight of stairs.

Yes, nitroglycerin pills were used. Everyone suffering from angina carried them and popped one or two into his mouth any time he felt an attack coming on. They either prevented the attack or made it much lighter than it would have been otherwise. Doc took a little pillbox out of his pocket and showed us some nitro pills. They were white and very tiny.

There was another drug also used to avert or limit attacks that was even

more effective than nitroglycerin. It was amyl nitrite and came in glass ampoules. In emergency, you crushed the ampoule and inhaled the contents. But amyl nitrite, Doc told us, was used less frequently than nitroglycerin, and only in very bad cases or for attacks in which nitro didn't seem to be helping, because repeated use of amyl nitrite diminished the effect; the victim built up immunity to it if he used it often.

Doc had really come loaded. He'd brought an amyl nitrite ampoule with him, too, and showed it to us. I asked him if I could have it, just in case. He gave it to me without asking why, and even showed me the best way to hold it and crush it if I ever had to use it.

We had a second cocktail and I asked him a few more questions and got answers to them, and that pretty well covered angina pectoris, and then we ordered. Ireland's is famous for sea food; it's probably the best inland sea-food restaurant in the country, and we all ordered it. Doc Kruger and Uncle Am wrestled with lobsters; me, I'm a coward—I ate royal sole.

4.

Doc had to take off after our coffee, but it was still fifteen or twenty minutes too early for me to leave—I'd have to take a taxi to the Morrison on account of having a suitcase; otherwise, I'd have walked and been just right on the timing—so Uncle Am and I had a second coffee apiece and yakked. He said he felt like tak-

ing a walk before he turned in, so he'd ride in the taxi with me and then walk home from there.

I fought off a bellboy who tried to take my suitcase away from me and made myself comfortable on one of the overstuffed chairs in the lobby. I'd sat there about five or ten minutes when I heard myself being paged. I stood up and waved to the bellboy who'd been doing the paging and he came over and told me I was wanted on the phone and led me to the phone I was wanted on. I bought him off for four bits and answered the phone. It was Ollie Bookman, as I'd known it would be. Only he and Uncle Am would have known I was here and Uncle Am had left me only ten minutes ago.

"Ed," he said. "Change of plans. Eve wasn't doing anything this evening and decided to come to the airport with me, for the ride. I couldn't tell her no, for no reason. So you'll have to grab a cab and get out there ahead of us."

"Okay," I said. "Where are you now?"

"On the way south, at Division Street. Made an excuse to stop in a drugstore; didn't know how to get in touch with you until the time of our appointment. You can make it ahead of us if you get a cabby to hurry. I'll stall—drive as slow as I can without making Eve wonder. And I can stop for gas, and have my tires checked."

"What do I do at the airport if the plane's late?"

"Don't worry about the plane. You take up a spot near the Pacific Air-

lines counter; you'll see me come toward it and intercept me. Won't matter if the plane's in yet or not. I'll get us the hell out of there fast before Eve can learn if the plane's in. I'll make sure not to get there *before* arrival time."

"Right," I said. "But, Ollie, I'm not supposed to have seen you for twenty years—and I was five then, or supposed to be. So how would I recognize you? Oh, for that matter, you recognize me?"

"No sweat, Ed. We write each other once a year, at Christmas. And several times, including last Christmas, we traded snapshots with our Christmas letters. Remember?"

"Of course," I said. "But didn't your wife see the one I sent you?"

"She may have glanced at it casually. But after seven months she wouldn't remember it. Besides, you and the real Ed Cartwright are about the same physical type, anyway—dark hair, good looking. You'll pass. But don't miss meeting us before we reach the counter or somebody there might tell us the plane's not in yet, if it's not. Well, I better not talk any longer."

I swore a little to myself as I left the Morrison lobby and went to the cab rank. I'd counted on the time Ollie and I would have had together to have him finish my briefing. This way I'd have to let him do most of the talking, at least tonight. Well, he seemed smart enough to handle it. I didn't even know my parents' names, whether either of them was alive, whether I had any other living rela-

tives besides Ollie. I didn't even know whether I was married or not—although I felt reasonably sure Ollie would have mentioned it if I was.

Yes, he'd have to do most of the talking—although I'd better figure out what kind of business I'd come to Chicago to do; I'd be supposed to know that, and Ollie wouldn't know anything about it. Well, I'd figure that out on the cab ride.

Barring accidents, I'd get there well ahead of Ollie, and I didn't want accidents, so I didn't offer the cabby any bribe for speed when I told him to take me to the airport. He'd keep the meter ticking all right, since he made his money by the mile and not by the minute.

