

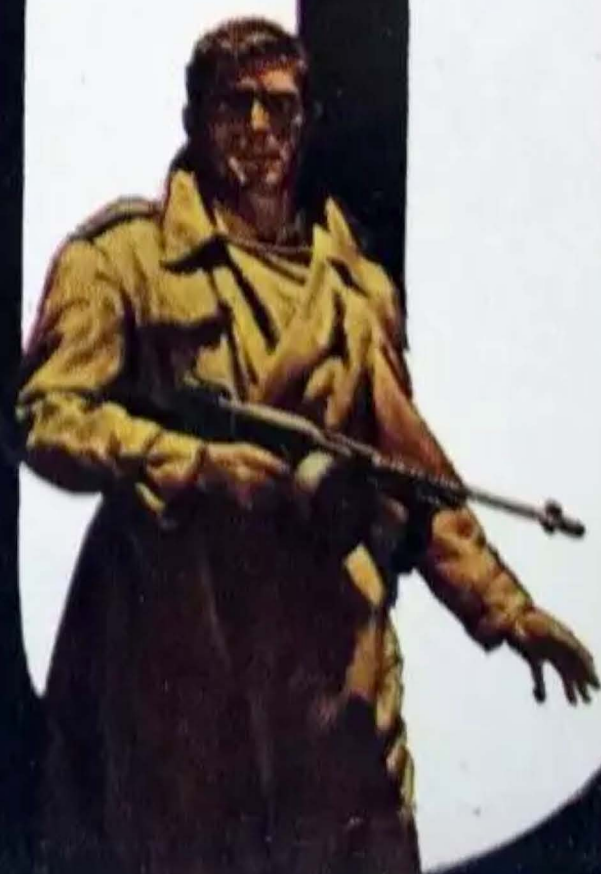


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NEW YORK

CALIBRE .50

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CALIBRE

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CHAPTER

1

ORDINARILY, Hollis went off duty promptly at midnight. But tonight, studying for a morning exam in the air-conditioned comfort of the dispatcher's office, he lost all track of time. When he looked up, it was a quarter to one. He was surprised that the relief man hadn't arrived.

Hollis closed his books and walked out of the office. He was a slim, quiet, rather humorless young man who went to the University of Miami days and worked as a watchman nights. It was an undemanding job which left him plenty of time for studying. Once an hour he strolled around the four spotlighted warehouses of Miami-South Exports, wearing the holstered revolver which the insurance company required. He had never checked to see if the gun was loaded. There wasn't any need, since no one in his right mind was going to steal the heavy bales of cotton and jute, or the huge, unwieldy crates of machinery.

He took a turn around the warehouses, the revolver slapping his hip uncomfortably, wondering what had happened to the midnight-to-eight watchman. Old Hanmeir was usually reliable, though somewhat simple.

Still, it wasn't any business of his. No shipments were going out tonight, so Hollis decided to lock up and go home. He walked down the access road that led from Ware-

house Four to the Miami Highway, to see if Hanmeir was coming. He'd give the old man fifteen minutes more. If he waited any longer, he'd miss the last bus to Coral Gables.

He stopped. A car had swung off the highway onto the access road. It pulled up even with him.

"Hi, Hollis," the driver said.

Hollis peered inside and recognized Jim Morrison. Jim was on the Miami police force, traffic division. Like Hollis, he was from Ann Arbor, Michigan. The two men sometimes bowled together when their schedules allowed.

"Came by to give you a lift home," Morrison said. "But I expected you'd be gone by now."

"I should have been," Hollis said. "But Hanmeir hasn't shown up yet."

"Well," Morrison said, "that's not your responsibility." He was a big, red-faced man with a bull neck. Even in sports shirt and slacks he looked like a policeman.

A hundred yards away on the four-lane highway, a big trailer truck was slowing down. Its directionals blinked. With a hiss of air brakes it turned into the access road leading to Warehouse One.

"That's funny," Hollis said.

"What's funny about it?"

"I didn't know any shipments were going out tonight. I guess maybe I'd better go back and check their dispatch slip."

"I'll wait," Morrison said, "if you won't be too long."

"I'll be just a minute," Hollis told him.

He walked back to the warehouse, enjoying the black velvet sensation of the Miami night. Royal palms lined the road. He could hear their fronds chatter faintly in the breeze. It was a sound he liked.

The truck had turned around on the wide concrete apron and backed up to the loading platform. Hollis could identify it as a new semi-diesel, red cab and gray trailer, a Christmas tree collection of colored lights surrounding it. Six or seven men had gotten out; a large crew. Sharp and clear in the glare of the overhead spotlights, Hollis saw the driver open the cab door and climb stiffly out. He left the motor idling.

"Hi," Hollis said.

"Hi," the driver said. "This is Warehouse One, isn't it?"

Hollis nodded, although the question was superfluous. A large One was stenciled over both doors.

The truck crew had rolled back the warehouse doors. They all appeared to be Latin-Americans. This didn't surprise Hollis. Miami was full of Cubans since the overthrow of the Batista government. What did surprise him was the way they were dressed. They looked more like sailors than truck-loaders.

"You the watchman?" the driver asked. He was a lanky, black-haired man with a large nose and bushy eyebrows. Hollis had the impression that he was nervous about something.

"How come you're loading so late?" Hollis asked.

"Change in shipping schedule. Big rush to get this stuff aboard tonight."

"Which stuff?"

"Load A-42," the driver said. Hollis nodded. A-42 was a shipment of heavy agricultural machinery. It had been scheduled to go out in the morning.

"Got the dispatch slip?" Hollis asked.

The driver took a piece of orange paper out of his shirt pocket and handed it to Hollis. Hollis glanced at it and nodded. He started to hand it back, then changed his mind and examined it again.

"What's the matter?" the driver asked. His voice had a sharp edge.

"It isn't countersigned," Hollis said.

"I don't know what you're talking about," the driver said. His men had brought out the first of the nine big wooden cases. The back of the truck was equipped with a hydraulic lift. They raised the first case and slid it to the back of the truck.

"Look," Hollis said, "you've got it signed by Mr. Ryerson down here. But it isn't countersigned. Mrs. Driscoll countersigns everything. She's head of the bookkeeping department."

He showed the driver where Mrs. Driscoll's signature should

have been. It was just the sort of omission that old Hanmeir would have let slip by.

The driver studied the paper and scratched his head. "I don't know anything about any countersigning."

"That's the form," Hollis said.

"But look, Ryerson signed it. He's the president of the company!"

"Sure. But all our dispatch slips have to be countersigned before they can go out. I'm sorry," Hollis said firmly. "You can't have that shipment without Mrs. Driscoll's signature."

The driver seemed perplexed. One of his men came over and peered at the paper. He was a little man, swarthy and sour-faced. He wore a large signet ring which showed a blue and white eagle with three red dots above its head. A thin knife scar ran from the edge of his temple into his scalp.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"No countersignature," the driver said. "You know anything about that, Juan?"

"All I know," Juan said, "that damned ship sails at four A.M. sharp, and we're supposed to have this stuff aboard. Jesus, it's always something like this."

"Look," the driver said to Hollis, "it is signed by Ryerson. Can't we let it go at that? I'll lose my job if I don't get this stuff aboard tonight."

"Well . . ." Hollis looked at the dispatch slip again. It was the right form, and it was made out properly. Ryerson's scrawl looked authentic. He had no real authority to hold up the shipment; certainly not on a minor technicality. He decided to let it go through.

The driver said, "I'd sure appreciate it." And he held out a neatly folded ten-dollar bill.

That might have worked with Hanmeir. It was very much the wrong move with Hollis.

"I'm sorry," Hollis said stiffly. "I think I'd better phone Mr. Ryerson. If he says okay, it's okay."

The driver shrugged. Hollis walked to the pay telephone on the wall and put in a dime. As he started to dial, he glimpsed, out of the corner of his eye, a black shadow swooping toward

him. He moved aside instinctively, and a blackjack crashed into the wall beside him.

"Take him, quick," Juan said.

The men moved toward him. Hollis backed away. Before he could get the revolver out of the buttoned holster, he saw the driver taking aim with a large black automatic. This can't be happening, Hollis thought. The driver fired, and Hollis felt something strike his chest with incredible force, slamming him against the wall.

He slid to the concrete floor. Barely conscious, he heard the driver say, "Christ, everything goes wrong. They told me the old man would be on duty."

"Get the rest of the stuff loaded," Juan said.

"Someone's coming."

Morrison was coming on the run, his revolver out. He was shouting, "Stop! Stop there!"

"Get down," the driver said. "I'll take care of him."

The men scattered behind packing cases, and the driver jumped into the cab of his truck. Morrison reached the loading platform, his revolver leveled at the truck.

"Get your hands up," Morrison said. "What in hell do—"

Before he could finish the sentence, the driver began firing from the cab window. He was using a Browning automatic rifle, and the long barrel bounced on the sill. Bullets ricocheted wildly off the concrete apron.

Morrison was fast on his feet. He turned and ran, outlined cruelly in the glaring overhead lights, trying to put palm trees between himself and the automatic rifle. But the driver, firing more steadily now, caught him before he could make any distance. Morrison managed to get behind a palm, but its slender girth couldn't protect him. Despairingly he fired at the cab. Bullets chopped at the sides of the palm, slitting bark. Morrison fell. The driver gave him a final burst, emptying the clip.

"Load!" he shouted. "Let's get out of here!"

The men wrestled the last of the heavy cases aboard. They climbed into the truck and slammed the tailgate. The driver clashed gears and got the big truck moving. He reached the highway and turned south.

CHAPTER

2

THE WAITING ROOM of Miami-South Exports was just as Thornton remembered it. The beige stucco walls looked cool, and the chairs were still covered with a durable brown tweed. The air-conditioning unit didn't hum any longer; perhaps that had been changed. Behind the gray steel reception desk was Mrs. Hutchins, neat and severe and unchanged, nodding a formal greeting.

"Welcome back, Mr. Thornton."

"Thank you. It's good to be back."

She pressed a button on her telephone, spoke into it briefly and put it down. "Mr. Ryerson wants to see you in just one moment. I suppose you've heard about our trouble?"

"Yes," Thornton said. "I picked up a Miami paper in London. But it was a few days old."

"Well, Mr. Ryerson will fill you in. Believe me, it's been just plain terrible." Her telephone rang once. "You can go in now."

Ryerson looked older than Thornton had remembered him, and less solidly compact. Lines of strain showed around his bulldog mouth, and there was a sprinkling of gray in his close-cropped ginger hair. He sat behind a desk covered with shipping directories and papers. His rows of pipes in their walnut stand were dusty. His ashtray, a large and hideous ceramic from Africa, was filled with cigar butts.

There were preliminaries to be gone through. "Well, Bill, you did a great job for us over there."

"Thank you, sir."

"I've studied your reports. Fine, just fine. Start thinking about how to spend a bonus. Do you really think that Moujadi Singh is reliable?"

"I think so. He's a very straightforward young man, and his family has been trading in Calcutta for generations."

"Fine, fine . . ." The preliminaries were over. India was eight thousand miles away, an enchanted land of elephants and spices unconnected with the real trouble at home. "I suppose you've heard about the mess we've got here?"

"I heard," Thornton said. "The newspaper I saw in London said the Hollis boy was in critical condition."

"They think he'll pull through now. I saw him in the hospital yesterday and he looks as if he'll pull through. But the policeman is dead."

"Have they any idea who did it?"

"They haven't told me," Ryerson said. "We've had the police department and the D.A.'s office swarming over us ever since the shooting. Insurance investigators. The federal government is investigating. . . . Bill, I think they're going to suspend our trading license."

"Why?"

"There's been too much of this sort of thing going on in Miami. They've been looking for a chance to crack down, make an example of someone."

"But why us?"

"This looks to them like an inside job." Ryerson ticked off the points on his stubby fingers. "According to Hollis, the dispatch slip was in order. It had what looked like my signature. They were after a single shipment which they knew by its shipping number. They knew which warehouse it was in. They knew its scheduled shipping date. They had everything right except for the countersignature."

"None of that proves anything."

"No. But it sure as hell intimates a close acquaintance with company practice. Bill, I've had investigators of every size, shape, and description swarming over this office ever since it happened. The Internal Revenue Bureau is examining our books again. FBI agents have made polite little calls. By

God, you'd think they'd spend their time trying to trace down the men who did it instead of trying to show I arranged for my own goods to be hijacked."

"They'll never make that charge stick."

"Of course they won't. But in the meantime, we're losing customers. We may lose our license. And with the federal government in it, God knows where it'll end." He picked up a single sheet of crinkly white paper. "Now I'm asked to extend my fullest cooperation to a Mr. Stephen Dain, a special agent from the Treasury Department. He'll arrive at Miami airport tonight and check into the Bronson Hotel."

"What do you plan to do?"

Ryerson didn't answer at once. He sat fingering the heavy white paper with the Treasury seal. From his expression, it might have been a death warrant. He looked up and said, "Everybody and his brother is investigating us. It's open season. Well, I think we should do some investigating. Bill, I'd like to assign you to this."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I'd like you to investigate this hijacking and murder on behalf of the company, acting as our representative."

"But I don't know anything about it," Thornton said. "Wouldn't it be better to hire a private detective?"

"It would not. For one thing, I don't trust them. For another, a private detective wouldn't be in a position to do the specific job I want done. Bill, I want you to look after the interests of the company."

"But why me? I've been out of the country for over a year."

"That's it," Ryerson said. "No one could possibly accuse you of complicity. You will be able to cooperate with the various authorities involved in this, particularly with this Mr. Dain. That's a perfectly natural move on our part, isn't it? On your own, you'll keep your eyes open in the firm's behalf. I don't expect you to find out where the shipment went or who killed the policeman. But I do want you to see that we aren't indicted on trumped-up evidence just because the authorities need a conviction."

"Investigate the investigators?" Thornton asked.

“Something like that. I know you have vacation time due, but we can take care of that after this is over. Will you do it, Bill?”

Thornton lighted a cigarette to give himself a moment to think. From personal experience, he knew the problems of being involved with a company under government investigation. If the investigation proved criminal behavior on the part of any of the officers, everybody in the firm was suspect. Under those circumstances, it could be very difficult to find another job. But now, just back from a successful overseas assignment, he could resign from Miami-South and find a good position elsewhere. That would be the hard-headed thing to do, and Thornton had always tried, not too successfully, to be hard-headed.

On the other hand, he owed Miami-South some loyalty. Not too much; he'd only been with them for two years. But Ryerson had advanced him rapidly, and had been generous with salary and bonuses. It was a good company.

Finally, he couldn't believe that the officers of Miami-South had had any part in the crime.

“I'll do it,” he said.

“I appreciate that,” Ryerson said. “I really do, Bill.” He handed Thornton a folder. “Here's all the information we have. Maybe you can get some ideas from it. Take that Mr. Dain around the warehouses, show him everything. We don't have a thing to hide.”

“All right. And any information I can develop on my own—”

“Use it as you think best,” Ryerson said firmly. “Don't hide anything. Naturally, I can't vouch for every clerk and truck-loader; but I'm absolutely certain about the officers and high-echelon personnel of this company.”

“I'll get right on it.”

“And Bill—”

“Yes, sir?”

“Don't go taking any chances. These people have killed a man. I shouldn't imagine they'd care much if they had to kill again.”

Thornton nodded and left the office. Outside, in Miami's

gluey September heat, he caught a taxi to his hotel. He had checked in that morning straight from the airport, but hadn't had time to unpack. He did so now, laying out his clothes methodically on one of the twin beds. He showered. Then, wearing only shorts, he opened the folder Ryerson had given him and started reading methodically through it.

Bill Thornton might have gone into his uncle's tool and die business in Waterbury, Connecticut, if World War II hadn't interrupted his education and exposed him to the seductions of travel. When he came out of Officer's Candidate School in 1943, he was assigned to the 112th Division in India. There he became the division payroll officer for native labor. He had a natural talent for languages and a New Englander's mixture of fascination and revulsion for the exotic. He picked up a fair working knowledge of Hindustani, and later, when his division moved to Rangoon, of Burmese. When the war ended, Thornton considered staying in India as a junior partner in a Calcutta trading company.

But this was neither practical nor suitable. He returned to the United States in 1946, completed his final year at Yale, and went to work for Trans-World Imports in Philadelphia. It was a very good position, but Thornton was cursed with a chronic restlessness. The bitter, protracted end of his marriage didn't help. Thornton resigned from Trans-World, spent a few months in Mexico after the divorce, and went to work for Edgar Johnson Traders in New York. That ended badly, in a black splash of newspaper headlines. For nearly eight months he was jobless; then he met Joe Ryerson. Miami-South was aggressively trying to enter the Far East trade. Thornton was immediately put into field work, where he should have been all along.

He was a quiet man of medium height and solid build, boyish in spite of his thirty-seven years, curiously untouched by his travels. When cynical Europeans spoke of American naïveté, they might have meant Thornton. Perhaps what they sensed was an absence of introspection; and perhaps they envied Thornton's effectiveness despite his lack

of it. For his part, Thornton simply considered himself a businesslike person; and he had a bank account to prove it.

And yet, this businesslike Thornton gave way at times to an exoticist, a man who experienced himself most fully when far from the stifling invisible limits of his home, under a strange sky, looking into the closed brown faces of an alien people.

Now, bent over the newspaper clippings of the warehouse robbery, Thornton felt a small, unaccustomed thrill. He was going into detective work.

Load A-42 had consisted of heavy agricultural machinery destined for Venezuela. The manufacturers were Boyce-Darwin of Birmingham, Alabama. The shipment had been ordered by the Arturo Delacourt Compania, S.A., with its main office in Mexico City and branch offices in Havana, Ciudad Trujillo, Monterrey, and Miami.

The police had undoubtedly checked the Miami office. Still, it would do no harm for him to go down there and see what he could find.

Thornton dressed in a lightweight wool and dacron suit. Opening a pocket of his val-pak, he took out a short-barreled Smith & Wesson 38-calibre revolver. He had been issued the weapon for his trip to Indonesia. He had carried it only once, bulging uncomfortably in a shoulder holster, on the streets of Jakarta. He had been certain that everybody could see its outline against his thin jacket.

Now he weighed the gun in his hand and told himself that he was acting like a kid. He had never found a use for the gun in India, Burma, or Indonesia. Why was he even considering carrying one in Miami?

He put the revolver back into his val-pak and left the hotel.

CHAPTER

3

THE STREAM of northern money flowing into south Florida had not touched Oliveda Street. It was one of those decayed and dying arteries with which Miami can surprise the adventurous tourist. Sadly enough, it often reminds him of home. Thornton parked his rented car between a milk truck and a battered Plymouth. He locked it, and walked past an open-air drugstore with a grimy palm tree in front of it, past a delicatessen and a plumbing supply store, to a small office building. The Arturo Delacourt Compania, S.A., was located on the ground floor.

Thornton went in. The office was large and gloomy, divided in half by a waist-high partition. A big overhead fan pushed hot air and cigar smoke around the room. In the back, two dark-haired girls were typing, and a third was staring earnestly out a window. In the front, a man was sitting at the reception desk frowning at a Donald Duck comic book. He slid it hastily away and stood up. He was about five and a half feet tall, black-eyed and sallow-skinned, very dapper in an electric blue suit, perforated alligator shoes, and a black silk tie.

"May I help you, sir?"

Thornton introduced himself and showed his credentials from Miami-South Exports.

"I am Eduardo Enriquez," the dapper little man said. "I am assistant manager of this branch of Delacourt."

"Could I speak to the manager?"

"Unfortunately, Señor Montemayor is in Havana. He per-

sonally handles all purchases, contracts, shipping arrangements, and the like. Perhaps you could come back in a week?"

Thornton explained that he wasn't buying or selling anything; he was simply interested in information concerning the robbery of shipment A-42.

"But the robbery was not performed on these premises," Enriquez said. "What information could I have?"

"Well, you see, it's a little unusual for someone to steal a single shipment of heavy agricultural machinery and to ignore everything else in the warehouse. I'm looking for possible motive."

"Yes?" Enriquez said. He was like some Asiatics Thornton had met; polite, opaque, willfully obtuse.

"I wondered if you had any business rivals?"

"We have several. But the machines were not in short supply. We can re-order and receive delivery in ten days. To hurt us, a business rival would have to steal after we had taken possession." Enriquez smiled. "Perhaps, Mr. Thornton, you should look to your own business rivals."

"We are," Thornton said. "But we want to make sure we cover everything. Does the delay of the order inconvenience you?"

"Not seriously."

"Have you ordered through our company before?"

"Several times over the past year. Why do you ask?"

"Routine," Thornton said. "We're checking the manufacturer and the shippers in the same way. There must be some reason why just this single shipment was stolen."

"Perhaps," Enriquez said, "perhaps not."