I had my cover story ready by the time we got there. It wasn't detailed, but I didn't anticipate being pressed for details, and if I was, I knew more about printing equipment than Eve Bookman would know. I was a good ten minutes ahead of plane time. I found myself a seat near the Pacific Airlines counter and facing in the direction from which the Bookmans would come. Fifteen minutes later—on time, as planes go—the public-address system announced the arrival of my flight from Seattle, and fifteen minutes after that—time for me to have left the plane and even to have collected the suitcase that was by my feet—I saw them coming. That is, I saw Ollie coming, and with him was a beautiful, *soignée* blonde who could only be Eve Bookman, nee Eve Eden. Quite a dish. She was, with high heels, just about two inches short of

Ollie's height, which made her just about as tall as I, unless she took off her shoes for me. Which, from what Ollie had told me about her, was about the last thing I expected her to do, especially here in the airport.

I got up and walked toward them and—remembering identification was only from snapshot—didn't put too much confidence in my voice when I asked, "Ollie?" and I put out my hand but only tentatively.

Ollie grabbed my hand in his big one and started pumping it. "Ed! Gawdamn if I can believe it, after all these years. When I last saw you, not counting pictures, you looked— Hell, let's get to that later. Meet Eve. Eve, meet Ed."

Eve Bookman gave me a smile but not a hand. "Glad to meet you at last, Edward. Oliver's talked quite a bit about you." I hoped she was just being polite in making the latter statement.

I gave her a smile back. "Hope he didn't say anything bad about me. But maybe he did; I was probably a pretty obstreperous brat when he saw me last. I would have been—let's see—"

"Five," said Ollie. "Well, what are we waiting for? Ed, you want we should go right home? Or should we drop in somewhere on the way and hoist a few? You weren't much of a drinker when I knew you last but maybe by now—"

Eve interrupted him. "Let's go home, Oliver. You'll want a nightcap there in any case, and you know you're not supposed to have more

than one or two a day. Did he tell you, Edward, about his heart trouble in any of his letters?"

Ollie saved me again. "No, but it's not important. All right, though. We'll head home and I'll have my daily one or two, or maybe, since this is an occasion, three. Ed, is that your suitcase back by where you were sitting?"

I said it was and went back and got it, then went with them to the parking area and to a beautiful cream-colored Buick convertible with the top down. Ollie opened the door for Eve and then held it open after she got in. "Go on, Ed. We can all sit in the front seat." He grinned. "Eve's got an MG and loves to drive it, but we couldn't bring it tonight. With those damn bucket seats, you can't ride three in the whole car." I got in and he went around and got in the driver's side. I was wishing that I could drive it—I'd never piloted a recent Buick—but I couldn't think of any reasonable excuse for offering.

Half an hour later, I wished that I'd not only offered but had insisted. Ollie Bookman was a poor driver. Not a fast driver or a dangerous one, just sloppy. The way he grated gears made my teeth grate with them and his starts and stops were much too jerky. Besides, he was a lane-straddler and had no sense of timing on making stop lights.

But he was a good talker. He talked almost incessantly, and to good purpose, briefing me, mostly by apparently talking to Eve. "Don't remember if I told you, Eve, how come

Ed and I have different last names, but the same father—not the same mother. See, I was Dad's son by his first marriage and Ed by his second—Ed was born Ed Bookman. But Dad died right after Ed was born and Ed's mother, my stepmother, married Wilkes Cartwright a couple years later. Ed was young enough that they changed his name to match his stepfather's, but I was already grown up, through high school anyway, so I didn't change mine. I was on my own by then. Well, both Ed's mother and his stepfather are dead now; he and I are the only survivors. Well . . ." And I listened and filed away facts. Sometimes he'd cut me in by asking me questions, but the questions always cued in their own answers or were ones that wouldn't be giveaways whichever way I answered them, like, "Ed, the house you were born in, out north of town—is it still standing, or haven't you been out that way recently?"

I was fairly well keyed in on family history by the time we got home.

5.

Home wasn't as I'd pictured it, a house. It was an apartment, but a big one—ten rooms, I learned later—on Coleman Boulevard just north of Howard. It was fourth floor, but there were elevators. Now that I thought of it, I realized that Ollie, because of his angina, wouldn't be able to live in a house where he had to climb stairs. But later I learned they'd been living there ever since

they'd married, so he hadn't had to move there on account of that angle.

It was a fine apartment, nicely furnished and with a living room big enough to contain a swimming pool. "Come on, Ed," Ollie said cheerfully. "I'll show you your room and let you get rid of your suitcase, freshen up if you want to—although I imagine we'll all be turning in soon. You must be tired after that long trip. Eve, could we talk you into making a round of Martinis meanwhile?"

"Yes, Oliver." The perfect wife, she walked toward the small but well-stocked bar in a corner of the room.