He was plainly growing bored with the discussion. One of the girls picked up a handful of letters on her desk and walked up to the manager. "These are ready for the post office, Señor Enriquez." She was an attractive girl with a delicate Latin complexion and an oval face framed in black hair. A strong, sad mouth relieved the postcard prettiness of her features.

"Very well," Enriquez said. "Take them, Estella. And you might bring back some more air forms."

The girl left. Enriquez turned to Thornton. "Is there anything else?"

"Just one more thing. Have you had any robbery of goods after delivery?"

"No."

"How about before delivery?"

"Never."

"Thank you very much," Thornton said. He left the assistant manager to his Donald Duck comic book and went into the street. He was dissatisfied and annoyed. As a detective, he was getting off to a mediocre beginning.

He went to the open-air drugstore and ordered coffee. It was as bitter as his thoughts. There were no suspects, no clues, no trail for the gifted amateur to follow. Perhaps he should wait until Stephen Dain arrived in Miami. Perhaps he shouldn't have taken on the job in the first place.

"Mr. Thornton?"

He turned and saw, sitting at the counter beside him, the girl who had left the Delacourt office. She was still holding the bundle of letters. He remembered her name: Estella.

"You are trying to recover the stolen goods?"

"My company is liable for them," Thornton said. "Of course I want to recover them."

"Do you work alone on a matter of this sort?"

Thornton had the impression that she was waiting for some sort of key word or phrase from him. He said, "I'm working with Mr. Stephen Dain." In another few hours it would be true.

"Can you be discreet with information? I would not like Mr. Enriquez to know I have talked with you."

"I can be very discreet."

She looked at him carefully, and Thornton wondered if she was trying to gauge his reliability. He decided that she was beautiful rather than pretty. She seemed very self-possessed, slim and erect in a white blouse and black skirt. She watched him as impersonally as one watches a lizard on a rock.

Quite suddenly she made up her mind. "Mr. Thornton, you can find the stolen shipment in an abandoned warehouse near the junction of State Highway 13 with Flamingo Road. Do you know where that is?"

"I can find it. How did you learn this?"

"From friends," Estella said. "But you must not say you heard it from me. I might lose my job."

"I don't see why."

"The Delacourt Company does not approve of a woman mixing in such matters. They would not like the friends who gave me this information."

To Thornton, this sounded misleading. But he nodded and asked, "How shall I say I found out?"

"Go back to your hotel. Stay for perhaps half an hour in your room. Then you can say that you received an anonymous phone call from a man. A man with a slight German accent. That sounds all right, doesn't it?"

"It sounds fine," Thornton said. "Why did this man with the German accent give me information?"

Estella shrugged. "He didn't say. No one will question it. Information is passed in that manner every day."

"And you learned this from friends?"

Estella nodded.

"You know some interesting people."

"That is no concern of yours, Mr. Thornton."

"All right," Thornton said. "I received a phone call from a sinister bald man with a German accent, a limp, and a dueling scar on his left cheek."

"The elaborations are not really necessary." Suddenly she smiled. "Good-bye, Mr. Thornton. Please be very careful."

Thornton watched her go, admiring her slender legs and erect carriage. She was a fine-looking girl, though distressingly formal and literal-minded. Perhaps that was Spanish upbringing. He thought of haciendas, duennas. He pictured a pretty, very serious little girl going to church, wearing white gloves and an air of piety. He wondered how she had found out about the location of the shipment, assuming that her information was correct. Perhaps a boy friend with underworld contacts? He found the thought unpleas-

ant. She seemed too nice a girl to be mixed up in that sort of thing; and the duenna would never approve.

He finished his coffee and went back to his car. Twenty minutes later, he managed to find a parking place near his hotel. In his room, he took off his jacket, lighted a cigarette, and looked through the folder on shipment A-42. It told him nothing he didn't already know. He opened a street map of Greater Miami and located the intersection of State Highway 13 and Flamingo Road. It was about fifteen miles from downtown Miami, in the direction of Cape Sable.

Thornton folded the map and asked himself if he should contact the police. Or should he wait until evening and give his information to the government man, Mr. Dain?

That might be the most discreet course. But if the shipment wasn't there—and it perhaps wasn't—he would look like a fool, telling a story about a mysterious man with a German accent. It might be better to have a cautious look first, to find out if the warehouse even existed. As a compromise, he could write a note to Dain and leave it with the desk clerk.

At the time, it seemed like a good idea.

CHAPTER

4

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON when Thornton reached the junction of Flamingo and Highway 13. He was in an area of worked-out farmland, flat fields of scrub pine and cabbage palm. Nearby he saw a deserted house with the remnants of a fruit stand in front of it. Past it was a boarded-up motel,

and beyond that he saw a warehouse. It stood alone on a dirt road, fifty yards back from the highway.

Thornton drove slowly down the dirt road. He reached the cracked concrete apron surrounding the warehouse and cruised around it slowly in second gear, ready to get out fast.

Nothing happened. He could see that the building was falling apart. The sun had warped and bleached its pine planking, and the corrugated iron roof was dark with rust. Leaving the motor running, Thornton got out of his car and walked up to the big double door. It sagged on its hinges, but it was secured by a new padlock.

That was curious. The windows were boarded up. He peered through a crack, but all he could see was his own eye reflected in dirty glass.

He walked to the rear. Ten feet up, he saw a broken window. He climbed onto a dented garbage can and looked through it.

Within the warehouse there was only a single circle of light, coming from a dim bulb hanging from a cord. Two men were sitting on oil cans under the light. They were playing cards, using a third can as a table. Near them was a small kerosene stove and several bottles of wine. Canned goods were stacked neatly to one side. Looming huge and indistinct behind them was a truck.

"All right," a voice said behind him. "Turn around slowly."

Thornton turned his head and saw a lanky man in a black windbreaker holding what looked like an army-issue .45 automatic. The man had a prominent nose and bushy black eyebrows. He must have come around the building with the silence of a stalking cat. He stood about ten feet from the garbage can, almost close enough for a jump.

"Don't try it," the man said, reading the intention in Thornton's flexed legs. "Just climb down from there slowly."

Thornton got down and stood facing the man. He felt sick. The man held the automatic close to his side and patted Thornton's clothes.

“All right, march. Around this way.”

He brought Thornton to a side entrance and motioned him inside. It took a few moments for Thornton's eyes to become accustomed to the gloom. He picked out the shapes of loading carts and bales; dominating everything was the shadowy truck. He saw the cardplayers finish their hand and put away the cards. They both wore hats, and the low overhead light left their faces in deep shadow.

“Now then,” the man in the windbreaker said, **“why did Eberhart send you?”**

“I don't know what you're talking about. I was just passing by and I thought—”

“Cut it. Angel, get his wallet.”

Now Thornton could see that the other two men were Latin-Americans. One of them, short and thickset, snaked the billfold out of his hip pocket and gave it to the man in the windbreaker. He glanced through it and handed it back to Thornton.

“You've got an identification card from Miami-South.”

“Of course,” Thornton said. **“I'm employed by them.”**

“It's easy to pick up cards like that. I've got a couple of them myself. How do I know Eberhart didn't send you?”

“I don't even know who he is.”

The man in the windbreaker seemed to consider this implausible, but he didn't comment. He asked, **“How'd you find this place?”**

“It wasn't very hard. Every warehouse within twenty-five miles of Miami is being checked. I just happened to hit this one first.”

“You're lying.”

Thornton shrugged. **“Wait and see. The police should be here in about half an hour if I don't report back.”**

“I still think you're lying,” the man in the windbreaker said. But now he didn't seem so confident. **“Put your hands on top of your head.”** He turned to the two Latin-Americans. **“We better get the rig out of here. It's time, anyhow.”**

Angel nodded. The other man asked, **“What about him?”** He was a small man, lean and swarthy. The faint yellow light

caught the edge of an old knife scar running upward from his temple.

"I guess we haven't much choice," the man in the wind-breaker said. "We'll put him and his car inside here. It'll be at least a few days before they find him. Hell, maybe it'll be a couple weeks." His voice was very reasonable; he was a man looking for a place to store some bulky objects. It took Thornton a moment to realize that his death had been decided.

"What about the police?" Juan asked.

"I think he's lying about them checking warehouses. And even if he isn't, what else can we do with him?" The cold voice regretted the uncertainties of the storage situation; but logic dictated no other course.

"All right, Roger," Juan said.

The little man with the knife scar walked to the truck. Thornton had had time now to visualize his death. He wasn't afraid; he was numb. But a part of his mind was coolly calculating chances, matching its attention against the preoccupations of the three men. That part of his mind believed that there was a mousehole for every mouse, if only he had the wit to find it. Thornton edged forward until he was directly in front of the unshielded light bulb. His legs were beginning to tremble. Juan climbed into the cab. In a moment the heavy engine coughed into life. Juan revved it up, stalled it, and started it again. The engine backfired. Roger turned his head slightly.

Thornton chose that moment to make his move. His hands were clasped lightly on his head; he leaned forward and struck the light bulb with the college signet ring on his left hand. The bulb broke, plunging the warehouse into darkness. Thornton dropped to the floor just before two brilliant gun flashes lashed through the spot where he had been standing.

"Get those headlights on!" Roger was shouting. "Angel, you got your gun? Get over to the side door—don't let him out. Juan, get those damned headlights on!"

Thornton rolled to his feet and sprinted in the direction of the back door. He ran into a loading car, cracking his

shins excruciatingly. The car began to roll, and two guns fired at it. Thornton kept on running, one arm held out in front of him, the other shielding his face. His outstretched hand encountered a supporting pillar, and he ducked around it. As he did so, the truck's headlights came on. They were facing the front door, so they produced only a ghostly reflection of light. Toward the rear, where Thornton was, the darkness was deep and thick.

"Angel!" the man in the windbreaker shouted. "Are you at the back door yet?"

"Just about," Angel said, his voice uncomfortably near the pillar. "Okay, Roger, I'm there."

"He can't get out now. Juan, we got any more light bulbs?"

"I don't think so."

"All right. Take the flashlight out of the cab and come down here."

Thornton could see the side door. Narrow slivers of light were shining between the warped boards. Then the light was gone as Angel moved his bulk in front of the door. A flashlight beam was probing the dark corners, poking at burlap bales and dusty cardboard cartons. Thornton flattened himself on the concrete floor. He crawled away from the moving beam of light, keeping the pillar between himself and it. His shoulder encountered a bale. He crept around it, and his hand touched a low wooden box. He reached inside and found that it contained tools. Taking out a pipe wrench and a Stillson, he crawled further from the light.

"Angel, you keep good watch. Don't let him get at you."

"He won't get at me."

"Juan, you see any sign of him?"

"Not yet. Maybe he's in back of some bales."

"Don't let him jump you."

"He gets a bullet if he tries."

They had to shout above the dull thunder of the truck's idling engine. Its noise covered the scraping sounds Thornton made as he crawled down a row of bales. He wondered if he could double back past the men and reach the truck. Probably not; that would bring him into the range of the

headlights. He looked around and saw a glint of light from a boarded-up window. He crawled to it and touched the planks. They were rotted. He should be able to break through on his first attempt, assuming that he wasn't shot first.

The flashlight beam was getting closer. Thornton hurled the pipe wrench across the room, and he heard it clatter against a wall. Someone fired at it, and the beam of light swung around abruptly.

He got to his feet, took a short run, and slammed his shoulder into the boards covering the window.

The boards held.

"He's over this way!" Roger was shouting.

Thornton threw the Stillson wrench at the bobbing eye of the flashlight. He heard a shout of pain. The flashlight fell to the floor, rolling slowly, its narrow beam shining along the pockmarked concrete. Thornton threw himself against the boards again, and felt them splinter. Now there was enough room between the cracks for his hand. He grabbed two boards and yanked. They gave way, and he could see an orange and blue sunset sky. Thornton leaped head-first out the window.

He landed on his left shoulder and the side of his head, but pulled himself to his feet. He heard the side door thrown open. Angel was probably coming around the side of the building; Roger and Juan must be following him through the broken window. Thornton turned away from the warehouse and ran toward a stand of palmettos thirty yards away. He was aware of firing behind him. But he knew it was difficult to hit a moving target with a revolver, at an increasing range. With a little luck . . .

Then he heard the sharp flat crack of a pistol firing from in front of him. It came from the palmettos. He hadn't thought of the possibility of a lookout.

Caught in a crossfire, Thornton threw himself to the ground. He saw Roger and Angel advance, with Juan close behind. After a moment he realized that they weren't firing at him; they were trying to get the man concealed in the palmettos.

The shots were returned. Thornton heard one of the men grunt—it was Angel. Tightly clasp ing his stomach, Angel bowed deeply and ludicrously from the waist. He sat down, grunted again, and curled up. Roger and Juan ran back into the warehouse.

Too dazed and sick to move, Thornton lay on the ground and watched. The warehouse doors burst open and the big diesel came out, clashing gears as it picked up speed. There were final shots; then the truck was rolling down the dirt road to the highway. It turned right, toward the northeast, and Thornton watched it until it was out of sight.

He heard footsteps. The sniper from the palmettos was standing over him. The man was lean and tall, dressed in a wrinkled gray cord suit and a quiet tie. He had flat, dark brown hair and a pleasant, slightly ascetic face. He might have been anywhere between thirty and forty years old. He looked at Thornton with a studied blandness.

“I’m Stephen Dain,” the man said. He was holding a revolver. He put it in his jacket pocket and said, “You, I suppose, would be William Thornton.”

The carefully casual words left no doubt of what Dain thought; who else but William Thornton would be lying dazed on the ground? Thornton got to his feet quickly.

“I want to thank you very much,” he said. “I’m sorry about this. I guess I acted hastily in coming out here alone.”

Dain nodded. “Well,” he said, “I’m sure it won’t happen again.”

Thornton brushed himself off. He decided that he could very easily dislike Mr. Stephen Dain.

CHAPTER

5

ANGEL WAS CURLED UP TIGHTLY, and his eyes were shut. He was dead. Dain's bullet, fired from a prone position, had gone into the stomach, creased a lung, and come out the back. Dain stood for a moment, tall and slightly stoop-shouldered against the deep blue Florida twilight. Then he turned and walked toward Thornton's car.

"What now?" Thornton asked.

"We report this to the Miami police. Did you notice the truck's license number?"

"I never gave it a thought," Thornton admitted. "Do you think the police will be able to find it?"

"I wouldn't count on it," Dain said. "These people seem very well organized."

Dain's car was parked out on the highway. They took Thornton's car and drove in silence until they came to an open restaurant. Dain telephoned the police, giving them, with Thornton's help, a description of the truck and the men. Then he telephoned the FBI office in Miami. When they returned to the warehouse, the first police units had already arrived.

A dozen policemen had congregated in front of the warehouse. Most of them were specialists, concerned with camera shots, fingerprints, bits of stray articles. The twilight faded quickly and searchlights were set up. A gray-haired plainclothesman questioned Thornton, taking down notes in a worn black notebook. Thornton told him about everything except Estella. To explain his knowledge of the warehouse,

he used the story of the man with the slight German accent.

After that, they left him alone. Thornton was beginning to have a reaction. He found that his legs weren't quite steady, and a fine tremor ran through his hands. He sat down on the running board of the Crime Lab truck and watched. Two plainclothesmen were talking to Dain. Another was sending a report through the radio of one of the cruisers. Thornton listened and watched, feeling lightheaded, wondering if anyone was looking for the escaped truck. The whole thing looked disorganized and mildly ludicrous; but presumably they knew what they were doing.

The investigation dragged on; then abruptly it was over. Angel's body was bundled into an ambulance, the specialists packed away their cameras and measuring tapes, the police cruisers began to leave.

Dain walked over and touched Thornton lightly on the shoulder. "What about a drink?"

"Sure, why not?"

"Do you think you can drive?"

"Of course."

They drove their cars back into Miami and met at a cocktail lounge near Lincoln Road. After a double Scotch, Thornton began to feel almost human again. He was able to study his rescuer with some interest.

Dain appeared to be in his late thirties. Although Thornton's first impression had been of unusual height, he could see now that Dain was not over six feet tall. His tanned leanness made him look taller. He was polite, reserved, low-voiced, and self-contained. There was not much of the gunman visible now; just a little. Enough so that Thornton could sense a detached and cynical toughness in Dain, a go-to-hell quality that was accentuated by his politeness. Thornton thought that he would not like to be an enemy of Mr. Dain; and even a friend might have to be careful.

In spite of his appraisal, he wasn't prepared when Dain said, "Mr. Thornton, I think you should seriously consider withdrawing from this case."

"I beg your pardon?"

"It isn't your sort of work. Why become involved in it any further?"

"I'm investigating on behalf of the Miami-South Corporation," Thornton said automatically.

"To what purpose? This case is being investigated by the police, the insurance people, the district attorney's office, and by at least two branches of the federal government. There are too many fingers in the pot already."

"Our interest should be apparent," Thornton said. "Miami-South is under investigation. Our trading license may be suspended. Under the circumstances, we feel it necessary to carry out our own independent investigation."

"You don't honestly think that your company is going to be accused of a crime it didn't commit?"

"Yes, I honestly do."

Dain frowned, and three vertical lines appeared between his eyebrows. His dark eyes were sad and distant. He lighted a cigarette with slow deliberation, as though it were a movement he had just learned.

"Mr. Thornton, I'm afraid you don't know what you're talking about. You are an amateur in this line of work, and not a particularly gifted one, as far as I've been able to observe. You've already had a very close call. If you persist, you may not be so lucky the next time."

"I suppose I deserve that," Thornton said. "I'm grateful to you for saving my life, Mr. Dain. But I'm not going to take orders from you."

"I'm not trying to order you. I'm simply advising you."

"Believe me," Thornton said, "I realize the dangers of a case like this. But there are many crimes in this country, and amateurs—like newspaper men—sometimes investigate them. Why can't we look at it that way?"

Dain's face took on an expression that might have been surprise. The vertical lines vanished. "Just what is your view of the case?"

"As far as I can see," Thornton said, "several armed men with a truck came to a warehouse owned by my company. They presented a forged dispatch slip and tried to remove a

shipment of agricultural machinery. When they were stopped, they shot to kill."

After a moment, Dain said, "I see." His voice was bleak.

"Is there another view?"

"Another view is, of course, possible."

"What is it?" Thornton asked.

Dain's expression grew peculiarly stony. His eyes went blank and flat. He looked at Thornton as though he had never seen him before.

"I could order you removed from the case," Dain said.

That was too much for Thornton. Events had been accumulating too rapidly for him to assimilate. There had been the long, uncomfortable air trip from Jakarta, via Rome, London, and New York. As soon as he had arrived in Miami, before he had even unpacked, he had been plunged into violence. A girl had smiled and sent him into a trap, and gunmen had hunted him in the dark like a rabbit. Now he was being reprimanded by a cold fish of a government man. On top of it all, his shins ached abominably where he had cracked them in the warehouse.

"Look," Thornton said, in a carefully controlled voice, "to hell with you and your case. You don't have to do any ordering. I'm getting out right now."

Although this presumably was what Dain wanted, he didn't seem happy about it. He asked, "What about Miami-South?"

"To hell with them, too," Thornton said recklessly. "It's about time I moved on."

"Do you move on often?"

"As often as I feel like it. Are there any more questions?"

Dain smiled and shook his head.

"Then good-bye, Mr. Dain. Thank you for saving my life this afternoon. Good luck on your case."

"Good luck to you, Mr. Thornton," Dain said. "Perhaps you've made a wise decision."

That made Thornton feel worse instead of better. He left the cocktail lounge and returned to his hotel. He refused to think. In his room he undressed and got into bed, falling asleep almost instantly.

CHAPTER

6

IN THE MORNING, Thornton had coffee and toast sent up to his room. His best plan, he decided, would be to go to New York after he had announced his resignation to Mr. Ryerson. He had some good contacts in New York. He could relax for a while, see a few shows, take his time about finding a new position. He could even rent a small apartment. It would be pleasant to take his books and records out of storage.

But he knew he wouldn't bother with an apartment. He would stay at a hotel quite similar to this one; he would telephone his contacts. In all likelihood he would be on his way to the Far East again within a month.

This saddened him. He sat on the bed drinking coffee and wondering how many hotel rooms he had seen in the last half-dozen years. How many airline terminals had he sat in, how many bus and train depots? Once travel had been a very great pleasure for him; then the pleasure became business, and now all countries seemed much alike.

The telephone rang, and a nurse at Miami General Hospital told him that Mr. James Hollis would like to see him. Thornton said he would be right over.

Miami General had the hushed air of a museum dedicated to exhibits of human sorrow. The corridors were scrubbed and shining; in them Thornton caught a fleeting glimpse of his own mortality as he went to Hollis's room on the third floor.

"Just stay for a few minutes," the interne at the door told him. "He's still very weak."

Thornton nodded and went in. He saw a young, bleached-out face against the crisp white sheets. When Hollis spoke, it was in a whisper.

"Mr. Thornton? You're Mr. Thornton?"

"That's right. How do you feel, Hollis?"

"I feel pretty good. Mr. Ryerson was in here yesterday evening. He said you were investigating for the company."

Thornton nodded unwillingly.

"I wanted to warn you. They're very dangerous men, Mr. Thornton. You should have seen the way they killed Jim Morrison. It was terrible."

Thornton found even more terrible the thin, flat, whispering voice.

"They used some kind of machine gun on Jim Morrison. It looked like a big rifle, but it operated like a machine gun."

"Sounds like a B.A.R.," Thornton said.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Browning automatic rifle," Thornton said, frowning. He found it difficult to imagine a gangster who would use a weapon as cumbersome and difficult to conceal as the heavy, long-barreled Browning. It was one more of the things about this case which didn't make sense.

Hollis said, "I read where Miami-South is supposed to be involved. That's ridiculous, isn't it?"

"It certainly is."

"Miami-South wouldn't do something like *this*," Hollis said. "I mean, they wouldn't shoot their own employee. And a policeman. Would they, Mr. Thornton?"

"Of course not. Hollis, I think you had better rest now. You're still pretty weak."

"Yes, sir. The real reason I asked you to come, Mr. Thornton, I remembered something. I thought I'd rather tell you first, you being part of the company and all. I don't suppose it's very important."

"Yes?" Thornton said.

"One of those men was wearing a ring. It was a funny sort of ring—a blue and white eagle with three red dots

above its head. Maybe it's some organization or club he belongs to. Maybe you can trace it."

"I'll try," Thornton said. "You rest now."

"The man in the black windbreaker didn't have it," Hollis said, in a voice so low that Thornton had to lean forward to hear. "It was the man called Juan. But the man in the windbreaker is the one you have to watch out for. He fired the machine gun."

Thornton thanked him and left the room. Outside, he asked the interne how Hollis was doing.

"I think he'll be all right," the interne said. "The bullet entered his chest at an angle and came out the side. It missed any vital organs, but the shock and loss of blood . . ."

Thornton thanked him and left the hotel. Back in his hotel room, he threw himself into a chair, propped his feet on a suitcase, and tried to think.

This affair was none of his business. Ryerson could find someone else to carry on the investigation. Hollis had the recourses of a modern hospital at his disposal. And Mr. Stephen Dain obviously needed no man's help.

Then there was Estella. She seemed to be playing some difficult and dangerous game. A beautiful girl. Thanks to her, he had almost been killed.

Thornton lighted a cigarette, smoked it halfway down, and snubbed it out. He began to pace up and down the room. Seeing Hollis hadn't helped. He had to remind himself that his departure was only reasonable under the circumstances. It wasn't a question of running away; it was simply a matter of avoiding trouble which was not his own.

Abruptly he picked up the telephone, asked for Miami International Airport, and made reservations for the first available flight to New York. His plane left at ten minutes after midnight. So that was that. The thing was done.

Not quite. There was still the necessity of calling Ryerson. That wasn't going to be pleasant.

Thornton lighted another cigarette and picked up the telephone. He began to dial Miami-South, then hung up. He paced up and down the room.

New York and another hotel room. Perhaps he would stay at the Statler. No trouble finding a job. Then off again. In London they knew him at the Ritz. In Paris he usually stayed at the Georges Cinq. In Rome, there was another Ritz. Istanbul used to be a problem, but now there was a new Hilton. Wire ahead for reservations. Five pieces of baggage . . .

The telephone rang. He answered it, and an unfamiliar voice asked if he was Mr. Thornton.

"Yes. Who's this?"

"Mr. Thornton, I wondered if we might have a talk soon on a matter of mutual profit."

"Sure. Mutual profit on what?"

"A shipment of agricultural machinery."

"If you want to place an order—"

"No, Mr. Thornton. You know the order to which I refer. I represent a very interested buyer."

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about."

"You disappoint me, Mr. Thornton. Please do not be willfully obtuse. The order number is A-42."

"If you mean the stolen shipment," Thornton said, "it's still stolen."

"Then you have been offered a better price for it? I hope you have not accepted yet."

"You don't seem to understand. A-42 has been stolen. If it hadn't been stolen, it was already sold. I have no idea where it is. Is that clear?"

"Very clear, but extremely unbelievable. Come now, Mr. Thornton, I know. I ask you to reconsider."

"Who is this?"

"We are prepared to pay a premium price in addition to a substantial bonus for you. I'm sure you won't fail us."

"Who the hell is this?" Thornton shouted. "Are you Eberhart?"

"It's been a very great pleasure talking to you," the man said. "We must discuss this again soon."

There was a click, and Thornton put down the receiver. The man had had a faint German accent. That accent restored Thornton's good humor; it was so absurdly sinister. Perhaps

Mr. Eberhart also had a limp and a dueling scar. Thornton hoped so.

He came to no conscious decision. It was impossible to weigh and solve the emotionally charged imponderables represented by Ryerson, Hollis, Estella, and Dain. It was impossible to know what was loyalty to the firm and what was a momentary revulsion at the thought of any more travel. He couldn't even know if he had actually changed his mind, or if he was simply following what now seemed like the path of least resistance.

He picked up the telephone and called Dain at his hotel.

"Mr. Dain? I've decided to stay on this case until such time as Miami-South is shown to be uninvolved."

Dain said, "I'm glad to hear that, Mr. Thornton."

"I don't know if you've told Mr. Ryerson of my decision of last night, but—"

"No, I haven't. I thought you might possibly change your mind."

"I see. Well, I have some information for you."

"Good. I've also discovered a few things which you might find interesting. Would you care to come over here?"

"I'll be right over," Thornton said. Unaccountably, he felt elated. Before he left the hotel, he canceled his flight to New York.

CHAPTER

7

WHEN THORNTON ENTERED, Dain was seated behind a long table. In front of him were papers arranged in neat piles. At one side was a large, black-bound "Shipping Directory for

Southern Ports, Volume Two." On the other side was a folded map of Florida and the Caribbean. A water glass held half a dozen meticulously sharpened pencils, and near it was a container of coffee. Dain had made minor concessions to the stifling September heat. His jacket was off, his tie loosened, and his sleeves were neatly rolled as far as the elbow. At the moment he looked like an unusually punctilious sort of clerk. Thornton found it hard to remember that this was the same Mr. Dain who had recently killed a man from ambush, and done it with a sureness that argued a fair amount of practice.

"Come in and sit down," Dain said. "Would you like some coffee?"

"No, thanks. Am I interrupting you?"

"Not at all. I've just finished putting together some reports."

"Have the police found that truck?"

"Not yet. They're still looking. Mr. Thornton, would you mind telling me why you changed your mind about working on this case?"

Thornton didn't know himself. Certainly it was not for the juvenile thrill of playing cops and robbers, nor even for the pleasure of Stephen Dain's company. He said lightly, "I guess I was sick of moving from one hotel room to another."

"That can be a very potent reason," Dain said. "One gets tired of living out of suitcases."

"That's it exactly."

Dain gave a polite little nod. "I believe you mentioned some information over the telephone?"

Thornton told him what Hollis had said about Juan's ring, and also told him about the telephone call from the presumed Mr. Eberhart. Dain leaned back in his chair, looking at the ceiling with no sign of interest. But he asked Thornton to repeat the description of the ring.

"A blue and white eagle with three red dots above its head. Is it important?"

"Not particularly," Dain said. "But it helps to round out the picture."

"The picture of what?" When Dain didn't answer, Thornton said, "Mr. Dain, I don't think you're being frank with me."

"Perhaps not," Dain said pleasantly.

"Well, I don't like it. I had the impression that we were going to work together on this. I thought we were going to exchange information. I've told you everything I know."

"And you feel that honesty deserves honesty?"

"Of course I do."

"I think you're right," Dain said. "It's a principle I shall certainly bear in mind."

Dain rose from behind the desk. He walked across the room to the bedroom door and opened it. Out of the bedroom walked Estella. Her color was high, and her left arm was bandaged. The look she gave Thornton could be construed, at the very best, as strong dislike.

She said to Dain, "Have you searched him yet? He might very well be armed."

"I don't think that's necessary at the moment," Dain said.

"Now, just a minute," Thornton said. "What is this all about?"

Dain said, "Miss Vargas has the idea that you are an agent in the employ of a foreign power."

It was so ridiculous a statement that Thornton almost laughed out loud. It was really just like a government man to make ghosts out of vapors. Next Dain would be accusing him of being a communist! He must have caught this infection from the pretty but undoubtedly hysterical Miss Vargas.

Dain said, "There is, of course, a certain amount of evidence for Miss Vargas' idea. Perhaps you'd like to hear it?"

"Certainly. I'll be glad to hear anything Miss Vargas dreamed up."

"We might as well start at the beginning," Dain said. "Mr. Thornton—honestly now—do you still maintain that the shipment stolen from your company was nothing more than agricultural machinery?"

CHAPTER

8

"OF COURSE," Thornton replied automatically.

"He's lying," Estella Vargas said. **"Look at his face, you can tell he's lying!"**

"Just a minute," Dain said. **"Let's examine the logic of the thing. Mr. Thornton, you are aware that the Miami police are showing an unusual amount of activity on this crime?"**

"Certainly. It involves murder."

"And you also know that the FBI and the Treasury Department are involved—to an extent which must strike even you as extraordinary."

"I never thought about it," Thornton said. **"I know very little about police methods."**

Estella looked incredulous. She started to say something, but restrained herself.

Dain said, **"Then the involvement of municipal and state police, the FBI, and the Treasury Department, all on a local case of murder, does not strike you as strange?"**

"When you put it that way, of course it seems strange."

"What about the crime itself?" Dain asked. **"Do you see anything unusual in it?"**

"I don't think so," Thornton said. **"A gang entered a warehouse and tried to take away a shipment. When they found a watchman and a policeman going for them, I suppose they lost their heads."** He thought for a moment. **"There have been warehouse robberies before."**

"Of course. But in this particular case, the gang knew the warehouse dispatching methods very well. They were ex-

tremely careful, and they had a great deal of time at their disposal. But even though they had a large truck, they didn't touch any shipment but A-42. In checking the list of goods in the warehouse, I found several shipments more valuable and more readily disposable than agricultural machinery."

"I've thought about that, too," Thornton said. "Perhaps they didn't know about them."

"Many of the shipments were clearly marked as to their contents. In clear view there was a case of typewriters—much more saleable than farm machinery, and much more valuable per pound. Even more valuable than that, and more easily transportable, was a large load of transistor parts. I also noticed diamond-head drills. But according to Hollis, the gang was only interested in a single shipment of almost unsaleable machinery."

"All right," Thornton said, "I agree there's something damned strange about it. If load A-42 didn't contain agricultural machinery, what did it contain?"

"Guns and ammunition!" Estella said. "As you very well know!"

"That's impossible," Thornton said. "In fact, it's ridiculous. We ordered the machinery for Delacourt, a perfectly legitimate buyer. The order was placed with the Boyce-Darwin Company, a firm of nearly a hundred years' standing. The machinery was sent from their Birmingham factory in sealed cases. It was transported to Miami by a bonded trucking service. After that, the—"

Dain said, "I think we know all the stages in the ordering and sending of the goods. Nevertheless, those crates contained weapons of war, exactly like the two previous orders you filled for Delacourt."

"Now, just a moment—"

"We've been tracing down the illegal flow of arms out of the United States for some time," Dain said. "There is no doubt—and no lack of proof—that Miami-South Exports is involved in the trade, either knowingly or unknowingly."

Thornton had the sensation of stepping suddenly into a bad dream. Dain's face was impassive. He had the air of a

man examining a specimen under a microscope. Perhaps he would find a harmless microorganism; perhaps it would be a plague bacillus.

Thornton said, "Assuming that your evidence is correct, it still doesn't mean that Miami-South is involved. We don't open sealed cases. We assume that what we receive is what we order."

"That doesn't seem likely."

"It's true. Besides, if you knew we were handling weapons, why didn't you raid us?"

"The Customs Bureau was planning on seizing this shipment at quayside. They delayed as long as possible in hope of finding the principals. Word must have leaked out. The shipment was stolen in order to prevent its seizure by U.S. Customs."

"I see."

Estella said, "It is very important that those arms do not reach their destination."

"Sure, I can see that," Thornton said. "But would you mind explaining why you're cross-examining me?"

Dain and Estella exchanged looks. Dain said, "I don't want to level any false accusations. But there are things about you which are difficult to explain, Mr. Thornton. Aside from your past record, which perhaps doesn't bear too close an examination, there is the fact that events in Miami have accelerated since you arrived."

Now Thornton felt he had passed from dream into nightmare. "What's wrong with my past record? What on earth are you talking about?"

Estella said, "Will you at least drop that air of outraged innocence? It doesn't suit you, Thornton."

"Either you're hysterical or out of your head, Miss Vargas."

"Am I? Why did the Indonesian authorities find it necessary to arrest you for smuggling guns to the Sumatran rebels in 1958?"

"All foreigners in Sumatra were arrested," Thornton said. "The officials in Jakarta were beyond reason for a while. Aside from gun-running, I was also accused of being a communist, a fascist, a revolutionary, and a Dutch terrorist."

Does your dossier note that I was promptly released?"

"At the request of the State Department," Dain said.

"And that all charges were withdrawn? That I am still allowed to travel in Indonesia?"

"Perfectly true," Dain said. "By itself, the incident is nothing. But then there was your unfortunate association with the Edgar Johnson Traders. Two Johnson officers are at present serving jail sentences for smuggling arms into the Shan States and northern Burma."

Thornton felt his face go hot. He had preferred to forget his short and unhappy association with the Edgar Johnson people.

"I knew nothing of their extra-legal activities. My own work involved only regular trading. Many of the firm's employees had no idea of what was going on—as the investigation has shown."

"That's also true. There is no direct evidence against you, and you have not been subpoenaed in the case. But you do seem to have bad luck, Mr. Thornton. Gun-running goes on all around you."

"That's true of any trader in the Far East," Thornton said. "Or in Africa and South America, for that matter. Everybody knows the trade goes on. But not everybody is involved in it."

"Mr. Eberhart thinks you're involved."

"Mr. Eberhart is wrong."

"When Miss Vargas gave you information relating to the location of the stolen goods, why didn't you communicate that information to the police or to me?"

"I wanted to take a look first. I wanted to see if the goods were actually there."

"You went to the warehouse yourself, even though Miss Vargas asked you to use discretion?"

Thornton said, "I freely admit that I made a damned fool of myself. But you saw what happened. I nearly got killed."

"I saw what looked like a gun battle," Dain said. "It was nicely staged and well executed. For all I know, it may have been real. But the principals were certainly bad shots."

"You think it was faked?" Thornton asked.

"I don't know. I do know that the truckload of weapons is gone again. And I know that since Miss Vargas talked to you, she's been in considerable danger."

"And that's my fault, too?"

"Last night," Dain said, "less than four hours after Miss Vargas talked to you, someone took a shot at her with a silenced rifle. The bullet creased her forearm."

"What is Miss Vargas' part in all this?" Thornton asked.

"She is working for the government of Coruna."

Thornton nodded. Coruna was a small Central American republic sandwiched between Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador. By all accounts it was a pleasant place, and relatively prosperous. An elected government had been in tenuous control for three years, ever since the overthrow of the junta headed by Francisco Rojas. But there had been two abortive revolts in the past six months, and numerous hints of an impending invasion. To Thornton's way of thinking, Coruna needed a reliable army more than it needed an intelligence division.

Dain said, "Miss Vargas was working undercover—until last night."

"Very well," Thornton said. "In my role of master spy, I ordered Miss Vargas murdered. Is there anything else in my dossier?"

"I would like to know," Estella Vargas said, "why you withdrew from the case, then changed your mind and came back in. Were you afraid of detection at first? And then were you offered more money?"

"That's it, of course," Thornton said. "Why don't you have me arrested?"

"Please stay calm, Mr. Thornton," Dain said.

"Why in hell should I? You bring me in here and accuse me of operating a smuggling ring, killing a policeman, wounding a boy, and ordering Miss Vargas murdered. Why don't you simply arrest me and break up the whole operation?"

"No one has spoken of arresting you," Dain said. "Put yourself in my position. I want to stop that shipment from reaching its principals. It's my duty to look at everything

connected with the case. Why shouldn't I look at you?"

"No reason at all. But your accusations—"

"I haven't accused. I have questioned. If I felt you were really involved, I would not have spoken about it. I would have waited, put together my evidence, and at the proper time had you arrested."

Estella said, "Mr. Dain, I don't understand this at all. We don't know who this man is working for, but it seems obvious—"

Dain waved a hand at her. "You mustn't let yourself be carried away, Miss Vargas. I'm glad we've aired the situation. It's good to have these things out in the open, since we'll all be working together."

"Together? Mr. Dain, this is senseless. Thornton is either a criminal or a fool. Either way, he's dangerous to us."

Thornton said tightly, "Miss Vargas, I received no briefing on the real nature of this case, and no advance information. At the time I entered it, I had only been in Miami a few hours, after nearly two years in the Far East. As for working with you, don't give it a thought. You're the last person I'd work with."

Dain leaned back in his chair. He was smiling, though Thornton couldn't imagine what he found amusing. "Now then," he said, "the important thing is to stop that shipment before it reaches its destination. I think we can all agree on that."

Thornton and Estella glowered at him. They seemed united for the moment in a mutual distaste for Mr. Dain.

"So," Dain said, "let's get to work. Miss Vargas, I believe you have some further information to develop?"

Estella nodded unwillingly.

"Thornton and I," Dain said, "have to do some interviewing. Right, Thornton?"

Thornton nodded. It wasn't until later that he realized this was a good way for Dain to keep an eye on him.

CHAPTER

9

THEIR FIRST STOP was the FBI branch office in downtown Miami. They went down a gray corridor to a room in the rear. Dain knocked and went in.

It was a small, sunny office furnished with functional steel furniture and a single leather armchair. A sandy-haired young man sat in the armchair reading a newspaper. He folded it and put it on the desk when Dain came in.

"The prodigal returns," he said, in a smooth, faintly southern voice.

"Hello, Tom," Dain said. "I'd like you to meet Mr. William Thornton. He's working on the warehouse case with me. Thornton, this is Tom Davies."

They shook hands. Davies said, "You're working out of the State Department now, aren't you, Steve?"

"No," Dain said. "The Treasury Department."

"I never can keep up with you," Davies said. He lighted a thin brown cigarillo. "I heard you were down here, but nobody told me in what capacity. They neglect such little details as that."

Dain sat down and clasped his hands behind his neck. He seemed to be dreaming of faraway things.

"Well, now," Davies said, "I suppose you want the data on the stolen machinery."

Dain said, "Mr. Thornton knows that the cases contain arms and machinery."

"I see," Davies said.

"That sums up what Mr. Thornton knows," Dain said.

“Certainly,” Davies said. “Well, now, there’s nothing very new to report. We’ve had no luck trying to pinpoint the truck. Local authorities threw up roadblocks in a twenty-mile circle, but I think they went up too late. Either that, or the truck had another place to hide nearby. Dade County police are still searching the area.”

“Nothing at all on the truck?” Dain asked.

“Nary a thing. It probably has a new paint job by now, and new license plates. In fact, I’ll bet that truck isn’t being used any more. Those cases are probably moving around the state in a hayrick or under a load of vegetables.”

“Is anyone saying anything?”

“Everyone seems to have dried up,” Davies said. “Usually reliable sources either don’t know or won’t tell. This is reasonably big, Steve. About a million dollars’ worth. Maybe they’re frightened.”

Thornton asked, “How are their chances of getting those arms out of the country?”

Both men looked at him with a faint air of surprise. Thornton had the uneasy feeling of intruding upon members of a private club.

“That’s difficult to say,” Davies told him. “Florida is blessed with no less than eighteen deep-water ports ranging from excellent to serviceable. That’s assuming they use a regular port. If they’ve worked out some kind of lighterage to a ship standing offshore, the problem is more difficult. Florida has better than three thousand miles of coastline.”

“Anything else?” Dain asked.

“Yes. The man you shot at the warehouse was Angel Morales. Puerto Rico. He did three years there for armed assault. Before that, he was picked up in New York for marijuana possession, but the charge didn’t stick. We picked up fingerprints on the man called Juan. There’s nothing on him in the files. The one in the black windbreaker is Roger Sticcini. He’s small fry from Tampa. Served eight years for aggravated assault, 1938 to 1945. Indicted for first degree murder in Jacksonville in 1949, but released for lack of evidence. After that, he worked off and on as a foreign mercenary. He was a captain of shock troops under the Jimenez re-

gime in Venezuela. He got out of the country before his own troops got him. He was employed for a while by the Somozas, but they kicked him out of Nicaragua for reasons unknown. There's nothing on him for the last two years. We have no proof as to his present employer."