I followed Ollie to the guest room that was to be mine. "Might as well unpack your suitcase while we talk," he said, after he closed the door behind us. "Hang your stuff up or put it in the dresser there. Well, so far, so good. Not a suspicion, and you're doing fine."

"Lots of questions I've still got to ask you, Ollie. We shouldn't take time to talk much now, but when will we have a chance to?"

"Tomorrow. I'll say I have to go downtown, make up some reasons. And you've got your excuse already—the business you came to do. Maybe you can get it over with sooner than you thought—but then decide, since you've come this far anyway, to stay out the week. That way you can stick around here as much as you want, or go out only when I go out."

"Fine. We'll talk that out tomorrow. But about tonight, we'll be

talking, the three of us, and what can I safely talk about? Does she know anything about the size of my business, or can I improvise freely and talk about it?"

"Improvise your head off. I've never talked about your business. Don't know much about it myself."

"Good. Another question. How come, at only twenty-five, I've got a business of my own? Most people are still working for somebody else at that age."

"You inherited it from your stepfather, Cartwright. He died three years ago. You were working in the shop and moved to the office and took over. And as far as I know, or Eve, you're doing okay with it."

"Good. And I'm not married?"

"No, but if you want to invent a girl you're thinking about marrying, that's another safe thing you can improvise about."

I put the last of the contents of my suitcase in the dresser drawer and we went back to the living room. Eve had the cocktails made and was waiting for us. We sat around sipping at them, and this time I was able to do most of the talking instead of having to let Ollie filibuster so I wouldn't put my foot into my mouth by saying something wrong.

Ollie suggested a second round but Eve stood up and said that she was tired and that if we'd excuse her, she'd retire. And she gave Ollie a wifely caution about not having more than one more drink. He promised he wouldn't and made a second round for himself and me.

He yawned when he put his down after the first sip. "Guess this will be the last one, Ed. I'm tired, too. And we'll have plenty of time to talk tomorrow."

I wasn't tired, but if he was, that was all right by me. We finished our nightcaps fairly quickly.

"My room's the one next to yours," he told me as he took our glasses back to the bar. "No connecting door, but if you want anything, rap on the wall and I'll hear you. I'm a light sleeper."

"So am I," I told him. "So make it vice versa on the rapping. I'm the one that's supposed to be protecting you, not the other way around."

"And Eve's room is the one on the other side of mine. No connecting door there, either. Not that I'd use it, at this stage, even if it stood wide open with a red carpet running through it."

"She's still a beautiful woman," I said, just to see how he'd answer it.

"Yes. But I guess I'm by nature monogamous. And this may sound corny and be corny, but I consider Dorothy and me married in the sight of God. She's all I'll ever want, she and the boy. Well, come on, and we'll turn in."

I turned in, but I didn't go right to sleep. I lay awake thinking, sorting out my preliminary impressions. Eve Bookman—yes, I believed Ollie's story about their marriage and didn't even think it was exaggerated. Most people would think her sexy as hell to look at her, but

I've got a sort of radar when it comes to sexiness. It hadn't registered with a single blip on the screen. And Koslovsky is a much better than average judge of people and what had he said about her? Oh, yes, he'd called her a cold potato.

Some women just naturally hate sex and men—and some of those very women become things like strip teasers because it gives them pleasure to arouse and frustrate men. If one of them breaks down and has an affair with a man, it's because the man has money, as Ollie had, and she thinks she can hook him for a husband, as Eve did Ollie. And once she's got him safely hog-tied, he's on his own and she can be her sweet, frigid self again. True, she's given up the privilege of frustrating men in audience-size groups, but she can torture the hell out of one man, as long as he keeps wanting her, and achieve respectability and even social position while she's doing it.

Oh, she'd been very pleasant to me, very hospitable, and no doubt was pleasant to all of Ollie's friends. And most of them, the ones without radar, probably thought she was a ball of fire in bed and that Ollie was a very lucky guy.

But murder—I was going to take some more convincing on that. It could be Ollie's imagination entirely. The only physical fact he'd come up with to indicate even the possibility of it was the business of the missing will. And she could have taken and destroyed that but still

have no intention of killing him before he could make another like it; she could simply be hoping he'd never discover that it was missing.

But I could be wrong, very wrong. I'd met Eve less than three hours ago and Ollie had lived with her eight years. Maybe there was more than met the eye. Well, I'd keep my eyes open and give Ollie a run for his five hundred bucks by not assuming that he was making a murder out of a molehill. I went to sleep and Ollie didn't tap on my wall.

6.

I woke at seven but decided that would be too early and that I didn't want to make a nuisance of myself by being up and around before anybody else, so I went back to sleep and it was half past nine when I woke the second time. I got up, showered and shaved—my bedroom had a private bath so all of them must have—dressed and went exploring. I went back to the living room and through it, and found a dining room. The table was set for breakfast for three but no one was there yet.

A matronly-looking woman who'd be a cook or housekeeper—I later learned that she was both and her name was Mrs. Ledbetter—appeared in the doorway that led through a pantry to the kitchen and smiled at me. "You must be Mr. Bookman's brother," she said. "What would you like for breakfast?"

"What time do the Bookmans

come down for breakfast?" I asked.

"Usually earlier than this. But I guess you talked late last night. They should be up soon, though."

"Then I won't eat alone, thanks. I'll wait till at least one of them shows up. And as for what I want—anything; whatever they will be having. I'm not fussy about breakfasts."

She smiled and disappeared into the kitchen and I disappeared into the living room. I took a chair with a magazine rack beside it and was leafing through the latest *Reader's Digest*, just reading the short items in it, when Ollie came in looking rested and cheerful. "Morning, Ed. Had breakfast?"

I told him I'd been up only a few minutes and had decided to wait for company. "Come on, then," he said. "We won't wait for Eve. She might be dressing now, but then again she might sleep till noon."

But she didn't sleep till noon; she came in when we were starting our coffee, and told Mrs. Ledbetter that she'd just have coffee, as she had a lunch engagement in only two hours. So the three of us sat drinking coffee and it was very cozy and you wouldn't have guessed there was a thing wrong. You wouldn't have guessed it, but you might have felt it. Anyway, I felt it.

Ollie asked me if I wanted a lift downtown to do the business I'd come to do, and of course I said that I did. We discussed plans. Mrs. Ledbetter, I learned, had the afternoon and evening off, starting at noon, so no dinner would be served

that evening. Eve would be gone all afternoon, playing bridge after her lunch date, and she suggested we all meet in the Loop and have dinner there. I wasn't supposed to know Chicago, of course, so I let them pick the place and it came up the Pump Room at seven.

Ollie and I left and on the way to the garage back of the building, I asked him if he minded if I drove the Buick. I said I liked driving and didn't get much chance to.

"Sure, Ed. But you mean you and Am don't have a car?"

I told him we wanted one but hadn't got around to affording it as yet. The few times we needed one for work, we rented one and simply got by without one for pleasure.

The Buick handled wonderfully. With me behind the wheel, it shifted smoothly, didn't jerk in starting or stopping; it timed stop lights and didn't straddle lanes. I asked how much it cost and said I hoped we'd be able to afford one like it someday. Except that we'd want a sedan because a convertible is too noticeable to use for a tail job. When we rented cars, we usually got a sedan in some neutral color like gray. Detectives used to use black cars, but nowadays a black car is almost as conspicuous as a red one.

I asked Ollie where he wanted me to drive him and he said he'd like to go to see Dorothy Stark and his son, Jerry. They lived in an apartment on LaSalle near Chicago Avenue. And did I have any plans or would I like to come up to meet

them? He said he would like that.

I told him I'd drop up briefly if he wanted me to, but that I had plans. I wanted him to lend me the key to his apartment and I was going back there, after I could be sure both Mrs. Ledbetter and Mrs. Bookman had left. Since it was the former's afternoon off, it would be the best chance I'd have to look around the place in privacy. He said sure, the key was on the ring with the car keys and I might as well keep the keys, car and all, until our dinner date at the Pump Room. It would be only a short cab ride for him to get there from Mrs. Stark's. I asked him if there was any danger that Eve would go back to the apartment after her lunch date and before her bridge game. He was almost sure she wouldn't, but her bridge club broke up about five thirty and she'd probably go back then to dress for dinner. That was all right; I could be gone by then.

When I parked the car on LaSalle, I remembered to ask him who I was supposed to be when I met Mrs. Stark—Ed Hunter or Ed Cartwright. He suggested we stick to the Cartwright story; if he told Dorothy the truth, she'd worry about him being in danger. Anyway, it would be simpler and take less explanation.

I liked Dorothy Stark on sight. She was small and brunette, with a heart-shaped face. Only passably pretty—nowhere near as stunning as Eve—but she was warm and genuine, the real thing. And really in love with Ollie; I didn't need radar to tell

me that. And Jerry, age two, was a cute toddler. I can take kids or let them alone, but Ollie was nuts about him.

I stayed only half an hour, breaking away with the excuse of having a business-lunch date in the Loop, but it was a very pleasant half hour, and Ollie was a completely different person here. He was at home in this small apartment, much more so than in the large apartment on Coleman Boulevard. And you had the feeling that Dorothy was his wife, not Eve.

I was only half a dozen blocks from the office and I didn't want to get out to Coleman Boulevard before one o'clock, so I drove over to State Street and went up to see if Uncle Am was there. He was, and I told him what little I'd learned to date and what my plans were.