Davies smiled when he said this; Dain smiled too. The members of the private club were sharing an intramural joke.

Dain asked, "Have you ever heard of a man named Eberhart?"

"No. But I'll run a check through the files. How does he fit in?"

"He doesn't yet," Dain said. "But perhaps he's trying to fit himself in. Thanks, Tom. Give me a ring if you hear anything."

"I'll do that," Davies said. "Nice to have met you, Mr. Thornton."

They returned to Dain's car and drove to the Miami-South office. Ryerson, in his shirtsleeves, looked tired and harassed. He shook hands politely with Dain, but was unable to control a tightening of the mouth.

Dain said, "Mr. Ryerson, I believe there's been some misunderstanding between you and some of the authorities investigating this crime."

"Misunderstanding, hell!" Ryerson said. "You people are trying to suspend my trading license."

"The crime does seem to involve an unusual knowledge of your company's operations. But with your help, I'm sure the whole thing can be cleared up."

"Maybe it can," Ryerson said dubiously.

"I'd like to know whatever you can tell me about the Delacourt Company."

"Nothing much to tell. They came to us about a year ago. They wanted to import various manufactured goods for buyers in the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Venezuela. We investigated and found that their credit rating was good, so we placed orders and shipped goods to them. This would have been the third shipment."

“With what manufacturers were the orders placed?” Dain asked.

Ryerson opened a drawer and took out a pile of papers fastened to a clipboard. “The last one was Boyce-Darwin. Before that, they placed orders for typewriters, office equipment, and diesel parts. Here are the invoices.”

Dain glanced at the pages and nodded. “They did most of their ordering from Boyce-Darwin?”

“That’s right.”

“I see that the previous shipments were sent out on Panama-flag freighters in the ownership of Styvos Mar-rachios. Was there any reason for the exclusive use of this shipping line?”

“The customer had done previous business with Mar-rachios,” Ryerson said. “Anyhow, that wasn’t our concern. Our contracts were f.o.b. the ship and port of his choosing.”

“What port?”

“The customer wanted us to use Port Cocoa, a few miles north of here.”

“Who brought the goods from the factory to your warehouse?”

“They were trucked in by Acme-Central. You can find out more of the specific arrangements from Phil Jackson. Transportation is his department.”

“Could I see him now?” Dain asked.

“He’s in the back of the plant,” Ryerson said.

Jackson was supervising the loading of a shipment of crated refrigerators. He was a sunburned little man with a sharp ferret face and washed-out blue eyes.

“Sure,” he told Dain, “I set up the transportation arrangements from the manufacturer’s plant to the warehouse, and from the warehouse to the ship. That’s my job.”

“Why did you use the Acme-Central truckers?”

“They made the best bid,” Jackson said. “We always use them for hauls out of the Birmingham area. They’re a good outfit. Their rates are reasonable and they stick to their schedules. That’s important in this business.”

“Have you ever used any other truckers in the Birmingham area?”

“We used to use Southeastern Express.”

“Why did you stop using them?”

“We didn’t stop. They withdrew. They decided their Florida routes weren’t profitable any longer.”

“I suppose this was about the time the president of Southeastern was indicted for accepting kickbacks?”

“I suppose it was,” Jackson said. “But that hasn’t anything to do with the company or me. Besides, we’re with Acme now. Are they under investigation?”

Dain smiled but didn’t answer.

Jackson said, “You can look over our records on Acme. Everything’s straight.”

“I’m sure of it,” Dain said. “Is there anything you can tell me about the Marrachios shipping line?”

“It’s a pretty good outfit,” Jackson said. “It was the company of choice for the stolen shipment. The designated freighter was the *Helios* at Pier 2, Port Cocoa.”

“Has the *Helios* arrived yet?”

“Not as far as I know,” Jackson said. “Those little freighters sail in whenever they want to, load some cargo, and sail out. Late arrivals are just out of luck.”

They talked for a few minutes more. Then Dain and Thornton left.

They went to the Federal Building on NE 3rd Street. Upstairs in the Customs Bureau they found John Frederiks, head of the section. He had been waiting for them.

“Well, Dain,” he said, “we damned near had them last week. They were ready to put the cargo on the *Helios*, and we were ready to put the handcuffs on them. Maybe we shouldn’t have waited.”

“It was the best way,” Dain said.

“I know. But now we don’t have anything at all. I’ve got all local customs and harbor officials on the lookout for the *Helios*, just in case. The Coast Guard is cooperating, too. But she hasn’t turned up in Cocoa or anywhere else. No rea-

son why she should. Those arms are probably out of the country by now.”

“What makes you think so?” Dain asked.

“Just an educated guess. Florida has a lot of coastline, and Customs is spread too thin to be effective. We’ve got problems down here unlike any other part of the country. I transferred here two months ago from the Savannah district, and I wish I’d never left.”

On one wall was a map showing Florida and the Caribbean as far south as Costa Rica. Frederiks gestured at it.

“Miami is home port for a very large fleet of yachts. You can cruise out of here and reach half a dozen foreign ports in a few days’ time. The commercial shippers are trouble enough, but the yachts are impossible. You can’t keep track of them, and a lot of them are engaged in smuggling arms, aliens, and dope. It’s a mess. Any time some idiot gets caught smuggling into Cuba or the Dominican Republic, Customs and Coast Guard get blamed.”

“Others also get blamed,” Dain said.

“That’s true enough,” Frederiks admitted. “The CAB gets hauled over the coals because it can’t keep tabs on the destination of every plane that leaves one of Florida’s two hundred airports. But what can we do? A few years ago it was heroin. Now we’re bearing down on the arms trade as hard as we can. But it’s going to take time. I don’t think we’re going to stop this shipment.”

“What would you do,” Dain asked, “if you had those arms? How would you get them out of the country?”

Frederiks thought for a moment. “Well, it’s a big, heavy load so I’d use a freighter if possible. Take too long to transport it in yachts. I’d send it to any port where the heat was off or the fix was in, arrange for a ship to meet me there, and put it on board as legitimate cargo.”

“That’s the way I’d do it, too,” Dain said.

“I’ve taken what precautions I can. All customs officials and harbormasters in the South Florida area have been notified to take a damned careful look at any cargo loaded over the next few weeks. We’re also keeping an eye on the big yachts, and we’re waiting for the *Helios*.”

Thornton said, "Maybe that'll do it."

Frederiks shook his head. "You don't know much about arms smuggling, young man. Just about the only thing that stops a gun-runner is when someone hijacks his goods."

Dain asked, "Have you ever heard of a man named Eberhart?"

"I don't recognize the name. But as I said, I'm pretty new here. If he has anything to do with smuggling," Frederiks added gloomily, "I'll hear about him eventually."

Their next stop was Miami police headquarters. Several men had been taken in for questioning. Thornton watched the lineup, looked at pictures in Records section, and waited while Dain engaged a police lieutenant in an interminable and apparently inconsequential conversation. Finally they left the station and returned to Dain's car.

"Nearly four o'clock," Dain said, glancing at his watch. "That should be enough for a few hours."

Thornton felt utterly weary, sweat-drenched and singed by the sun. He noticed with annoyance that Dain still looked cool and competent.

"Just what have we accomplished by all this running around?" Thornton asked.

"Pressure."

"Eh?"

"We want to precipitate action on the part of the people involved in the crime," Dain said. "At present, we have the wholehearted cooperation of many local and federal agencies. But they have other work to do. There are, or will shortly be, other robberies and other murders. As the days pass, their cooperation will of necessity become less wholehearted. So we have to act now—or force action on the part of others."

"I see," Thornton said slowly. "Was that why you threw all that stuff at me about my possible criminal activities? Were you hoping for something to happen?"

Dain smiled. "The possibilities concerning you were real."

Thornton thought about that. "And why are you taking me around now? So that the people involved will think I know more than I do?"

"I suppose that possibility might occur to them."

"Maybe they'll take a shot at me."

Dain shrugged his shoulders. Apparently he didn't care who shot at whom, as long as things started rolling.

"It's a nice system, Mr. Dain," Thornton said. "Nobody knows where anyone else stands. You generate a nice atmosphere of mutual suspicion."

"I wouldn't worry too much about Miss Vargas," Dain said.

"What makes you think . . . To hell with it," Thornton said. "I'm going to my hotel for a shower."

"Good idea. We have a full evening ahead of us."

"More action precipitation?"

"Perhaps," Dain said. "In any event, I can promise you a good dinner."

"Are we going to put pressure on the head waiter?"

Dain grinned suddenly. **"No. But I'll introduce you to a very interesting man."**

"I don't want to meet an interesting man."

"You should," Dain told him. "It'll help to round out your education. Anyway, I do promise you an excellent dinner."

"At whose expense?"

"The interesting man will probably pay," Dain said. "If not, I'll put it on the expense account."

"Do you always treat your suspects so well?" Thornton asked.

"Always," Dain assured him, "as long as it's at government expense."

Thornton was too tired to argue. Dain drove him to his hotel and promised to pick him up at eight o'clock in the evening.

CHAPTER

10

THE CLERK told Thornton there had been four telephone calls for him during the day, all from the same man. The caller had not left his name. There were also two letters. Thornton took them up to his room.

One was from Doris, his married sister in Waterbury. It was a chatty letter filled with anecdotes about her husband and children, a report on his uncle's health, news and gossip of his friends. Had he known that Bobby Reins was getting married to the Branch girl? That Dan Macdonald, his old high school chum, had become engaged to a girl from Radcliffe? Had he heard that Elliot Eiger had made what looked like a very successful and happy second marriage? (So you see, Bill, it can be done!)

Her concern for him was almost tangible. It rose from the heavy, pale stationery, from the slanting black lines. Since their mother's death, Doris had taken on the task of worrying about him; it was a privilege which could not be denied her.

The other letter was from Paul Lansing, a friend of his at Carlisle Traders in San Francisco. Thornton decided to read it after his shower.

Thoroughly scrubbed and shaved, he felt almost like a new man. He found a fresh shirt and suit, and sat down to read Paul's letter.

He had met Paul Lansing in India. For a week they had shared a cottage on the outskirts of Baroda, until Paul's work took him north into Pakistan. Now, back at the home of-

face, Paul wrote an informal but not quite casual account of conditions on the West Coast trading scene. Of course he had heard about Miami-South's trouble; news got around fast in trading circles. He commiserated. But he pointed out the present uncertainties of Caribbean trading. Tariffs and quotas shifted from day to day, you never could tell who was going to stay in power or for how long, you couldn't even know when your assets might be seized and nationalized.

The letter ended with a definite job offer. Thornton could fly out to San Francisco at the expense of Carlisle Traders, look over the operation, talk with the district managers, see what he thought. No obligation. However, Lansing pointed out, Carlisle was a good big outfit, well capitalized, badly in need of first-rate men for the Far East.

Thornton put down the letter. He reminded himself again of how little he really owed to Miami-South. He could withdraw from the case. He could say good-bye to Dain's machinations, Estella's suspicions, Ryerson's fears. He could pack his suitcases and start again in California.

The thought filled him with no enthusiasm. He had started again too often. The offer was certainly worth considering; but it could wait.

The telephone rang, and Thornton answered it. On his fifth try, the caller had found him in.

"Mr. Thornton?"

"Yes. I suppose this is Mr. Eberhart."

There was a long pause. Then the caller said, "Yes, it is. Mr. Thornton, have you reconsidered?"

"There's nothing to reconsider."

"If it is a question of price—"

"It is not," Thornton said. "Look, Eberhart, I can't sell you any arms because I don't have any arms to sell. Can't you understand that?"

He might have been talking to a block of wood. "Mr. Thornton, I must have those arms. It is imperative. Name your own terms."

"Damn it, I can't name terms! I don't have the arms! I don't know where they are!"

“Then you refuse,” Mr. Eberhart said. “I am afraid you put yourself into danger, Mr. Thornton.”

There was a click. Eberhart had hung up.

Promptly at eight o'clock, Thornton was in front of the hotel. Dain was equally prompt. They drove up Biscayne Boulevard to the 79th Street Causeway. Thornton told Dain about the call from Eberhart, and the man's refusal to believe that he didn't know where the arms were hidden.

“Many criminals have one-track minds,” Dain said. “Eberhart knows that you went to the warehouse where the arms were originally hidden. He knows about your past, which has sometimes been tangential to gun-running. And he knows I've been keeping you with me. For him, that must all add up to a certainty.”

“He threatened me.”

“You'll have to be careful,” Dain said. He might have been talking about crossing a street in heavy traffic.

Their destination was a restaurant called the Spanish Oak, on Collins Road near Surfside. Situated between the Arabian Nights Motel and the Old Tapestry House, the restaurant did its best to live up to the splendor of its surroundings. Its lower half, bathed in floodlights, resembled a hacienda. Its upper sections blossomed into gothic battlements and slitted casements of imitation stone. From its highest pinnacles, banners of indeterminate description creaked in the ocean breeze.

Dain and Thornton entered the patio, where a mustached head waiter in a red sash led them to the main dining room. They were given a table and handed menus the size of large briefcases. As Thornton had often observed, the price of the dinner rose in direct proportion to the size of the menu.

A balding, plum-shaped man in a tuxedo was approaching their table, smiling, his hand held out.

“My dear Mr. Dain! I am so happy you could come to my restaurant.”

“The pleasure is all mine,” Dain said warmly. He shook hands with the plum-shaped man, grinning with evident af-

fection. "General Mendoza, allow me to introduce Mr. William Thornton."

Thornton shook Mendoza's small, hard, well-manicured hand.

"Perhaps," Dain said, "the General would join us in a glass of wine?"

"I would be delighted," Mendoza said, sitting down. "But it is no longer general. Now I am just plain Mister Mendoza. As you know, Mr. Dain, the arts of war are far behind me. Now my only desire is to run a satisfactory restaurant in this beautiful city."

There were two waiters at Mendoza's shoulder, and they were joined almost immediately by the wine steward, a mournful old man dressed in black and wearing the chain and key of his office.

"What shall we have for this very special occasion?" Mendoza asked. "Champagne? Mr. Dain, Mr. Thornton, does that seem suitable?"

Thornton nodded. Dain said, "It was cognac when we last ate together, General."

"I remember. And the wine glass broke in your hand. Eh? Do you still have the scar?"

Dain pushed back his sleeve. On the inside of his wide, flat wrist was a hairline scar, almost faded.

"How quickly old wounds can vanish!" said the general. "Soon you will have nothing by which to remember me."

"I'll always remember you," Dain said, "with or without the scar. Men of your calibre are rare in this world."

"You overwhelm me," said the general. "Truly you do. But then, you were always a generous man."

Thornton listened impatiently to the flood of Latin compliments. He had the sensation of listening to language which he could almost but not quite understand. He was beginning to get irritated. Except for himself, everybody in this case seemed to know everybody else.

"And Mr. Thornton," Mendoza said. "He is an associate of yours?"

"In a manner of speaking," Dain said.

Mendoza found that very amusing. He said to Thornton, "Watch out for him! It is always 'in a manner of speaking' with our Mr. Dain. He is elusive—in a manner of speaking!"

Thornton smiled politely, although he had very little idea of what the general was talking about.

"Yes," Mendoza said to him, "you must not be taken in by our good gray Mr. Dain. There is nothing he loves better than the Anglo-Saxon pose of quietness, gentility, caution. But beneath that unprepossessing exterior dwells a truly Latin sense of flamboyance. Have you noticed it yet, Mr. Thornton? Have you noticed that Mr. Dain does his work—whatever that work may be—with an unmistakable style, a flair, a sweep?"

"Your own style is equally unmistakable, General," Dain said.

"Ah," Mendoza said with mock sorrow, "I am a man of entirely too many words. But what can one expect of an expatriate no longer young? What can one expect of the voluble Latin mentality? And when deeds are no longer possible, what is left but words?"

Mendoza was certainly a man of many words; but his small, unblinking cat's eyes didn't participate in the easy flow of speech. In evening clothes, even with his plum shape, he conveyed a military bearing. Thornton had the impression that Mendoza took a delight in appearing absurd. He cultivated his buffoonery as Dain did his circumspection.

After the wine, Mendoza asked permission to order dinner for them. He continued talking to Dain. Thornton got the impression that the two men had been close friends in South America some years back.

"And now you are in Miami!" Mendoza said. "Is it possible to hope that you will enjoy a long stay?"

"That depends," Dain said. "It is possible that my business will be quickly completed. In that case, I shall have to leave."

"That would be a pity. I have not even had a chance to show you my house. It is a comfortable house."

"I'm sure it is," Dain said. "I would like to see it some day."

"You and your friend would be most welcome. Any time the demands of the Central Intelligence Agency leave you the time . . ."

"My present employer is the Treasury Department," Dain said.

"Of course. I had forgotten how restless you are."

"We are similar in that respect."

Mendoza laughed loudly. "I am restless no longer. Believe me, Mr. Dain, the deeds of my youth might have been performed by an entirely different person. War and conquest are illusory; what counts is serenity of mind. I have applied for American citizenship."

"I know," Dain said.

"My only desire is to remain here, to run my little restaurant in peace. Restlessness is a disease which age cures."

"I never expected to hear you say that, General," Dain said. "When I think of you some few years ago—"

"Those were troubled times," Mendoza said hastily. "I am glad to have those years behind me."

At the end of the meal Dain and Thornton rose to go. Dain reached into his breast pocket for his wallet, but Mendoza put out a hand.

"No, Mr. Dain. Let this be my pleasure."

"Thank you, General, but I insist."

"I refuse," Mendoza said. "You paid the last time. In Caracas. Do you remember?"

Dain smiled and nodded.

"This time," Mendoza said, "the pleasure must be mine."

CHAPTER

11

“WHAT did you think of him?” Dain asked as they drove back to Thornton’s hotel.

“I hardly know what to think,” Thornton said. He paused for a moment. “He talks a great deal.”

“He was nervous.”

“And he seems to know you very well.”

“I suppose he does—in a manner of speaking.”

“A manner of speaking! Our good gray Mr. Dain! Was he actually a general?”

“Oh, yes. He was an important man under Perez Jimenez in Venezuela. He commanded one of the few armies which didn’t break at once under rebel attack. After the fight became hopeless, his retreat from Caracas to Baranquilla was quite impressive. With two more generals like him, Jimenez might still be in power.”

Dain was silent for a moment as he swung the car onto the 79th Street Causeway. “Before Venezuela, Mendoza had a fairly interesting career. He was a chief of secret police under the Stroessner regime in Paraguay, until the ’48 disturbances. Stroessner conceived the idea that Mendoza was impartially supporting both sides, so Mendoza crossed the border to Bolivia. He took a good portion of El Banco de Paraguay with him. In Bolivia, he was very popular for a while. He sold information about Paraguay’s military dispositions. The Bolivians were eager to learn; they still remember the Chaco War. Then Mendoza left Bolivia in a hurry.”

“Why?”

“It turned out his information wasn’t accurate.”

“Is Mendoza important in this case?”

“I would be very surprised if he weren’t.”

“But what makes you think so? Is there any evidence pointing to him?”

“Above a certain level,” Dain said, “no direct evidence is needed to imply involvement; proximity is enough. When you start to deal with Caribbean arms shipments, there are only a few men at the top directing the traffic. Since Mendoza is in Miami, we’ll assume he’s in charge until it’s been proven otherwise.”

Thornton was a little disappointed. He had imagined a trail of suspects leading to an unexpected Mr. X. But here Dain had gone and put his finger on the man without any supporting evidence at all! Still, when he thought about it, it was logical that the principals of one power should know the principals of another. Proof was another matter; but the head of an important criminal enterprise could no more stay anonymous than the head of a state.

They had reached Thornton’s hotel. As Dain brought the car to the curb, Thornton said, “I suppose our visit to Mendoza increases the pressure.”

“I hope so,” Dain said. “I think your appearance with me piqued the general’s curiosity. He must wonder what you have to do with the case.”

“He can find out easily enough that I’m employed by Miami-South.”

“He probably knows that already, but I doubt if he believes it. To Mendoza, you’re an unknown factor in the equation. That must worry him.”

“Don’t people try to remove unknown factors from equations?”

“They do.”

“So what next?”

“We’ll just wait and see what happens,” Dain said. “I’ll give you a call tomorrow.”

There were no messages for Thornton at the desk. The

clerk gave him his key, and he took the self-service elevator to the tenth floor. He unlocked the door, stepped inside, and turned on the light switch.

The lights didn't go on. Someone standing behind the door pushed it violently shut. Thornton heard a grunt, and moved away just before something heavy and hard crashed into the wall where he had been standing.

The room was absolutely black; apparently the curtains had been drawn. Thornton could smell perspiration and garlic. Someone was moving toward him in the darkness. Thornton lashed out, and his fist glanced off a man's shoulder. He swung again and missed. A blow caught him in the ribs, driving him against the wall. Still unable to see anything, he steadied himself and lashed out again. This time his fist hit something hard and curved, and a flash of pain went up his wrist. He had hit the crouching man on the top of the head. He swung lower, hitting the man in the chest. Setting himself, he drew back for a blow at the man's stomach.

He heard the whisper of footsteps behind him. He tried to turn, but something exploded across the back of his skull. He seemed to be floating in the air; and then there was no feeling at all.

When Thornton recovered consciousness, he was lying on the floor of his room. The lights were on. Someone had put a pillow under his head, and had thrown a blanket across his legs. Very nice of someone, he thought. He tried to sit up, then decided not to. The room was slipping out of focus.

When it came back into focus, Thornton saw that Estella Vargas was kneeling on the floor beside him. She removed a wet washcloth from his head and put on another. She put the first washcloth into a basin beside her and looked at him anxiously.

"Are you able to talk?" she asked him. "I hope you don't have a concussion."

"No, I don't think it's a concussion," Thornton said. He sat up, feeling weak and ill-tempered. His scalp felt as though someone had shrunk it in the sun for several days. On the back

of his head was a large and very sensitive bump. It felt about the size of a billiard ball.

"Who hit me?"

"I don't know," Estella said. "When I came into your room, you were lying on the floor unconscious. Your room had been searched."

Moving his head cautiously, Thornton looked around. Drawers were hanging open. His suitcases had been emptied onto the floor, and the linings were slashed. Even the mattress of his bed had been cut open.

"The manager should love me for this," Thornton said. He began to stand up, then decided it was unnecessary and sat down again. He touched the back of his head gingerly.

"Does it hurt very badly?" Estella asked.

"It'll do. Miss Vargas, did you see the men?"

She shook her head. "When I came into your room, the lights were out and the switch wouldn't work. I had a little flashlight in my purse, so I looked around. I found that the fuse had been unscrewed. You were lying on the floor, moaning."

"A beautiful picture," Thornton said. "Well, Miss Vargas, it should be obvious to you that those men knocked me out and searched my room as part of an elaborate cover-up."

"Please, Mr. Thornton—"

"Or possibly there were no men. In which case I tore up the room and then knocked myself out. Which theory do you prefer?"

"Believe me," Estella said, "I'm very sorry I suspected you. I should have accepted Mr. Dain's opinion. I'm sorry if I have said anything insulting."

"Forget it," Thornton said. Upon experimenting, he found that he could sit in a chair with very little agony. A thought occurred to him.

"Miss Vargas, you couldn't have received any answer when you telephoned up here from the desk."

Estella's pale olive skin showed the faintest sign of a blush. "Well, to tell you the truth, I didn't telephone. I just came up."

“Really? And did you find the door open?”

“No, it was closed. I knocked, but you didn’t answer. So I—I—”

“You decided to come in anyhow. How did you manage that without a key?”

“Hotel room doors are quite easy to open,” Estella said. She looked extremely uncomfortable.

“You came here to search my room, didn’t you?”

“I suppose I did. But I really had no idea then—”

“I’m sure you didn’t,” Thornton said. He walked over to the closet and looked at his clothes. They looked as though a vicious child had attacked them with a razor.

“Did you search the room?” he asked.

“Yes. I thought the men might have left something. Some evidence.”

“That sounds good.”

“It’s true. Mr. Thornton, there was genuine reason to suspect you. Perhaps Mr. Dain thought you were all right, but I am entitled to my own opinions. I am not working for Mr. Dain; he and I are cooperating on this particular case. I know he is trying his best to stop that arms shipment from reaching its destination. But he can’t have the same degree of involvement I have.”

“Why not?”

“Because the weapons won’t be used against his country,” Estella said. “They will be used against mine.”

CHAPTER

12

THORNTON LOOKED around the shambles of his room. Two tropical silk suits and one new dacron suit had been slashed

up. He wondered who would pay for them. And who would repay the hotel for the damage to their room? The ache in his head had subsided enough for him to feel the bruises on his ribs. Morosely he watched Estella pick her way through the debris, straightening up. At the moment, Thornton found it difficult to care whose country was going to be invaded.

“What do you think they were looking for?” he asked.

“Credentials of some sort. They probably wanted to know who you were really working for.”

“Was that what you were looking for too?”

“Mr. Thornton, I have already explained—”

“Skip it,” Thornton said. “And will you please stop calling me Mr. Thornton? I think our acquaintance, such as it is, has progressed far enough for you to call me Bill.”

“All right,” Estella said. “I think we should notify Mr. Dain of this immediately.”

Thornton nodded. He said hopefully, “Maybe they searched his room, too. Would you mind dialing for me, Estella?”

It was three-twenty in the morning, but Dain answered the telephone in his usual brisk manner. He didn't sound surprised at the events of the evening. In fact, he seemed pleased.

“It's all to the good,” he said. “It means they're getting nervous. Searching your room was a mistake. They'll probably make more.”

“I just hope they choose someone else to make them on,” Thornton said.

“You made a mistake, too,” Dain told him. “When the lights didn't go on, you should have gotten out immediately.”

Undoubtedly that was the first thing Mr. Dain would have done; but not everyone reacted like a combat platoon leader. Thornton didn't bother to answer.

“In the meantime,” Dain told him, “we have a few more items of interest. This evening the county police found the truck which was probably used in the robbery. It had been abandoned on Route One about ten miles from Fort Lauderdale.”

"I don't suppose the cases were still on it?"

"Of course not. Still, it's something. And we have a late report from Customs about a ship putting into Port Cocoa for repairs late yesterday, then sailing out without waiting for the supplies she had ordered. It's worth looking into. Can you be ready for a drive at seven o'clock this morning?"

Thornton said he would be ready. And by seven-thirty, he and Dain were on Route A1A, speeding north out of Golden Beach toward Port Cocoa.

The sun had begun to take on heat when they passed the small group of stores surrounding the port area. Nothing was open, and Thornton remembered that this was Sunday. They drove past stunted pine trees, down a high-crowned tar road to the docks. Port Cocoa's narrow harbor was devoted mostly to pleasure-boat moorings. At one side was a long T-dock, and near it was an ancient crane.

The harbormaster's office was on the second floor of an old frame warehouse near the dock. They knocked, and a gruff voice told them to come in.

The harbormaster's name was George Clarris. He was a paunchy, red-faced man in his fifties, dressed in grease-stained khakis and smelling of stale beer. The walls of his office were covered with inept seascapes. More canvases were piled on the chairs, and a partially completed watercolor of the harbor at sunset stood on an easel.

"Let me push a couple of these paintings out of the way and give you sitting room," Clarris said. He cleared a space for them on rickety folding chairs.

Dain said, "You reported that a ship put in here yesterday for repairs. We'd like to hear about it."

"Right," Clarris said. "I've got all the dope here in my logbook."

He took a plastic-covered notebook out of his desk and flipped through the pages. "Here it is. Little coaster named Trenton, about five hundred tons, came in flying an emergency flag. She dropped an anchor, and her engineer rowed ashore and told me they'd had an explosion on the bridge and lost a part of their loran. They were in the Gulf Stream when it happened, and they went into the first navigable

port. Wanted to know if I could get them replacement parts."

"Could you?" Dain asked.

"Sure. I also run a hardware store here in town. But naturally I didn't have ship loran parts in stock, so I drove down to Miami for them."

Thornton asked, "Why didn't the *Trenton* steam another hour and go into Miami herself?"

"They saved time this way," Clarris said. "Miami's busy this season. Assigned lanes, assigned berths. They might have spent the better part of a day just looking for a place to park the ship while the engineer went ashore for the loran. It's different here. We don't have much big-ship business."

"It all seems natural enough so far," Dain said. "What happened then?"

"The *Trenton* didn't stay around to pick up her loran parts. She steamed out before I got back."

Dain nodded encouragingly.

"That was one thing," Clarris said. "Come on down to the dock and I'll show you another."

At the far end of the dock, Clarris pointed to fresh skid-marks in the blackened wood. Near them, a small loading cart still oozed black grease. A small, very old man in white ducks and a skipper's cap sat near the crane. He was as thin and dry as a stick, and he had a lizard's alert eyes.

"You showing 'em, George?" he asked.

"I'm showing them," Clarris said. "Tell them what you saw, Ted."

"Well, sir," Ted said, "no sooner did George light out for Miami than those fellers warped their ship further inshore. Another bunch of fellers came down to the dock in a cream-colored panel truck, and they started loading cargo."

"What did you do?" Dain asked.

"Didn't do a thing," Ted said. "It seemed a little funny that they was loading after George had left, but what the hell, some of these ship skippers are a funny lot. I just went on fishing. They got through loading, warped out again, and left. I waited until George got back and told him about it."

"Did you see what they were loading?"

"Big packing cases. Must have been nine or ten of them."

"Did the cases have any markings?"

"Nope. They was all painted black. From the sound of the winches, I figure those cases were pretty heavy."

"Please go on," Dain said.

"There's nothing more to tell. I'm not the only one who saw it. Young Tom Baker saw it, too. He was sailing his *Thistle* around the harbor. Probably a couple more people saw it. Anyhow, I waited until George got back and told him. George was mighty upset."

"You're darned right I was," Clarris said. "No ship has any right to load or unload here without my okay. We're a small port, but we're properly run. What they did was out of order. I mean without papers, bills of lading, inspection, all that sort of thing. I tried to think why they didn't wait for those loran parts. The more I thought about it, the more something bothered me about that ship."

Clarris paused for dramatic effect. He said, "Now I'm no great hand at identifying ships. If it's sailing craft, that's another thing. But ships—well, all ships look about the same to me. Still, something about that ship reminded me of something. So I looked in my logbook to see if the *Trenton* had stopped in here before. She hadn't. But damned if her identifying marks weren't the same as for the *Helios*."

"I told you it was the same ship!" Ted said. "I told you!"

"At first I thought the old man'd had a little too much sun," Clarris said. "I couldn't figure what the *Helios* would be doing, coming into this harbor under another name and another flag. Then I remembered the announcement Customs had sent out about *Helios*, and I called you people up."

"Weren't you able to recognize a ship you'd had before in the harbor?" Dain asked.

Clarris shrugged his shoulders. "Like I said, all these little coastal tramps look about the same. I'd know the captain by sight, and the first mate. But they didn't come ashore."

"When was the *Helios* in here last?" Dain asked.

"About two months ago. She was taking on a load of cement and mixed goods."

"Who was the exporter?"

"Miami-South," Clarris said. "It's all down in the log. You can find the same info at the main customs house in Miami."

"Do any other ships make regular stops here?"

"Not in the last couple years," Clarris said. "Ten or twelve years ago we had a pretty good little business exporting citrus fruits. But it's fallen away these days. Miami's too close to the south, and there's Port Everglades and Palm Beach to the north. They've got better harbors and facilities than we've got."

"If that's the case," Dain said, "do you have any idea why Miami-South continued to send a portion of its cargoes through your port?"

"Now, just a minute," Thornton said. "Miami-South had no choice in the matter. We agreed to deliver the goods from the manufacturer to the port and the ship of the importer's choice. It's no concern of ours if he chose Port Cocoa."

"There's nothing wrong with this port," Clarris said with some heat. "In fact, we have certain advantages for smaller ships. Our dock and loading charges are lower than either Miami or Palm Beach. We have no labor problem, no pilotage fees, no thefts. For an outfit operating on a limited budget, we're a damned good port."

"Right you are," Ted said gleefully. "Give 'em hell, George."

"Well, it's true," Clarris said. "You can check the comparative figures and see for yourself. It's what I told Mr. Ryerson when he was thinking of switching the Delacourt business to Miami."

Thornton said, "Now, wait a minute—"

"I know, I know," Clarris said. "The foreign importer, not the exporter, chooses the port for F.O.B. deliveries. But let's face facts. The exporter is the man on the scene. He knows the local port costs, the warehouse facilities, the

scheduling. His advice on the selection of a port is going to be listened to.”

“Are you implying,” Thornton asked, “that Mr. Ryerson selected this port?”

“I’m not implying a damned thing,” Clarris said. “I’m just telling you that I had a talk with Mr. Ryerson about the facilities at Port Cocoa. If that means he had the choice of port, well, I can’t help that.”

Dain stopped Thornton from further comment. He said, “Did the *Trenton* give her next destination?”

“No, she didn’t.”

“Where did the *Helios* usually go from here?”

“That’d depend on her cargo. Sometimes she’d put in an Nassau, sometimes at Havana. After that, she’d stop at Santa Catarina and Ciudad Trujillo, then come around to Jamaica and up Central America on her trip back. Say, mister, what was in those cases?”

Dain pursed his lips judiciously. The three vertical lines appeared in his forehead. “Dutiable goods,” he said.

CHAPTER

13

“WHAT NOW?” Thornton asked as they walked back to Dain’s car.

“Now it becomes a problem,” Dain said. He walked with his hands in his pockets and his head bent. He seemed tired and depressed.

“Can’t the Coast Guard intercept the *Helios*?”

“It’s had time to get beyond the coastal waters of the United States. Even if we knew where it was, I’d need ap-

proval from the State Department to order a foreign-flag ship stopped at sea. By the time I got the approval, assuming I got it, the *Helios* wouldn't be there any longer. Everything is moving a little too fast for us, Thornton. The arms are still one big jump ahead."

"Can you tell me now who bought them?"

"To the best of my knowledge," Dain said, "this shipment was ordered from the Dominican Republic."

They had reached the car. Dain backed it around and came onto the narrow tar road.

Thornton asked, "This isn't the first shipment of arms to be smuggled there, is it?"

"Of course not."

"Then is it really so crucial to intercept it now that it's left the United States?"

"Yes."

"I'm afraid I don't see why."

"Because this is the final shipment. This is the big one."

Thornton said, "I can understand the need to stop more arms from getting into the Caribbean area. It seems clear that we're doing everything in our power to prevent it. But we can't stop the Dominican Republic from ordering its weapons from Britain or West Germany, or even Czechoslovakia, can we?"

"Not really."

"Then why don't they?"

"Because it isn't that simple. Their previous shipments have been from the United States. That means they have Garands, Brownings, and Thompsons, which can't use Czech or Belgian ammunition. The Dominicans don't want to re-arm with Brens and Skodas, since they already have a stockpile of 30-calibre ammunition. The bullets must fit their guns, and the guns they buy must be the right calibre for their bullets. But even if the Dominicans wanted to buy different calibre guns and ammunition from Europe, they still couldn't get those weapons *right now*, when they need them. Agents must be sent over, the deal has to be arranged, credit and shipments must be verified. All of that takes time, and they don't have much time."

Dain drove in silence for a few moments. Then he asked, "Thornton, have you ever heard of the Blue Division?"

"I don't think so. Is it important?"

"It's crucial."

Far down the road, almost blending in with the sand dunes on either side, Thornton saw a cream-colored vehicle approaching them. As the distance closed he could see that it was a truck, traveling at considerable speed, straddling the middle of the narrow road.

"Dain—"

"Yes, I see it," Dain said. "Brace yourself. I think they're going to ram us."

Thornton put both hands against the front panel. With a horrified fascination he saw that Dain had also moved to the center of the road. The two vehicles were coming head-on. Thornton could see the truck's high bumpers glinting in the morning sun like dragon's teeth. It was a small truck; but it looked solid enough to smash through them and keep on going.

If Thornton had been driving he would have jammed on the brakes instantly, hoping to turn a major crash into a minor collision. But Dain didn't react that way. Insanely, he had the accelerator on the floor. His face was hard and set, the eyebrows knit, the lips compressed into a slight smile. He seemed to be enjoying himself. The speedometer crept past sixty.

To their right, the dune dissolved into a wide, shallow ditch with cyprus and pine woods beyond it. To their left, the face of the dune rose high and smooth. Thornton decided that Dain had lost his mind. Despairingly he thought of grabbing the wheel before the inevitable collision. Inertia held him. He braced himself for the crash.

Dain swerved the speeding car slightly to the right, toward the ditch and the pine woods. The truck swerved to follow the movement. Just before the vehicles came together, Dain cut the wheel sharply to the left. Thornton had an impression of steel fangs trying to snap shut on the car's exposed flank. Then they were past the truck, riding at a sickening angle across the crumbling face of the dune. Thornton had to grab

the door handle to keep from falling against Dain. He heard the car's tires shrieking against the sand, felt the car lurch. Then they were off the dune and bouncing wildly across the road. A front tire blew out.

By the time Dain had wrestled the car to a standstill, the truck had vanished down the road.

They changed the tire together. Dain had the pleased expression of a man who has neatly solved a problem in the calculus of motion. They drove into Miami at a leisurely pace. When Thornton lighted a cigarette, he noticed with annoyance that his hand was not quite steady. With even more annoyance he observed the composure of Dain's face. The near collision had shaken him out of his depression. By the time they reached the 79th Street Causeway, Dain was humming very softly under his breath.

"Do you mind my asking what in hell you're singing about?"

"I was thinking about that truck. It changes the picture, you know."

"We were damn near killed."

"No, we weren't," Dain said. "I could have gone off either side of the road. Actually, it was a clumsy and desperate attempt on their part, with very little chance of success."

Thornton, remembering the truck's steel fangs snapping at the car's side, couldn't agree. "Successful or not, they tried. I suppose they'll try again."

"It seems entirely possible. In any case, the situation is altered."

"Why?"

"The shipment," Dain said, "is already out of the United States. Since we have been attacked after its successful smuggling, we can assume that it's still in our reach. Otherwise, why would they bother with us now?"

"Maybe they just don't like us."

Dain shook his head. "It doesn't work that way. They want us out of the picture because it must still be possible for us to recover the arms."

"If they killed you, wouldn't another agent take your place?"

"Certainly. But there would be a loss of time and continuity."

"All right," Thornton said. "If I understand this right, the arms are on a ship which is outside the territorial limits of the United States. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Then I don't see how we can stop them. All they have to do is land the stuff in the Dominican Republic."

"The arms will not be landed in the Dominican Republic," Dain said. "I don't know where they'll go, but they definitely won't go there."

"Weren't the arms ordered from Ciudad Trujillo?"

"I believe so."

"Then why shouldn't they be put ashore in the country that ordered them?"

"To understand that," Dain said, "you would have to know something about Caribbean politics; and of course, you would have to know about the Blue Division."

Dain was silent for a few moments as he maneuvered into a parking place near his hotel.

"I have to make a few phone calls," he told Thornton. "And I think we should bring Miss Vargas up to date. After that, I'll be happy to tell you about the Blue Division."

They left the car and went into Dain's hotel. Thornton thought about what the harbormaster at Port Cocoa had said. For the first time, he was beginning to wonder if Miami-South was involved in gun-running.

CHAPTER

14

IN THE PRIVACY of a telephone booth, Stephen Dain made a long-distance call to a Washington, D.C., number. While the call was being put through, he hummed softly to himself and lighted a cigarette. The operator got the number for him, and Dain asked for an extension.

A secretary answered. "Mr. Beader's office."

"This is Mr. Dain. Is your boss around, honey?"

"I'll see if he's in, Mr. Dain." There was a perceptible chill to her voice. Dain grinned and waited. In a few seconds a man's cautious voice was saying, "How are you, Steve?"

"I'm just fine, Harvey. You?"

"Oh, I'm fine."

"Wife and children well?"

"Yes, quite well." The caution was more marked; when Dain began asking personal questions he had to be wary.

"What can I do for you?"

"Well, Harvey, I have a little favor to ask you."

"Certainly, Steve. Anything my department can do—"

"Unofficially."

"Now, Steve, I told you last time—"

"Harvey, all I want is a look at certain papers in your possession. Income tax statements for a Mr. George Clarris of Port Cocoa, Florida, Mr. Joseph Ryerson of Miami, Mr. Edward Jackson of Miami, Mr. William Thornton of Miami. Statements for the last three years should do, plus any other pertinent financial information. Also, I'd like to see the incorporation papers for the Miami-South Corporation, and

any papers you have on Arturo Delacourt, Sociedad Anonimo, main office in Mexico City, branch office in Miami. Also a list of the controlling stockholders for those two firms. Have you got all that?"

"I've got it," Beader said. "But you can't have it."

"Harvey, don't be obstructive."

"Damn it all, Dain, you know you aren't authorized to see income tax statements. You've got a helluva nerve even asking me. There are channels you must go through." His words had a droning ritual sound; he was a priest of the bureaucracy, guarding his holy of holies, an austere bank of gray files. "I did it for you once on that deportation case, but I told you it would only be once. You can't plead special circumstances every time."

"We're both in the Treasury Department," Dain said. "Where's that old team spirit?"