"Kid," he said, "I'd like a ride in that chariot you're pushing. How about us having an early lunch and then I'll go out with you and help search the joint. Two of us can do twice as good a job."

It was tempting but I thumbed it down. If a wheel did come off and Eve Bookman came back unexpectedly, I could give her a song and dance as to what I was doing there, but Uncle Am would be harder to explain. I said I'd give him the ride, though. We could leave now and he could come with me out as far as Howard Avenue and we'd eat somewhere out there; then he could take the el back south from the Howard station. It would amount only to his taking a two-hour lunch break and

we did that any time we felt like it. He liked the idea.

I let him drive the second half of the way and he fell in love with the car, too. After we had lunch, I phoned the apartment from the restaurant and let the phone ring a dozen times to make sure both Mrs. Bookman and Mrs. Ledbetter were gone. Then I drove Uncle Am to the el station and myself to the apartment.

7.

I let myself in and put the chain on the door. If Eve came back too soon, that was going to be embarrassing to explain; I'd have to say I'd done it absent-mindedly and it would make me look like a fool. But it would be less embarrassing than to have her walk in and find me rooting in the drawers of her dresser.

First, I decided, I'd take a look at the place as a whole. The living room, dining room, and the guest bedroom were the only rooms I'd been in thus far. I decided to start at the back. I went through the dining room and the pantry into the kitchen. It was a big kitchen and had the works in the way of equipment, even an automatic dishwasher and garbage disposal. A room on one side of it was a service and storage room and on the other side was a bedroom; Mrs. Ledbetter's, of course. I looked around in all three rooms but didn't touch anything. I went back to the dining room and found that a door from it led to a room proba-

bly intended as a den or study; there was a desk—an old-fashioned roll-top desk that was really an antique—two file cabinets, a bookcase filled mostly with books on construction and business practice but with a few novels on one shelf, mostly mysteries, a typewriter on a stand, and a dictating machine. This was Ollie's office, from which he conducted whatever business he still did. And the dictating machine meant he must have a part-time secretary, however many days or hours a week. He'd hardly dictate letters and then transcribe them himself.

The roll-top desk was closed but not locked. I opened it and saw a lot of papers and envelopes in pigeon-holes, but I didn't study any of them. Ollie's business was no business of mine. But I wondered if he'd used the "Purloined Letter" method of hiding his missing will by having it in plain sight in one of those pigeon-holes. And if so, what had Eve been looking for when she found it? I made a mental note to ask him about that.

There was a telephone on top of the desk and I looked at the number on it; it wasn't the same number as that on the phone in the living room, which meant it wasn't an extension but a private line.

I closed the desk and went back to the living room and through its side doorway to the hall from which the bedrooms opened. Another door from it turned out to be a linen closet.

Ollie's bedroom was the same size

as mine and furnished in the same way. I walked over to the dresser. A little bottle on it contained nitroglycerin pills. It held a hundred and was about half full. Beside it were three glass ampoules of amyl nitrite like the one in my pocket, the one I'd got from Doc Kruger last night at dinner. I looked at the ampoules and decided that they hadn't been tampered with. Couldn't be tampered with, in fact. But I took a couple of the nitro pills out of the bottle and put them in my pocket. If I had a chance to get them to Uncle Am, I'd ask him to take them to a laboratory and have them checked to make sure they were really what the label claimed them to be.

I didn't search the room thoroughly, but I looked through the dresser drawers and the closet. I wasn't sure what I was looking for, unless maybe a gun. If Ollie kept a gun, I wanted to know it. But I didn't find a gun or anything else more dangerous than a nail file.

Eve Bookman's room was, of course, the main object of my search, but I wasn't in any hurry and decided I'd do a little thinking before I tackled it. I went back to the living room and since it occurred to me that if Eve was coming back between lunch and bridge, this would be about the time, I took the chain off the door. It wouldn't matter if I was found here, as long as I was innocently occupied. I could just say that I was unable to see the man I'd come to see until tomorrow. And that Ollie—Oliver to her—had had things to do in the

Loop and had lent me his car and his house key.

I made myself a highball at the bar and sat down to sip it and think, but the thinking didn't get me anywhere. I knew one thing I'd be looking for—pills the size and color of nitro pills but that might turn out to be something else. Or a gun or any other lethal weapon, or poison—if it could be identified as such. But that was all and it didn't seem very likely to me that I'd find any of those things, even if Eve did have any designs on her husband's life. One other thing I thought of: I might as well finish my search for a gun by looking for one in Ollie's office. If he had one, I wanted to know it, and he might keep it in his study instead of his bedroom.

I made myself another short drink and did some more thinking without getting any ideas except that if I could reach Ollie by phone at the Stark apartment, I could simply ask him about the gun, and another question or two I'd thought of.