"Like hell we're both in the Treasury Department," Beader said bitterly. "What are you trying to sell me? You're in any department you feel like working from. Today it's Treasury, tomorrow you'll be in Navy, and the day after you'll be back with your buddies in the FBI. Don't give me any of that team-spirit stuff."

Dain snubbed out his cigarette and waited. After a moment Beader said, "Are you still there?"

"Yes, I'm still here."

"Well, I can't do it. It's absolutely out. Dain, there are laws and regulations which govern the flow of information between government agencies and their subdivisions. There are channels through which anybody—even you—must go." Beader was pleading now. "You understand that, don't you?"

"Of course I understand," Dain said pleasantly. "If you can't do it, you can't do it."

"I'm glad you feel that way. Nothing personal."

"Certainly not. I'll work it out some other way. Give my love to Dolores."

"Who?" Beader said.

"Don't tell me you've forgotten Dolores? Aren't you seeing her any more?"

"I am not. I was drunk that time. It was all a terrible mistake."

"Right," Dain said. "I'll be seeing you."

"Just a minute," Beader said. "Why did you bring up that woman now?"

"She just happened to cross my mind. We had a lot of fun that night, Harvey."

"I must have been out of my mind," Beader said. "I can't understand why I—consorted—with that woman."

"Consorted? That's a nice word for it."

"Dain! You promised never to speak about it. I was drunk, and I was under an incredible tension. It had to burst out some way. It—"

"I understand," Dain said. "It upsets you. Let's not speak of it."

"If my wife ever found out—"

"Let's hope she never does."

"Dain, are you blackmailing me?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"You are, aren't you? You're going to spread the story around if I don't give you what you want. Is that it?"

"I hope your secretary is out of the office," Dain said affably.

"She is. Am I right?"

"It's a preposterous notion," Dain said. "Who ever heard of one government employee blackmailing another government employee in order to obtain information for the conviction of a criminal? Something like that would be downright silly. How soon can you get the stuff to me, Harvey?"

Beader was the sort of man who uses anger for self-expression. "Dain, you're absolutely amoral. You're no better than the scum you hunt. Furthermore, you're too damned sure of yourself. Some day one of your scum is going to shoot you down, or one of your floozies will take a knife to you. When that day comes, a number of us here will hold a party on your grave."

Dain clucked sadly. "And here I always thought I was popular. We'll have to discuss this when I get back, Harvey. I want to be part of the team. I wanted to be liked."

Beader made apoplectic sounds over the telephone.

"Can I expect the stuff tomorrow?" Dain asked.

"Yes."

"Wonderful. My office has my address. Let's make a night of it when I get back, Harvey."

"Not a chance."

"You need it. You sound pretty tense. A little vacation would do you a world of good."

"It's been a hard year." Caution reasserted itself as anger ebbed away. "Steve, if I've said anything insulting—"

"Nothing at all! I'll get things lined up and we'll make a night of it."

"Call me first," Beader said hastily. "You bachelors don't know . . . I'll get that stuff off. Good-bye, Steve."

"Good-bye, Harvey."

Dain hung up and left the telephone booth. He went into the hotel and took the elevator to his room.

CHAPTER

15

DURING WORLD WAR II, Spain maintained a cordial neutrality with the Axis powers. At Hendaye, Hitler offered Gibraltar and a portion of North Africa in return for Spanish intervention and the use of Spanish bases. Generalissimo Franco was interested, but wary. He declined the offer. Spain remained technically neutral; but when Hitler declared war on Russia in 1941, Franco sent the Blue Division to fight on the Eastern Front.

By 1944, the war had turned irrevocably against the Axis. The German Sixth Army had surrendered at Stalingrad, and

Franco had withdrawn his division. Normandy had been invaded. Italy was out of the war, and Allied armies were fighting at Anzio and Cassino. It was best to forget Hendaye, to act as though no Spanish troops had fought in the war. The Blue Division was demobilized and its name was struck from the rolls of the Spanish Army. Its commander, General Santos-Figueros, found it expedient to leave Europe. He took up residence in the Dominican Republic.

At the end of the war, Spain had the highest birth rate in Europe, low assets, a minimum of foreign credit, and no good will abroad. Franco encouraged emigration from Spain. One of the few countries which welcomed Spanish immigrants was the Dominican Republic, ruled by Generalissimo Leonidas Trujillo.

During the postwar years, Trujillo's problems had become acute. His people, after more than thirty years of absolute dictatorship, were growing restless. Revolt was in the air, aided and encouraged by examples in Venezuela and Argentina. In revolutionary Cuba, free Dominican forces trained in Oriente Province. Several landings had been made in the Dominican Republic, and had been repelled. But the danger of a successful attack was continually present.

Cuba was the key; but the risks of a war against Cuba were too great. That move had to be avoided at present. Still, a military diversion elsewhere was a definite possibility. It would change the stress; and the establishment of another dictatorship in the Americas would be an asset to the sagging Trujillo regime.

There were no lack of targets. Panama was restless, and Guatemala was unstable. Honduras and Coruna were militarily weak.

Out of these needs and possibilities the Blue Division was reborn. Men came singly and in small groups to the Dominican Republic. The first arrivals were Spanish. But there were Germans from the Wehrmacht, Dutch expelled from Indonesia, landless exiles from Eastern Europe, British and American adventurers, a sprinkling of Canadians and a few French. One and all, they were welcomed to the blue and white eagle. Santos-Figueros began to train his new men. There were

nearly five thousand of them. The Blue Division had become a foreign legion. They were not issued weapons.

There were problems connected with the arming of the Blue Division.

General Santos-Figueros was an able and ambitious man. To arm his troops in the Dominican Republic would give him the temptation and the opportunity of overthrowing the Trujillo regime. Even beyond that, the question of arms was complicated. In the past, the Dominican army had been equipped by the United States. This tended to make European calibres uneconomical. But the United States had suddenly and inexplicably stopped shipping arms to certain dictators. To buy from the Soviet bloc was to court economic retaliation from the United States. Some Western European countries would supply arms to Trujillo, but only on a limited basis, and for cash. Even those shipments might be stopped at American insistence. And finally, shiploads of arms to the Dominican Republic would focus unwanted attention on whom the arms were for. Questions might be asked in the U.N. or in the Organization of American States.

To solve these problems, Trujillo relied upon smugglers. Arms were slowly collected, and a suitable target country was set up: Coruna in Central America. The final large shipment was to coincide with the launching of the Blue Division's advance elements from Ciudad Trujillo. The two shipments, of arms and of men, were to intersect at an arranged point.

"That's the picture," Dain said. "The trouble is, we don't know where the arms and the men will meet."

They were in Dain's hotel room. Estella's eyes were closed and her hands were folded in her lap. The lifeless heat of the room seemed to have drained her of energy. Thornton lighted a cigarette. A haze of blue smoke hung motionless in front of his face.

Estella opened her eyes. "We know the *Helios* usually stops at the island of Santa Catarina. Perhaps that's the intersection point."

"Perhaps," Dain said, "but I doubt it. For Trujillo's pur-

poses, Santa Catarina is too close to the Dominican Republic. Still, it's our only lead. With a little luck and a fair amount of money, we might be able to learn the destination of the *Helios* from there."

"When do we leave?" Thornton asked.

"I'll go this afternoon," Dain said. "You and Miss Vargas remain here and continue to develop information. I'll contact you as soon as I've learned anything."

Estella came quickly out of her lethargy. "I am also going to Santa Catarina."

"I don't think that would be wise or safe."

"Secret service work is neither wise nor safe for a woman. But I am in it. I would be useless in Miami now that the arms are gone, and you know it."

"You would be equally useless in Santa Catarina."

"I don't think so. I know you speak Spanish, Mr. Dain. But how well?"

"It's not one of my best languages," Dain admitted.

"You wouldn't learn anything alone in Santa Catarina," Estella said. "They don't trust North Americans, and you don't have the time to win their confidence. I believe I will be very useful. Anyhow, I'm not under your command. I'm going."

"I am, too," Thornton said.

"This is ridiculous," Dain told him. "Do you speak any Spanish at all, Thornton?"

"Just the high school variety. But I have a stake in this case. My company is implicated."

"Don't worry about that. I promise you that any resolution will be completely fair to Miami-South."

"Thank you. But I still prefer to do the job I was hired to do. Also, if there's trouble—"

"We would need a company of Marines at the very least. Thornton, I can't be responsible for your safety on this venture."

"I know," Thornton said. He felt relieved at having committed himself once and for all. Less readily, he knew that his decision had been influenced by Estella's decision.

Without coherent reason, he had not wanted to be in Florida or California if Estella was on Santa Catarina.

"Then you're both sure?" Dain asked. "You're both certain you want to go on this trip?"

They nodded.

"I had considered the possibility," Dain said, "and reserved two extra seats just in case. We leave tonight at one forty-five. Pack one light bag each. Take your gun, Thornton. Miss Vargas, are you armed?"

"Yes. But it's only a small thirty-two."

"You might be inaccurate with anything heavier. Not that I really think we'll need arms. The value of a handgun is much overrated, as you found out at that warehouse, Thornton. But it does confer a certain psychological advantage. Let's meet back here after dinner."

Thornton and Estella left for their hotel rooms. Already Thornton could feel a slight anxious tightening in his stomach. It was not an entirely unpleasant sensation.

CHAPTER

16

THE ENGINES of the Inter-Island DC-4 changed pitch, and Thornton yawned deeply to clear his ears. Below, he could see the brilliant cobalt-blue waters of the Caribbean, reflecting gold where the morning sun hit the wave crests. White dots of sand surrounded by breakers appeared below them. They were passing the easternmost of the Bahamas. Cuba was to their right, the Dominican Republic lay straight ahead.

The nose of the plane slanted downward, beginning its long approach to the landing.

A sign flashed on, requesting them in Spanish and English to fasten their seat belts. Thornton did so, glancing at Estella in the seat beside him. She looked pale. As he watched, she gulped hard. Across the aisle, Dain was sleeping. His face was smooth and relaxed. Beads of perspiration slid slowly down his cheek, like tears on stone. A 35-millimeter camera rested on his chest, gently rising and falling with his breathing. His pockets were stuffed with travel folders.

"How do you feel?" Thornton asked Estella.

"I'll be all right when we land."

"Do you really think anyone will believe we're tourists?"

"Why not? Santa Catarina has one of the oldest Spanish forts in the Caribbean. People are always photographing it."

"I don't feel like a tourist."

"Tourists never do. I wish this plane wouldn't jump around so. Will we land soon?"

"Probably in another fifteen minutes. If you feel sick, there's a paper bag—"

"I do not feel sick," Estella said. "Just dizzy." She turned away from him and looked out the window with determination. In what he hoped was a sympathetic gesture, Thornton put his hand lightly over hers. She let it rest there without acknowledgment. Ripe sunshine poured through the windows, illuminating the blue-black sheen of her hair.

After a moment she turned toward him, her hand still in his. "Bill, tell me about yourself."

"There really isn't much to tell," Thornton said. "I'm in the export business and I do a lot of traveling. That's about all there is to say."

"That can't be all," Estella said, smiling. "What about your family?"

"My parents are dead. I have an aunt and uncle in Waterbury, Connecticut. Also a married sister." He hesitated for a moment, then took the plunge. "And I have an ex-wife living in Phoenix. That sums up my family."

"I didn't know you had been married."

Thornton had been divorced for nearly seven years; he was therefore able to say, "She's really a very nice person. Her name is Janet. She's married now to an army officer."

He wore his first marriage like a badge of shame, a mark of personal failure. He knew it was best not to speak about it, to live as though it had never happened. But if the subject came up, a nervous compulsion forced him into an attempt to explain something he still found inexplicable.

"I wish I could tell you what went wrong," Thornton said. "It wasn't anything big. I didn't beat her, and she didn't cheat on me. But we quarreled constantly, and after a while it got pretty vicious. I thought she was simply an impossible person. We got divorced. A few years later, I decided that I had been the impossible person. Now I don't know. I think that Janet and I had both been very young and selfish . . . That must sound like a pretty weak reason for a divorce."

"It sounds honest," Estella said. She paused. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure, go ahead."

"What was your ex-wife like?"

"Oh, she was tall and blonde. Willowy. Athletic. A high-spirited girl. Why do you ask?"

"I was just curious," Estella said. She became very quiet, and Thornton wondered if she was speculating on the differing qualities of Anglo-Saxon and Latin women.

Santa Catarina rose out of the ocean below them, dazzling white and speckled green with palms. They flew over docks with toy ships angled into them, past a complex of streets and buildings. A doll-house airport appeared below them. In the distance, balanced on the ocean's edge, they could see the dark mass of Haiti.

Dain was awake, adjusting his camera and humming to himself. Estella slipped her hand from under Thornton's.

When they came out of the airplane it was like stepping into a blast furnace. The much advertised trade winds were not blowing over Santa Catarina that day. The streets were nearly deserted, and high wooden shutters blocked the en-

trances to the stores. Near the airport a driver dozed in his ancient cab, and reluctantly came awake when Thornton shook him by the shoulder.

Dain had reserved rooms for them at the Coronado, a splendid salt-stained ruin whose dirty windows looked out on the harbor. The elevator wasn't working; neither were the bellboys. They walked up a creaking staircase to their rooms on the third floor. The climb left them ill-humored and drenched in perspiration. They decided to take a shower and a siesta.

Thornton went into his room and slammed the door, frightening the cockroaches. He turned on the overhead fan and watched its blades creep around with painful effort. He stripped and went into the bathroom. There he managed to coax a trickle of lukewarm water from the shower.

It all reminded him depressingly of Southeast Asia. Mechanical decay made all tropical countries seem alike. Rotted insulation and rusting metal were the same the world over; they were the epidemic diseases of Western machinery. And yet, people wanted those tractors and jeeps and harvesters and reapers, even where the climate reduced them to scrap in a year or less.

He thought about Estella. A rather fascinating girl, and unusually pretty. She was slim but full-breasted, and her legs were memorable. She was a little stiff and serious, perhaps; but that, he decided, simply showed a good upbringing, and one entirely compatible with his own.

She was attractive by any standards, though very different from the kind of girls he had dated, the kind he had even married once. Estella was not much like the girl next door. She had little in common with the girls who modeled themselves, unconsciously perhaps, on the standards of beauty to be found in toothpaste ads and television commercials. Different factors had gone into Estella's shaping. Thornton approved of this; but a million commercials and ten thousand billboard miles clashed with his newer experience of the world and of himself. He needed a little time to sort it out.

For a while he watched the blades of the fan turn slowly

in the stagnant air; but just watching them was an exertion. At last he went to sleep.

He awoke several hours later, unrefreshed, with a taste of iron in his mouth. He shaved, showered and dressed, and left his room. At the end of the corridor was an open patio half choked with potted plants. Dain and Estella were at the far end of it, sitting in wicker chairs. Dain was wearing lightweight slacks supported by an alligator belt, a rakish panama, and an offensively loud sport shirt. His camera and light meter were slung around his neck. He almost succeeded in looking ridiculous. Almost, but not quite. No hat could conceal the steady gunmetal gleam of his eyes set in a long, tan, sardonic face; and no sports shirt could hide the wide wrists and capable hands.

Estella was wearing a full, deeply pleated silk skirt with fringe on the bottom, beneath which peeped red high heels. Her blouse was black silk with red polka dots, and her small waist was accentuated by a tight white sash. She had on a good deal of makeup. She might have stepped out of a bad production of *Carmen*.

Thornton surveyed them for a moment in respectful silence. At last he said, "What would you suggest for me? I could rent a matador's uniform, or perhaps—"

"Those clothes," Dain said, "are quite natural to the surroundings."

"In what night club," Thornton asked, "is Miss Vargas going to appear?"

Estella said, "Do you have any idea what girls in Santa Catarina wear?"

"I suppose not. Anyhow, what's the plan?"

Dain said, "Miss Vargas is going to look for her boy friend."

"Her what?"

"Hadn't I told you about him?" Estella asked sweetly. "His name is Rafael Dominguez. You would like him, Bill. He's over six feet tall, very big in the shoulders, and he dances wonderfully. He has the most marvelous laugh. It's very infectious."

"I'm sure it is," Thornton said.

"And," Estella added, "he's third mate on the freighter *Helios*."

"Oh. I see. Does Dominguez really exist?"

"Certainly he exists," Dain said. "We have a file on him from the Immigration Bureau, including a photograph. With any luck, Miss Vargas may develop some information about the *Helios*."

"Are we going with her?"

"Certainly not. She wouldn't learn anything with two men trailing her around the docks."

"But isn't it apt to be dangerous?"

"This whole thing is dangerous."

"Can she really find anything out this way?"

"Probably," Dain said. "There's never much difficulty in getting information. Accuracy is another matter. And it's almost impossible to be sure your information is exclusive."

Thornton nodded. "What about you and me?"

"I am going to do some shopping. You are going to the ruins of the old fort just outside of town. It's very picturesque. I'll loan you my camera."

Thornton stared at him incredulously. "You mean I should just sightsee?"

"Of course. Did you expect me to have some mysterious character for you to follow?"

"No, but . . . What are you going shopping for?"

"A new wallet. The one I have is quite badly worn."

"Really, Mr. Dain, this hardly seems like the way to do things. I thought we were in a hurry to locate those arms."

"We are. But we won't accomplish anything by rushing around Santa Catarina buttonholing people. Are you wondering how we'll learn anything?"

"Of course I am."

"Informants will come to us," Dain said.

"Why should they?"

"Because they know we'll pay for information with American dollars. Informants have a sixth sense about these matters. While you're at the fort, be sure to look at the monastery nearby. I'm told it has beautiful gardens."

"I guess you know what you're doing," Thornton said dubiously. "When shall we meet?"

"Let's say seven-thirty this evening, at the Castellon Restaurant. It's just down the block from our hotel."

Thornton went dutifully to the old fort and took photographs of crumbling battlements and ornate bronze cannon. He joined a crowd of sightseers from a cruise ship and climbed to the top of a watchtower. From here, a uniformed guide told them, Spanish lookouts had scanned the ocean for the arrival of treasure galleons from Cuba, and watched for English and Dutch pirates coming from the Bahamas. The heat was still oppressive, and the people from the cruise ship were noisy. Thornton went to the monastery gardens and looked at much the same sort of tropical plants he had seen in Java.

He was on a terraced hilltop looking at flowers. Stephen Dain was in the city shopping for a wallet. Estella was at the waterfront inquiring about an imaginary boy friend named Dominguez. And somewhere, the freighter *Helios* was at sea, going to an unknown rendezvous.

At last Thornton slung his jacket over his shoulder and walked back to Santa Catarina. It wasn't quite seven-fifteen, but Dain and Estella were at a table in the Castellon, waiting for him.

"Did you find the wallet?" Thornton asked.

Dain nodded. "Thornton, to your left and several tables back is a man I think you know."

Thornton turned. A man several tables back nodded at him, then went back to his newspaper. It took Thornton a moment to remember who he was. The only other time he had seen Roger Sticcini had been in Miami, in a deserted warehouse, at the point of a gun.

CHAPTER

17

"WHAT'S HE DOING HERE?" Thornton asked.

"Probably much the same sort of thing we're doing here," Dain said.

"Can't he be extradited?"

"The U.S. has no extradition treaty with Santa Catarina."

"But what can we do?"

"We'll order dinner," Dain said, and proceeded to do so in fair Spanish.

Later, in Estella's room, they put together what information they had acquired. Estella had learned that the *Helios* had called at Santa Catarina two days ago, stopping only a few hours to take on food and water. No one knew the ship's next port of call, though some thought it might be Puerto Barrios in Guatemala. Her informant, the broad-beamed, gossipy wife of a fisherman, promised to tell her if the *Helios* returned, or if anything were heard about it. From her, Estella had learned other waterfront rumors: that Cuba was preparing an invasion of Haiti, that a band of two hundred heavily armed rebels had entered Nicaragua from Honduras, that a mysterious plane had strafed Santiago de Cuba, that an armed clash had taken place on the Mexican-Guatemalan border near San Felipe in Campeche. There were no interesting stories about the Dominican Republic, and nothing at all about the Blue Division.

"So we still don't know where the arms are going," Thornton said.

Dain shook his head. "That seems to be one of the few well-kept secrets in this part of the world. In the normal course of events we would have had an informer calling on us tonight or tomorrow. But with Sticcini in the port, I'm not so sure."

"What now?" Estella asked.

"I'm going to send off a few cables. Then I'm going for a walk. I think it would be best if you and Mr. Thornton stayed near the hotel. All we can do at the moment is wait."

Dain left. Thornton invited Estella to the hotel bar, but she declined. She had been drinking wine most of the afternoon with the fisherman's wife.

"Are you going to continue in this line of work?" Thornton asked her.

"Certainly not. It's a job for professionals like Mr. Dain."

"Aren't you a professional?"

"Not in the same sense. I was asked to do a job for my country, and I'm trying to do it. When this is over, I'll go back to my regular job."