I rinsed out and wiped the glass I'd used and went to the telephone. I checked the book and found a *Stark, Dorothy* on LaSalle Street and called the number. Ollie answered and when I asked him if he could talk freely, he said sure, that Dorothy had gone out shopping and had left him to baby-sit.

I asked him about guns and he said no, he didn't own any.

I told him I'd noticed the ampoules and pills on his dresser and asked him if he carried some of both with

him. He said the pills yes, always. But he didn't carry ampoules because the pills always worked for him and the ampoules he just kept on hand at home in case his angina should get worse. He told me the same thing about them the doctor had, that if one used them often they became ineffective. He'd used one only once thus far, and wouldn't again until and unless he had to.

After I'd hung up, I remembered that I'd forgotten to ask him where the will had been hidden in his office, but it didn't seem worth while calling back to ask him. I wanted to know, if only out of curiosity, but there wasn't any hurry and I could find out the next time I talked to him alone.

I put the chain bolt back on the door—I was pretty sure by now that Eve wasn't coming back before her bridge-club session, as it was already after two, but I thought I might as well play safe—and went to her room.

8.

It was bigger than any of the other bedrooms—had originally, no doubt, been intended as the master bedroom—and it had a dressing room attached and lots of closet space. It was going to be a lot of territory to cover thoroughly, but if Eve had any secrets, they'd surely be here, not in Ledbetter territory like the kitchen or Ollie's office or neutral territory like the living room. Apparently she spent a lot of time here; besides the

usual bedroom furniture and a vanity table, there was a bookcase of novels and a writing desk that looked used. I sighed and pitched in. Two hours later, all I knew that I hadn't known—but might have suspected—before was that a woman can have more clothes and more beauty preparations than a man would think possible.

I'd looked in everything but the writing desk; I'd saved that for last. There were three drawers and the top one contained only raw materials—paper and envelopes, pencils, ink and such. No pens, but she probably used a fountain pen and carried it with her. The middle one contained canceled checks, neatly in order and rubber-banded, used stubs of check-books similarly banded, and bank statements. No current checkbook; she must have had it with her. The bottom drawer was empty except for a dictionary, a Merriam-Webster *Collegiate*. If she corresponded with anyone, beyond sending out checks to pay bills, she must have destroyed letters when she answered them and not owed any at the moment; there was no correspondence at all.

I still had almost an hour of safe time, since her bridge club surely wouldn't break up before five, so for lack of anything else to go through, I started studying the bank statements and the canceled checks. One thing was immediately obvious: this was her personal account, for clothes and other personal expenses. There was one deposit a month for exactly four hundred dollars, never

more or never less. None of the checks drawn against this amount would have been for household expenses. Ollie must have handled them, or had his hypothetical part-time secretary (that was another thing I hadn't remembered to ask him about, but again it was nothing I was in a hurry to know) handle them. This account was strictly a personal one. Some of the checks, usually twenty-five- or fifty-dollar ones, were drawn to cash. Others, most of them for odd amounts, were made out to stores. There was one every month to a Howard Avenue Drugstore, no doubt mostly for cosmetics, most of the others were to clothing stores, lingerie shops and the like. Occasional checks to some woman or other for odd amounts up to twenty or thirty dollars were, I decided, probably bridge losses or the like, at times when she didn't have enough cash to pay off. From the bank statements I could see that she lived up to the hilt of her allowance; at the time each four-hundred-dollar check was deposited, always on the first of the month, the balance to which it was added was never over twenty or thirty dollars.

I went through the stack of canceled checks once more. I didn't know what I was looking for, but my subconscious must have noticed something my conscious mind had missed. It had. Not many of the checks were over a hundred dollars, but all of the checks to one outfit, Vogue Shops, Inc., were over a hundred and some were over two hundred. At

least half of Eve's four hundred dollars a month was being spent in one place. And other checks were dated at different times, but the Vogue checks were all dated the first of the month exactly. Wondering how much they did total, I took paper and pencil and added the amounts of six of them, for the first six months of the previous year. The smallest was \$165.50 and the largest \$254.25, but the total—it jarred me. The total of the six checks came to \$1,200. Exactly. Even. On the head. And so, I knew a minute later, did the six checks for the second half of the year. It certainly couldn't be coincidence, twice.

Eve Bookman was paying somebody an even two hundred bucks a month—and disguising the fact, on the surface at any rate, by making some of the amounts more than that and some less, but making them average out. I turned over some of the checks to look at the endorsements. Each one was rubber-stamped *Vogue Shops, Inc.*, and under the rubber stamp was the signature *John L. Littleton*. Rubber stamps under that showed they'd all been deposited or cashed at the Dearborn Branch of the Chicago Second National Bank.