"Which is?"

"A researcher on the Advisory Committee of the Office of American States. It's just as dull as it sounds. But the committee often meets in New York, and that's very pleasant. I would like to live in New York."

"I would, too," Thornton said. "Estella, how did you get into this?"

"I was in the right place at the right time. It was just as simple as that. What about you, Bill? What are you going to do after this?"

"I don't know," Thornton said. "Probably India again."

"That sounds wonderful."

Thornton reflected on an endless succession of hotel rooms stretching into the indefinite future. Outside, he could hear the sounds of a marimba band rising above the taxi horns.

"It's surprising how dull it can get. I'd like to spend more time in the States."

"Couldn't you?"

"I don't really know," Thornton said. They both fell into an uneasy silence. Estella, her smooth black hair pulled be-

hind her ears, sat with her hands folded in her lap. Thornton felt tense. He lighted a cigarette, wondering what was wrong with him.

"Shall we go down for some coffee?" he asked.

"I don't think so. I'm pretty tired, Bill."

Thornton agreed that he was tired, too. Estella walked with him to the door. There, still in the grip of an inexplicable tension, he turned and put his hands on her shoulders.

"I wish you weren't in this," he said. "It's going to be dangerous with Sticcini here."

"I have more reason to be in it than you."

"I suppose that's true." He felt a reluctance to release her. She was wearing flat slippers, and Thornton hadn't realized how small she was. From the open window he heard the sound of a wheezy trumpet rising above the marimbas. The fan creaked, and he realized that his hands were perspiring. He released her, and she stepped back.

"I'll see you in the morning, then," Thornton said. Estella nodded, and he left.

Back in his room, he lay down on the bed fully clothed, his hands clasped behind his head. He listened intently. Through the thin partition, he could hear Estella's footsteps as she moved about the room. He heard the lock turn in her door. After a while he thought he could detect the rustle of clothing, and finally the creak of her bed.

He smoked in the darkness. Perspiration rolled down his face, anxiety pulled and tugged at his thoughts. He couldn't stop thinking about her; and he couldn't stop trying to banish his thoughts. Estella walked across the stage of his mind, beautiful and sensuous, slowly removing the polka-dot blouse, bending to unfasten the silk skirt.

If he had known this was going to happen, he would have brought sleeping pills with him.

CHAPTER

18

BRILLIANT MORNING SUNSHINE after nearly eight hours of sleep brought Thornton a certain measure of equanimity. He told himself that he had been emotionally involved before, and had lived through it. The important thing was to maintain some sense of proportion while the fever ran its course. Some men seemed able to do just that; but Thornton had never attained that laudable goal. Since Janet, his infrequent loves had burned with a puritanical fierceness, and died with the suddenness of red-hot iron quenched in water.

The trouble was, he was not really a philandering type. The role of carefree bachelor didn't suit him. He had a craving for companionship and understanding; he wanted a home and a sense of solidarity.

With Estella as his wife . . . But he shied quickly away from the idea. He had been married once, he dreaded the possibility of a second failure. He put any further thoughts on the subject out of his mind. Soon he was knocking at Estella's door.

She was ready to meet the new day's promise of stifling heat. Together they knocked on Dain's door, and received no answer. They went down to the lobby, and the desk clerk beckoned to them.

"The other member of your party left a note for you." He handed Thornton an unsealed envelope.

"What time did he leave it?" Estella asked.

"Very late last night. I was not on duty then. The night man told me."

They thanked him and went into the hotel dining room for breakfast. Thornton took out the note, and they read it together:

Dear kids, I'm sorry I've run off like this, but that's the hell of going on a vacation with an amateur archeologist. Met a guy in a bar here who told me about some genuine pre-Columbian stone carvings, to say nothing of some weapons dating back to the Spanish occupation! If I could pick up something on one of the nearby islands, wouldn't that be something to take back to Council Bluffs High School! Anyway, don't let this disturb your vacation. If you feel like staying around Santa Catarina, I should be back in a day or two. If you're going back to Miami, I'll meet you at the hotel. Once again, I apologize."

"So now he's an amateur archeologist," Thornton said. "Really, isn't that carrying things too far?"

"I don't think so," Estella said. "What would you have him do? Write a list of instructions concerning arms shipments?"

"Of course not. But this seems so artificial."

"It is artificial. Anyhow, what he says is clear enough."

"Translate it for me."

Estella picked up the letter again. "He says he's met someone who knows something about the situation. He's gone off for a day or two to check something. Council Bluffs High School could mean Washington. And he tells us explicitly either to stay in Santa Catarina or return to Miami."

"I wonder why he didn't tell us about it last night?"

"Probably something happened late and he didn't have time."

"He mentions the nearby islands," Thornton said. "That could be the Bahamas."

"I doubt it," Estella said, "since he mentioned it so explicitly. On the other hand, he might have written about the locality he was actually going to in order to misdirect someone else reading the note. I'd have to know him better to understand what he meant by that."

"Can we be sure there isn't another message on it in invisible ink?"

Estella looked up at him, startled.

"I dislike this cloak-and-dagger stuff," Thornton told her. "I saw a lot of it in Asia. CIA men with mysterious looks on their faces. It's amazing how much that sort of thing costs, and how little it accomplishes."

"Mr. Dain is after one specific thing," Estella said. "It is very important for him to accomplish it."

"All right," Thornton said. "What would you like to do this morning?"

"How about a walk through the market?"

"Fine," Thornton said, and turned to his coffee.

After breakfast, they went first to the small-boat docks at the northern end of the port. They walked past rows of stocky tuna boats painted vermilion and green, past the charter dock where two elderly cruisers and a forty-foot auxiliary waited hopefully for business. Most of the fishing boats had converted to diesel power; their stumpy masts and booms were used now to swing in cargoes. They were poorly maintained and furnished, but each had a radio which blared dance music from Havana. On the pier, baskets of fish lost their iridescent glow in the sunlight.

"Want to go for a sail?" Thornton asked.

"Not today. I hope Mr. Dain isn't gone too long."

"Yeah," Thornton said, somewhat sourly. But it was impossible to be in a bad mood on a beautiful tropical morning before the heat had reached its full force, with Estella walking beside him and occasionally taking his arm on broken stretches of pavement.

They went from the docks to the market. At the entrance were the flower sellers, sheltered under long sheds, their stands massed high with pink, yellow, and red blossoms which already gave off a faint sweet odor of decay. They walked past open stands where Mexican blankets and Haitian carvings were sold, past a charcoal brazier where an old woman in a black shawl squatted and patted tortillas, surrounded by a sharp smell of burning oil. Homeowners bargained for shriveled fruit. An open-air butcher shop had long red and white sections of beef hanging from hooks in the ceiling, and a little boy was on duty to brush away the flies.

Further on, the market took on a slightly more prosperous air. Rows of little shops sold rings, necklaces, religious statuary, strawwork, and trays of uncut semi-precious stones. They passed the furniture section and entered the world of alligator hide. There were alligator shoes and wallets, passport cases, luggage, belts, and pocketbooks adorned with little stuffed alligators. Anything in the world could be made of alligator, and an uglier world could hardly be conceived. The supply seemed endless; the demand was nonexistent.

They had been successful up to now in brushing off the vendors. Estella's forceful Spanish and Thornton's grunts had discouraged even the most tenacious. But alligator salesmen were a different breed. A man left his store and fastened himself to them with the singlemindedness of a jungle leech. He was short, round, and sloe-eyed. He assailed them in Spanish, French, and English. His drive and determination, Thornton thought, might have made him a rich man somewhere else.

"I beg you simply to look at my suitcases. Just look, nothing more. Business is bad and the bargains are tremendous. It is genuine alligator, sir."

"I don't like alligator," Thornton said. "I prefer cowhide."

"Alligator outwears cowhide," the salesman said. "There is an eternity of wear in my suitcases. Or perhaps a wallet?"

"No," Thornton said.

"At least look around my shop. No obligation, I assure you."

"No!" Thornton said, and Estella added something in Spanish that sounded uncomplimentary.

"I am so sorry," the salesman said. "Just yesterday a countryman of yours bought a most excellent wallet from me. A Mr. Dain. He knew good values."

"Really?" Thornton said, stopping.

"And he told me that you too might be in need of a wallet, or perhaps a small piece of luggage. In fact, he recommended that I look you up."

"I see," Thornton said. "All right, we'll take a look."

The man was named Mr. Cualilla. He took them to his

store, leading them behind the counter into a fair-sized room containing two worn couches and a stained oriental rug, some little tile tables, and a great deal of brassware. Mr. Cualilla drew the curtains and sat down in an overstuffed armchair.

"My dear sir," he said reproachfully, "you shouldn't make a middle-aged and somewhat overweight man run around in the streets. I thought you people were quicker of perception."

Thornton apologized, and Estella added that the fault in perception was entirely hers.

"Not at all," Mr. Cualilla said gallantly. "Most certainly not! In any event we are here now, all quiet and comfortable, and in just one moment I will prepare coffee. Sir, let me say that I agree entirely with your tastes. Alligator is a singularly hideous material."

"Then why did you go into it?" Thornton asked.

"I thought it would be amusing and undemanding, which it is. I have very little business except when a tourist ship docks. I can use the rest of the time to write my memoirs. Do you like Turkish coffee? . . . Excellent, I will brew some."

Mr. Cualilla took a long-handled pot from the wall and set it on his two-burner stove. He found a can of coffee on top of a bale of cured hides.

"Yes," he told them, "I can say that I enjoy the alligator business because it is hardly any business at all. It allows me to enjoy the amenities of this pleasant island of Santa Catarina. In one's own country, one must work; but abroad, there are better uses for one's time."

"What is your country, Mr. Cualilla?"

"I am British," Mr. Cualilla said. "There! I believe it is ready."

He poured the coffee into tiny brass cups. Thornton and Estella tasted the sirupy brew and complimented him on it. Mr. Cualilla beamed with pleasure.

Thornton said, "I believe you mentioned Mr. Dain?"

"Yes," Mr. Cualilla said, "the excellent Mr. Dain. He usually buys a wallet from me when he passes through Santa Catarina. Then we come back here, drink coffee, and talk."

"That must be interesting," Thornton said, restraining his impatience.

"I always enjoy my conversations with Mr. Dain," Cualilla said. "He brings such a hearty wind of the North with him. Around Mr. Dain it is difficult to keep one's conviction of the absurdity of the world. After Mr. Dain leaves, I usually have a talk with my good friend, the French ambassador's secretary. It helps to bring things back into perspective."

"Do you work for the French, too?" Thornton asked.

"I am a man of the West," Mr. Cualilla said staunchly. "My sympathies are with all the NATO nations. But my first loyalty is of course to the United States."

"Of course," Thornton said.

"Some more coffee? No? Well then, Mr. Dain asked me to keep you advised of developments. You should know that an interesting event has taken place recently in the Dominican Republic. A group of approximately a thousand Europeans have moved down from their special camp outside of La Vega to Ciudad Trujillo. They have been taken aboard the transport *Liberio*. Ostensibly they are workers, going to a new oil field in Venezuela. Their foreman is the well-known Santos-Figueros, former general of the Blue Division." Mr. Cualilla smiled subtly. "Perhaps you have heard of this work force?"

"We've heard of it," Thornton said. "Have they received arms yet?"

"Not yet. Not in the Dominican Republic."

"Have they sailed?"

"Their transport left the Dominican Republic this morning. If you could speak to Mr. Dain of this—"

"We don't know where he is," Thornton said.

Cualilla raised both eyebrows. "Indeed? Did he leave no way in which he could be reached?"

"None at all."

"Perhaps he does not have you entirely in his confidence," Mr. Cualilla said, with a smile to show that he was only joking. "Or perhaps it is the obsessive American security."

"Do you have any other information for us?" Estella asked.

"Not at present. But I would strongly advise both of you to leave Santa Catarina at the earliest opportunity. A rough element has entered the city. Too many people are trying to alter the flow of events by removing various of the principals. A quick departure is indicated."

"That isn't possible just yet."

"Then be careful," Cualilla said. "Be very careful."

Estella asked, "Have you heard anything about the freighter *Helios*?"

"It was here two days ago. Beyond that, I have heard nothing. It is obvious, of course, that the *Helios* and the *Liberio* must meet at some point. The arms and the men must be joined, at a place which will compromise no one. But I do not know where that place is. It could not be any large port or city. Outside of that, you have the entire Caribbean to choose from."

Thornton and Estella stood up. Cualilla shook their hands warmly.

"Take care, my young friends. Above all, take care."

"What about you, Mr. Cualilla?" Estella asked. "Will you be safe?"

"I am taking the necessary precautions. The time has come for my vacation, on funds so thoughtfully provided by Mr. Dain. I shall be away for several weeks. After that, I expect that Santa Catarina will again be its graceful and somnolent self. Give my regards to Mr. Dain when you see him. And take care."

Thornton said, "Perhaps I should buy an alligator wallet before I go."

"Please do not," Mr. Cualilla said. "Mr. Dain only buys them to annoy me. He has a very strange sense of humor."

"I guess he does," Thornton said. He and Estella stepped into the street.

They had walked only a block when Estella touched Thornton on the arm. "About the trouble Mr. Cualilla predicted . . ."

Thornton turned and saw, walking purposefully toward them, the tall, lanky figure of Roger Sticcini.

CHAPTER

19

"LET'S get out of here," Thornton said. He took Estella's arm and crossed the street. He couldn't believe that Sticcini meant to try anything in the middle of the city in broad daylight. But he couldn't afford not to believe it. Sticcini had tried to kill him once before. Perhaps he thought it would be easier in a public place—a sudden argument, a shot, a confused crowd pushing to see the body. And when the police finally arrived, no one would be sure of what had happened.

They turned into a narrow side street. Thornton looked back and saw that Sticcini was following them. His hands were jammed deep in his pockets. He looked nervous and angry.

At the far end of the street, Thornton could see the gray stone face of his hotel.

Sticcini was shouting something. Thornton looked around and saw that a truck had turned into the street. He pulled Estella close to the side of a building to give it room to pass. Then he saw that the truck had no intention of passing.

There was less than a foot of curb at the side of the street. On either side of them, the buildings rose straight and high, like the walls of a ravine. The truck, with its left front wheel riding the curb, its square body taking up almost the entire width of the road, was coming straight at them.

Sticcini, twenty feet away, had jumped into a doorway. Thornton looked around frantically for one, and saw only the sheer granite face of the building. He could hear the

truck's valves clattering above the whine of the engine; and a radio in the cab was playing dance music from Havana.

For a moment Thornton was paralyzed by the sight of the big left wheel, half covered by a dented fender, coming directly at them. Then, despairingly, he pulled Estella down into the right angle formed by the building and the curb, shielding her with his body.

The driver's eagerness saved their lives. The truck swung too close to the building. The cab scraped, then jolted hard against a ledge. At forty miles an hour, the truck was rocked up on its side and slammed against a building on the other side of the street. It went past them on two wheels in a blue cloud of exhaust fumes. Thornton pulled Estella to her feet and ran back the way they had come, before the truck had a chance to stop.

But the truck kept on going. When they reached the doorway where Sticcini had taken refuge, he was no longer there. Apparently he had gone through the building to the next street.

Estella was calm on the way back to the hotel. Reaction didn't set in until they were both in her room with the door locked. Then she started to tremble uncontrollably. Thornton held her until the trembling began to subside. She put her head in the hollow of his shoulder, and he could smell a faint fragrance rising from her hair. Late afternoon sunlight glowed like tarnished gold on the dark furniture.

Thornton's throat felt dry, and perspiration was rolling down his face. He saw that he had forgotten to turn on the overhead fan.

"Estella—"

She tilted her head to look up at him. He bent and kissed her, and she put her arms around his neck. Thornton kissed her again, still hearing in his mind the thin, high clattering of the truck's valves. There was a moment of strangeness, a sensation of trespass when he touched the thin silk of her blouse. But that passed quickly in a flood of more vivid sensations.

Later, the tarnished gold of the room had turned to a

shadowy twilight blue. Thornton and Estella lay side by side on the bed, their fingers touching. Thornton floated in an ocean of sensation. His immediate desire had been fulfilled. It was replaced now by a need, startling in its immensity, for permanence. Half-formed images drifted across his mind, incomplete glimpses of Estella as his wife. The glimpses were tantalizing and infinitely desirable. But the strength of his feelings drew apprehension with them. He had possessed her, but had he won her? Her response to him had been strong, savage even. But now she lay relaxed and remote in the bed beside him, a stranger, communicating perhaps with her invisible duenna. With sudden dismay he wondered if he had already lost her.

"Estella," he said. "I didn't have a chance to tell you how I felt about you."

"It doesn't matter."

"It does. I love you, Estella." He laughed uncertainly. "I'm in love with a lady secret service agent."

"Are you really?" She sounded warm and sleepy, and a little amused.

"Yes. Definitely. Estella, will you marry me?"

"I might," she said dreamily. "I'll consider your proposition. Your proposal, I mean."

"I should have told you sooner. I'm sorry if I—"

"Please," Estella said, "don't get gloomy and moralistic. Not now. That would be terrible."

"All right. But I do love you."

"I think you're wonderful. I'm really considering your proposal very seriously."

Thornton began to feel a strange desperation. Just when he should have won her, he felt closest to losing her.

"Are you going to marry me?"

"The place to decide that," she said firmly, "is not in bed. I'm sure only Americans propose in bed. It must be an example of Yankee ingenuity."

"Estella, for God's sake!"

"I love you very much, Bill. Ask me to marry you tomorrow, if you still feel like it."

"Of course I'll feel like it."

"Ask me then. In the meantime, I suppose we can con-

sider ourselves unofficially engaged." She leaned over and kissed him on the neck, then moved quickly off the bed. He watched her dress, her body almost hidden by the deep twilight shadows in the room.

"Come on, Bill. I want supper."

"You're a very unromantic wench."

"I'm hungry, but I'm not unromantic."

"I guess you're not," Thornton said. "Do you think they'll be serving that damned chicken again?"

"What else do they ever serve?"

In the dining room, the specialty of the evening was chicken and rice. To Thornton's surprise, it was almost edible. They ate in companionable silence. Over coffee, Thornton said, "You're definitely going to leave the secret service, aren't you?"

"I think so. Why?"

"It would be embarrassing to be the husband of a secret service agent. You know how stuffy people can be in the States. Our neighbors might not understand why you're practicing judo and knife-throwing. I might have difficulty explaining why little bearded men with briefcases come to our house after dark. And we must think of the children. How could I tell them that mother is away on a special mission?"

"Bill, how silly you can be! It's very nice. But I didn't say I'd marry you."

"You will, though, won't you?"

"I might. Do you plan to go on traveling?"

"I'll always have to do some traveling in my business," Thornton said. "I'd probably be miserable if I didn't. But there's no reason why I should be abroad all the time. With some diligence, I might become manager in charge of a foreign sales department. That would keep me home most of the time."

"Do you think you would like that?"

"I would," Thornton said, and was faintly surprised to find that it was true. "My work would still involve a considerable amount of traveling, however."

"Could you take me?"

"On the longer trips, yes."

"I would love to see Europe," Estella said. "And Asia. I've never been out of the Western hemisphere."

"You'll like Europe," Thornton said, finding it difficult to keep a wide and foolish grin from spreading across his face.

"Yes. But right now we still have this matter of the shipment."

"I had forgotten all about the damned shipment. I wish Dain would get back."

"Perhaps he's sent us a cable," Estella said.

They asked at the desk, but no messages had been left for Miss Vargas or Mr. Thornton. They went to the hotel's big, empty card room and played casino. Then Thornton taught Estella gin rummy. An hour of that was sufficient. They had a drink in the hotel bar, bought several magazines and a newspaper, and went upstairs to Thornton's room.

Dain's absence depressed them. They sat and read, or looked out the window at the strollers along the Paseo. At last Thornton looked at his watch and said, "Estella, will you marry me?"

"What, Bill?"

"It's twelve-oh-three. You said I should ask you tomorrow, and tomorrow it is."

"Are you always so punctual?"

"Always."

"We haven't known each other very long."

"I know."

"And marriage is a very serious matter."

"I know that, too."

She looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, then said, "Bill, I love you. But this is too soon to decide about marriage. I think we should think about it a little more."

"I suppose you're right," Thornton said. He kissed her lightly. There was a knock at the door.

"Who's there?" Thornton asked.

"Sticcini. I have to see you, Thornton. It's important."

Thornton looked at Estella. He took the revolver from his suitcase, broke it open, checked the rounds, and snapped it shut. He put the revolver in his jacket pocket and kept his hand on it. He unlocked the door.

"All right, Sticcini. Come in."

CHAPTER

20

STICCINI looked sick. There was a yellowish cast to his face, and his eyes glinted with a suggestion of fever. He closed the door behind him and came tentatively into the room, both hands in sight at his sides. He was wearing a badly pressed slack suit, a button-down shirt, slim tie, and loafers.