And that, whatever it meant, was all the checks were going to tell me. I rebanded them and put them back as I'd found them, took a final look around the room to see that I was leaving everything else as I'd found it, and went back to the living room. I was going to call Uncle Am at the

office—if he wasn't there, I could reach him later at the rooming house—but I took the chain off the door first. If Eve walked in while I was talking on the phone, I'd just have to switch the subject of conversation to printing equipment, and Uncle Am would understand.

He was still at the office. I talked fast and when I finished, he said, "Nice going, kid. You've got something by the tail and I'll find out what it is. You stick with the Bookmans and let me handle everything outside. We've got two lucky breaks on this. One, it's Friday and that bank will be open till six o'clock. Two, one of the tellers is a friend of mine. When I get anything for sure, I'll get in touch with you. Is there an extension on the phone there that somebody could listen in on?"

"No," I said. "There's another phone in Ollie's office, but it's a different line."

"Fine, then I can call openly and ask for you. You can pretend it's a business call, if anyone's around, and argue price on a Miehle vertical for your end of the conversation."

"Okay. One other thing." I told him about the two alleged nitro pills I'd appropriated from Ollie's bottle. I told him that on my way in to town for dinner, I'd drop them off on his desk at the office and sometime tomorrow he could take them to the lab. Or maybe, if nitro had a distinctive taste, Doc Kruger could tell by touching one of them to his tongue.

It was five o'clock when I hung up the phone. I decided that I'd earned a drink and helped myself to a short one at the bar. Then I went to my room, treated myself to a quick shower and a clean shirt for the evening.

I was just about to open the door to leave when it opened from the other side and Eve Bookman came home. She was pleasantly surprised to find me and I told her how I happened to have the house key and Ollie's car, but said I'd been there only half an hour, just to clean up and change shirts for the evening.

She asked why, since it was five thirty already, I didn't stay and drive her in in Ollie's car. That way we wouldn't be stuck, after dinner, with having both the Buick and the MG downtown with us and could all ride home together.

I told her it sounded like an excellent idea. Which it was, except for the fact that I wanted to get the pills to Uncle Am. But there was a way around that. I asked if she could give me a piece of paper, envelope and stamp. She went to her room to get them and after she'd gone back there to dress, I addressed the envelope to Uncle Am at the office, folded the paper around the pills and sealed them in the envelope. All I'd have to do was mail it, on our way in, at the Dearborn Post Office Station and it would get there in the morning delivery.

I made myself comfortable with

a magazine to read and Eve surprised me by taking not too long to get ready. And she looked gorgeous, and I told her so, when she came back to the living room. It was only six fifteen and I didn't have to speed to get us to the Pump Room by seven. Ollie wasn't there, but he'd reserved us a table and left word with the maitre d' that something had come up and he'd be a bit late.

He was quite a bit late and we were finishing our third round of Martinis when he showed up, very apologetic about being detained. We decided we'd have one more so he could have one with us, and then ate a wonderful meal. As an out-of-town guest who was presuming on their hospitality already, I insisted on grabbing the check. A nice touch, since it would go on Ollie's bill anyway.

We discussed going on to a night club, but Eve said that Ollie looked tired—which he did—and if we went clubbing, would want to drink too much. We could have a drink or two at home—if Ollie would promise to hold to two. He said he would.

Since Ollie admitted that he really was a little tired, I had no trouble talking him into letting me do the driving again. Eve seemed more genuinely friendly than hitherto. Maybe it was the Martinis before dinner or maybe she was getting to like me. But it was an at-a-distance type of friendliness; my radar told me that.

Back home, I offered to do the bartending, but Eve overruled me and made our drinks. We were

drinking them and talking about nothing in particular when I saw Ollie suddenly put down his glass and bend forward slightly, putting his right hand under his left arm.

Then he straightened up and saw that we were both looking at him with concern. He said, "Nothing. Just a little twinge, not an attack. But maybe to be on the safe side, I'll take one—"

He took a little gold pillbox out of his pocket and opened it.

"Good Lord," he said, standing up. "Forgot I took my last one just before I got to the Pump Room. Just as well we didn't go night-clubbing, after all. Well, it's okay now. I'll fill it."

"Let me—" I said.

But he looked perfectly well now and waved me away. "I'm perfectly okay. Don't worry."

And he went into the hallway, walking confidently, and I heard the door of his room open and close so I knew he'd made it all right.

Eve started to make conversation by asking me questions about the girl in Seattle whom I'd talked about, and I was answering and enjoying it, when suddenly I realized Ollie had been gone at least five minutes and maybe ten. A lot longer than it would take to refill a pillbox. Of course he might have decided to go to the john or something while he was there, but just the same, I stood up quickly, excused myself without explaining, headed for his room.

The minute I opened the door, I saw him and thought he was dead.

He was lying face down on the rug in front of the dresser and on the dresser there wasn't any little bottle of pills and there weren't any amylnitrite ampoules, either.

I bent over him, but I didn't waste time trying to find out whether he was dead or not. If he was, the ampoule I'd got from Doc Kruger wasn't going to hurt him. And if he was alive, a fraction of a second might make the difference of whether it would save him or not. I didn't feel for a heartbeat or look at his face. I got hold of a handful of hair and lifted his head a few inches off the floor, reached in under it with my hand and crushed the ampoule right under his nose.

Eve was standing in the doorway and I barked at her to phone for an ambulance, right away quick. She ran back toward the living room.

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Ollie didn't die, although he certainly would have if I hadn't had the bright idea of appropriating that ampoule from Doc and carrying it with me. But Ollie was in bad shape for a while, and Uncle Am and I didn't get to see him until two days later, Sunday evening.

His face looked gray and drawn and he was having to lie very quiet. But he could talk, and they gave us fifteen minutes with him. And they'd told us he was definitely out of danger, as long as he behaved himself, but he'd still be in the hospital another week or maybe even two.

But bad as he looked, I didn't pull any punches. "Ollie," I said, "it didn't work, your little frame-up. I didn't go to the police and accuse Eve of trying to murder you. On the other hand, I've given you this break, so far. I didn't go to them and tell them you tried to commit suicide in a way to frame her for murder. You must love Dorothy and Jerry awfully much to have planned that."

"I—I do," he said. "What—made you guess, Ed?"

"Your hands, for one thing," I said. "They were dirtier than they'd have been if you'd just fallen. That and the fact that you were lying face down told me how you managed to bring on that attack at just that moment. You were doing push-ups—about as strenuous and concentrated exercise as a man can take. And just kept doing them till you passed out. It *should* have been fatal, all right.

"And you knew the pills and ampoules had been on your dresser that afternoon, and that Eve had been home since I'd seen them and could have taken them. Actually you took them yourself. You came out in a taxi—and we could probably find the taxi if we had to prove this—and got them yourself. You had to wait till you were sure Eve and I would be en route downtown, and that's why you were so late getting to the Pump Room. Now Uncle Am's got news for you—not that you deserve it."

Uncle Am cleared his throat. "You're not married, Ollie. You're a free man because your marriage to Eve Packer wasn't legal. She'd been

married before and hadn't got a divorce. Probably because she had no intention of marrying again until you popped the question to her, and then it was too late to get one.

"Her legal husband, who left her ten years ago, is a bartender named Littleton. He found her again somehow and when he learned she'd married you illegally, he started blackmailing her. She's been paying him two hundred a month, half the pin-money allowance you gave her, for three years. They worked out a way she could mail him checks and still have her money seemingly accounted for. The method doesn't matter."

I took over. "We haven't called copper on the bigamy bit, either, because you're not going to prosecute her for it, or tell the cops. We figure you owe her something for having tried to frame her on a murder charge. We've talked to her. She'll leave town quietly, and go to Reno, and in a little while you can let out that you're divorced and free. And marry Dorothy and legitimize Jerry.

"She really will be getting a divorce, incidentally, but from Littleton, not from you. I said you'd finance that and give her a reasonable stake to start out with. Like ten thousand dollars—does that sound reasonable?"

He nodded. His face looked less drawn, less gray now. I had a hunch his improvement would be a lot faster now.

"And you fellows," he said. "How can I ever—?"

"We're even," Uncle Am said.

"Your retainer will cover. But don't ever look us up again to do a job for you. A private detective doesn't like to be made a patsy, be put in the spot of helping a frame-up. And that's what you tried to do to us. Don't ever look us up again."

We never saw Ollie again, but we did hear from him once, a few months later. One morning, a Western Union messenger came into our office to deliver a note and a little box. He said he had instructions not to wait and left.

The envelope contained a wedding announcement. One of the after-the-fact kind, not an invitation, of the marriage of Oliver R. Bookman to Dorothy Stark. On the back of it was scribbled a note. "Hope you've forgiven me enough to accept a wedding

present in reverse. I've arranged for the dealer to leave it out front. Papers will be in glove compartment. Thanks for everything, including accepting this." And the little box, of course, contained two sets of car keys.

It was, as I'd known it would be, a brand-new Buick sedan, gray, a hell of a car. We stood looking at it, and Uncle Am said, "Well, Ed, have we forgiven him enough?"

"I guess so," I said. "It's a sweet chariot. But somebody got off on his time, either the car dealer or the messenger, and it's been here too long. Look."

I pointed to the parking ticket on the windshield. "Well, shall we take our first ride in it, down to the City Hall to pay the fine and get right with God?"

We did.

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