He looked around the room and asked, "Where's the other one?"

"Do you mean Mr. Dain?"

"The government man who was with you."

"He isn't here right now," Thornton said. "What can we do for you?"

"I only want to talk to the government man."

"Then go find him," Thornton said.

Sticcini nodded abstractedly and sat down in a straight-backed chair near the door. He seemed to be trying to make up his mind. He reached into his pocket, and Thornton's hand tightened on his concealed revolver. Sticcini fished out a cigarette and lighted it.

"Look," he asked, "are you people really working with this government man?" When he got no answer, he thought for a moment more. At last he said, "I want to make a deal."

"What kind of a deal?" Thornton asked.

"I want to go to Europe."

"We're not stopping you."

"I'd be arrested as soon as I stepped off the plane," Sticcini said. "I'd be extradited. I know you've got people watching me. I can't go any place until I get square."

"Under the circumstances," Thornton said, "I can't generate much sympathy."

"I don't want sympathy. I want to make a deal."

"How could I trust you?" Thornton asked. "In Florida you tried to kill me."

Sticcini looked annoyed. "You aren't going to hold that against me, are you? We were on different sides."

"We're still on different sides. This afternoon there was that business with the truck."

"Just a minute," Sticcini said. "That wasn't meant for you."

"Of course not."

"Didn't you see what happened? That truck was meant for me. Sure, they would just as soon have got you, too. But I was number one. Thornton, they would have got you if they hadn't been trying for me first."

"It doesn't make sense," Thornton said. "Are we talking about the same people? The group who bought the arms?"

Sticcini nodded.

"And you've been working for them. Why should they want to kill you?"

"Because they've got the stuff now. They're going to set up a legitimate government in Central America, and they don't want me connected with it. Also, they don't like North Americans."

"Anything else?"

"They don't trust me."

"Not too surprising," Estella said.

"Hell, they don't trust each other. Now that they have the guns, they think they can kiss me off. Well, they can't."

"I don't see what you can do about it," Thornton said. "And I don't see why the U.S. government should make any deal with you."

"I'll tell you why. You people want to stop this invasion

before it begins, right? But you don't know where the guns are. Well, I've got all the information. I know where the guns are. I know all the people in this. I know where the stuff came from, who ordered it, who delivered it, how they got it past customs. It should be worth something."

"Perhaps so," Thornton said. "Where are the guns?"

"I'll tell that to Dain after we have a deal."

"He isn't here now. I don't know when he'll be back."

"Then we haven't got any deal."

"The weapons will be used soon, won't they?" Estella asked.

"Very soon."

"Then you'd better tell us where they are. We'll do our best to help you. I'm sure Mr. Dain will also."

"No," Sticcini said. "That arrangement's just a little too loose."

"Don't be a fool. You have to trust us. If the weapons are used, you won't have anything left to bargain with."

"I'll still have the names of the people involved."

"That won't be enough to help you," Estella said. "The important thing is the invasion. You'd better tell us about it. If your friends don't get you, we will."

Looking at her bleak and uncompromising expression, Thornton believed her. Apparently Sticcini did, too. He turned away and stared at the floor. He said, "If I tell you, will you promise to fix this up with Dain?"

"We'll do all we can."

"Can I trust you?" Neither of them answered. Sticcini said, "All right, you promised. Do you know a little island called Quevera? It's just off the Central American coast, about sixty miles south of San Juan del Norte."

"I've heard of it," Estella said. "It's uninhabited, isn't it?"

"That's right. I've never been there, but I've been told it's just a pile of rocks about an acre square. There were some fishing shacks on it once, but they were blown down in the last hurricane. The people never came back."

"The guns are going to be landed there?" Estella asked.

Sticcini nodded. "The stuff is cached there already. The *Helios* took it to Quevera and lightered it ashore. You

know about this invasion force from Ciudad Trujillo? Well, they'll be landed on Quevera. After they're armed, they'll cross to the mainland and begin the invasion. Or the liberation, as they call it."

"When will they land?"

"The last I heard, the schedule called for having them at Quevera at dawn of the sixteenth. That's two days from now."

"Who is at the island now?" Thornton asked.

"No one, as far as I know. The original plan was for the *Helios* and the *Liberio* to arrive off the island at the same time. That had to be changed. The *Liberio* got damaged in harbor—some say it was Cuban sabotage—and had to spend a couple days in drydock. The *Helios* didn't dare cruise around with the arms aboard, not with American ships searching for her. She dumped the stuff at Quevera last night."

"Is Miami-South involved in this?" Thornton asked.

"I've said all I'm going to say right now," Sticcini told him. "I've told you about the arms and the invasion schedule. If you want to know about the people involved, I have to have a deal. When will Dain be back?"

"We're expecting him any time now," Thornton said.

"That's just great. And in the meantime, the kite goes up. Look, I want some protection."

Estella said, "You'll get it. But until Mr. Dain returns, I think you'd better stay in this hotel. I wouldn't suggest walking around Santa Catarina."

"Don't worry, I wasn't planning on any walking around," Sticcini said. "I've holed up before, I guess I can do it again."

He walked to the window and looked cautiously through the curtains. A marimba band was playing on the sidewalk below. Sticcini watched them for a moment, then moved away from the window. The sight of the ragged players had depressed him.

"That sort of thing is a perfect cover for machine-gunners," he told Thornton.

"Aren't you being a little melodramatic?"

"I wish I were. Maybe you haven't been around enough, Thornton. That's how it happens, especially in the Caribbean. Isn't that right, Miss?"

Estella nodded unwillingly. Sticcini said, "It isn't like in the States. Down here, the heavies just walk in and take over a town, do their business, and get out. Cowboy stuff with machine guns. The heavies have been landing here for two days now."

"What about the police?" Thornton asked.

"They usually go on vacation when the heavies come to town," Sticcini said morosely. "It'll take the army to clean up this place."

"We had better get you a room," Estella said.

"Yeah, I think that's best. I want an inside room without a view. They can send the meals up." He reached into his pocket and took out a large black automatic. The gesture was done so quickly and casually that Thornton didn't react until the weapon was in Sticcini's hand. Then he reached for his own revolver.

"Take it easy," Sticcini said. "We're partners now, remember?" He ejected the round from the chamber, pulled the clip and checked it, snapped the gun's firing action several times, then put the clip in and jacked a round into the chamber. He set the automatic at half cock and put it back in his jacket pocket. He seemed to gain confidence from handling the gun.

"All right," he said. "I guess I'm in pretty good shape now. They better not try any tricks with the waiters. I'll phone the desk."

He took the wall telephone off its hook and tapped the lever several times. "Hello? Desk?"

He waited, then tapped the lever again and said, "Hello? Hello?" He put the receiver back on its hook.

"It's dead."

"Maybe the switchboard girl is off duty," Thornton said. Sticcini was unconvinced. "The business always starts with tricks like this."

"What do you suggest?" Estella asked. "Shall we wait?"

Sticcini went to the window, pulled the curtains back an

inch and looked at the marimba band again. He walked to the door, unlocked it, looked quickly up and down the corridor, and closed it.

"No," he said, "we'd better not. They'll expect us to wait."

Thornton said, "What can they do as long as we stay in the room?"

"Plenty. If someone gave me that little problem, I could work it out in five minutes. I need another room under a different name. For all I know, this room is wired."

"For a tape recorder?"

"Who gives a damn about a tap recorder? It's a bomb I'm worried about. Do you know how to use that gun in your pocket?"

"I can use it," Thornton said. "But I still think you're exaggerating the danger."

"I hope so." Sticcini tried the telephone again, and found it was still dead. Taking the automatic out of his pocket, he set it at full cock. He picked up a newspaper from the table and folded it over the gun.

"All right," he said, "I guess I'm as ready as I'll ever be."

Thornton would have found it all ludicrous if there hadn't been the truck that afternoon. Even remembering the truck, he wasn't sure. Estella's face was composed. Sticcini seemed to have regained his confidence. He said, "If you see me make a play, take cover fast. But I don't think they'll try anything just yet."

He opened the door and looked up and down the corridor. He stepped outside, the newspaper in his left hand concealing the automatic.

"All right, let's move out," Sticcini said, sounding like a combat lieutenant straight out of television.

He walked in front of them down the corridor. At each turn he stopped and looked around the corner before exposing himself. When they reached the staircase, he looked up and down the iron spiral before starting down. He paused at each landing, listened, then continued down. By the time they reached the lobby, Thornton was sure that Sticcini was a frustrated actor.

There were perhaps eight people in the lobby. A group of tourists were clustered around a bulletin board, arguing about what nightclub they should go to. Two old men were playing checkers at a table near the dining room.

Sticcini went up to the desk, registered, and asked for an inside room. The clerk took his money and gave him a room on the second floor. Sticcini asked, "What's wrong with your phone service?"

"It has been out of order for nearly two hours," the clerk said. "The repair man hasn't come yet."

"So I see," Sticcini said. "Look, I'll want my meals sent up. Can you arrange that?"

"Certainly, sir."

"All right, that takes care of it." Sticcini turned to Thornton. "I might as well go up now and see how the room looks. I think maybe this is going to work out all right."

He walked to the stairs. There he had to wait because four men in white tropical business suits were coming down, arguing violently in Spanish. They pushed past Sticcini and walked into the lobby.

Sticcini started up the stairs. Then he stopped and turned. His face had gone a yellowish white and for a moment he stood utterly still. Then he shouted something, dropped the automatic and the newspaper, and burrowed frantically into his pocket.

Thornton and Estella, fifteen feet away, stared at him. Then Thornton realized what Sticcini had shouted. He grabbed Estella by the arm and started to run.

The four men in business suits had already left the hotel.

Sticcini managed to pull something halfway out of his pocket. That was all he had time to do.

The blast of the explosion was muffled, but it almost threw Thornton off his feet.

CHAPTER

21

THE Captain of Police was a young man, no more than twenty-seven or twenty-eight, and handsome in a somber way. He had a small, carefully trimmed mustache, heavily lidded eyes, a noble forehead, and a finely cut mouth. He wore his khakis with an air of military precision. Looking at him, Thornton thought of a young Loyola. There was nothing to object to about him except perhaps his attitude. And even his attitude was understandable; he was on the right side of the interrogation desk.

"It was a hand grenade," said the young Loyola, whose name was Miguel Domingo Alvares y Tadarro. "They dropped a hand grenade in your friend's jacket pocket. Do you understand now?"

"He was no friend of mine," Thornton said.

Captain Alvares shrugged. He expected any man on the wrong side of the interrogation desk to lie; that was merely criminal nature asserting itself.

"The grenade," Alvares continued, "was probably fused for approximately four seconds. That would give the men who placed it enough time to get out of the blast area."

"There's one thing I don't understand," Thornton said. "Why wasn't Sticcini able to get it out of his pocket in time?"

"I have not recovered enough metal fragments to be sure, but I believe the killers used an old and very simple trick. A double row of fishhooks is wired to the body of the

grenade. Ordinary fishhooks, which catch on cloth and hold.”

“That’s horrible,” Thornton said.

“Accordingly, your friend’s reaction was wrong. He should have taken off his jacket instead of trying to remove the grenade. But perhaps your friend had never heard of the trick.”

“I repeat, he was not my friend,” Thornton said. “Have you found those men who brushed past him on the stairs?”

“No,” said Captain Alvares. “Your description was somewhat vague. Four men who appeared to be of Spanish descent, wearing white business suits. We have perhaps ten thousand such men on Santa Catarina. Your friend—”

“Captain, I told you.”

“As you wish. Your compatriot Mr. Sticcini fell victim to an old terrorist technique which originated in Russia but found its fullest flower in South America. Does that suggest anything to you?”

“No. Should it?”

Captain Alvares sighed and looked through some papers on his desk. Behind him, Thornton could hear the creak of leather as the uniformed guard at the door shifted position.

Alvares said, “Mr. Thornton, I think you are being uncooperative. Would you tell me what you are doing in Santa Catarina?”

“I’ve already told you.”

“I would like to hear it again.”

“I came here with Mr. Stephen Dain, who is an agent of the Treasury Department of the United States.”

“We have no record of his entry or exit. But please go on.”

“The reason we came here,” Thornton said, “was to intercept a small freighter named the *Helios*.”

“That ship sailed two days ago, and yet you are still here. Your story is becoming a little tenuous, Mr. Thornton. But please continue.”

Thornton stared at the handsome, ascetic brown face in front of him. He put down his anger and said, “The reason we wanted to locate and intercept this ship was because it contained arms which had been smuggled out of the United

States and which were to be used for an invasion of Coruna in Central America."

"Coruna?"

"Yes."

"But Mr. Thornton, Coruna is at the other end of the Caribbean from Santa Catarina, a distance of nearly fifteen hundred miles. Why would anyone smuggle arms out of the United States, then take them a thousand miles out of their way? Mr. Thornton, you must agree that your story is weak in spots."

"Mr. Dain could tell you the reason."

"But Mr. Dain is most unfortunately not here. We have only you and Miss Vargas, and a story about an invasion on the other side of the Caribbean."

"The story happens to be true."

"I have no doubt," Alvares said, "that there will soon be an invasion or a revolt or a revolution in Central America. There have been at least six so far this year; why shouldn't there be more? It is very tragic. But it still does not explain the presence of you or Miss Vargas or your friend Mr. Sticcini in Santa Catarina."

"I have told you," Thornton said, exercising what felt like an enormous patience, "Sticcini was no friend of mine. He tried to kill me in Florida."

Alvares nodded. "That certainly would not make him a friend. But if he did make an attempt on your life, why did you allow him in your hotel room? Why did you go downstairs with him and help him find a room in your hotel?"

"Things had changed."

"They must have changed considerably for you to help a man who had tried to kill you. But perhaps you were not helping him. Perhaps you had some small part in Mr. Sticcini's death."

"Certainly not."

"He tried to kill you. What would be more natural than for you to try to kill him?"

"Maybe it would be natural," Thornton said, "but I didn't have any part in it."

"Then tell me what you are really doing in Santa Catarina," Alvares said sharply. "Perhaps you are a smuggler?"

"I am not."

"Then perhaps you are a revolutionary. No? You could be a spy of Trujillo or Castro, either of whom could make good use of this little island. The other day you were seen taking pictures at the old fort."

"Surely that's not strategic information."

"The fort itself is of no military importance. But it commands an excellent view of the harbor and the airport."

"This is preposterous!" Thornton said. "Hundreds of tourists must have taken pictures from the fort."

"But you are not a tourist, Mr. Thornton. I believe we have already agreed on that. You are a man whom I must connect with an element of unrest which has recently come into Santa Catarina. You are a man closely involved in a terrorist murder, a man with an extremely unlikely story to explain his presence here. You tell me that your activities are concerned with Coruna; but that is fifteen hundred miles away on the other side of the Caribbean. You tell me that you are working with a Mr. Dain, but we have no record of his having entered or left the island. You tell me that the Mr. Sticcini whom you invited into your room once tried to kill you; and now Mr. Sticcini has met with a very messy death. I think you are a liar and a dangerous man, Mr. Thornton. I do not know what I will do with you."

Thornton decided that there was no way of reasoning with Captain Alvares. "I want a lawyer," he said. "And I want to see the American consul."

"I will decide who you will or will not see. Things must be done in proper order. I may have to confer with higher authority."

Captain Alvares nodded, and two guards came forward. "Take him below," the captain said. He selected a pen and began to fill out a blue form on his desk. The interview was over.

The guards led Thornton down a double flight of uneven stone steps to a block of eight cells. They unlocked the door

of the second cell with an enormous key that might have been fashioned before the Armada. They locked the door after he was inside.

Thornton surveyed his new home and found that it measured approximately ten feet by ten. The cell contained a wooden cot, a bucket, a chipped pitcher, and a teacup with no handle. Three of the walls were iron. The fourth had been cut from the granite upon which Santa Catarina rested. That wall glistened with moisture, as did the stone floor. It looked, Thornton thought, like an ideal place in which to catch pneumonia. There was a small barred window fifteen feet above his head, and a dim light bulb set in the ceiling.

He lay down on the cot, which had been constructed for a man no more than five and a half feet tall. By doubling his knees and folding his arms under his head, Thornton was able to lie on it in some comfort. He watched large and complacent cockroaches stalk across the ceiling. His skin itched. He hoped Estella had better quarters.

The guards had not taken his belt or his shoelaces. He was free to hang himself if he so desired. He did not so desire. All he wanted was to get out of this ridiculous and unrewarding mess.

What on earth did he have to do with Central American invasions, smuggled arms, Caribbean intrigues?

Of course, the matter was not quite that simple. Tangential to it was his loyalty to Miami-South. But the question of loyalty was only tangential. By now he had discharged any lingering debt to Ryerson and the firm. He had pursued this investigation at considerable personal risk. He had done all he could, and it would just have to be enough.

Then there was Estella. But even with Estella, hard facts had to be faced with some slight degree of sense. It had been one thing to journey around under Stephen Dain's instructions; it was another thing entirely with Dain gone and the situation growing more dangerous by the hour. This was a job for an expert; and the expert was not on Santa Catarina. Estella should be able to understand that.

She ought to be able to see that heroics would get them

nowhere. To continue after the arms would not be loyalty or patriotism; it would be suicide. The truck that afternoon had been close; he could still see the huge bald front tire rolling toward him. Sticcini had died messily, and only luck had prevented others from dying with him. It was enough. He was through. Let Dain handle it. This was what he was paid for.

Once he had decided this, Thornton felt much better. He got up, lighted a cigarette, and paced around his cell. From the far end of the block he could hear the moans of a drunk. The place smelled of rot and ammonia, and his cigarette was beginning to taste bad. He put it out, took off his jacket, and rolled it up. He lay down on the cot again with the jacket under his head, and found that he could prop his feet against the wall. To his surprise, he dozed off.

He was awakened by the clanking of the huge key. His cell door was swung open, and the guard was saying something. Thornton caught the word *abogado*, and remembered that it meant lawyer. A man entered the cell, and the door was closed behind him.

“Do you speak English?” Thornton asked.

“I speak English, yes. I am sorry to see you here, Mr. Thornton.”

Thornton thought he recognized the voice. He sat up straighter. “Aren’t you Mr. Eberhart?”

“That is correct. May I sit down?”

“Why not?” Thornton said, and moved to the end of the cot to give him room.

CHAPTER

22

MR. EBERHART appeared to be in his fifties, of average height and weight. He had a pale, disagreeable face, tight little lips, and a round bald head. He wore glasses with stainless steel rims. There was no evidence of a limp or a dueling scar. Mr. Eberhart sat down on the cot and put his hands on his knees. His hands looked like two long white fish in the twilight of the cell.

"I have a few friends on this island," Mr. Eberhart said. "I might be able to arrange for your immediate release."

"In return for information?"

"Of course."

"Why didn't you ask Sticcini?"

"Mr. Sticcini was a man no one could reason with," Eberhart said. "His terms were completely unrealistic."

"You had him killed, didn't you?"

"I do not think it matters," Eberhart said. "He was no friend of yours, Mr. Thornton. Why bother yourself about him?"

Thornton certainly hadn't liked Sticcini; but he hadn't enjoyed seeing him blown up with a hand grenade.

"After all," Eberhart said, "why shouldn't you give me the information I need? If what you've told me is true, you are employed by the Miami-South Corporation."

"That's right."

"Then I can understand your concern for your company's reputation. But the information you give me will not compromise that reputation. I can understand your wanting to re-

cover the shipment. But surely you have done all that is reasonably possible. You have risked your life on a matter which, in the final analysis, cannot be of too great an importance for you. The best thing now would be to divest yourself of information and step out of the case."

This was uncomfortably close to what Thornton had been thinking a little while ago. But hearing it from Mr. Eberhart seemed to rob the plan of its few virtues.

"I've told you before," Thornton said, "I don't have any information."

Mr. Eberhart carefully removed his glasses and wiped them on a handkerchief. He put his glasses back on.

"I do not understand you," he said.

"Maybe it's a question of elementary fairness," Thornton said. "Why don't you go hijack someone else's arms?"

"Ah, I see," Mr. Eberhart said. "Elementary fairness. Then it may interest you to know that I am the original purchaser of those arms. Mr. Sticcini and his associates stole them from me."

"How do I know that's true?"

"You have only my word," Mr. Eberhart said. "I ordered those arms from a New Jersey dealer in surplus government goods. I paid for them in cash. They were sent south by truck. The truck was overtaken and the guard and driver killed. Since then, I have been trying to recover my property."

"Why didn't you contact the police?"

"That would not be possible. My purchase of the arms was illegal in the eyes of the law. It is a fickle law, Mr. Thornton. One year arms shipments are legal, the next year they are not. The country for whom I bought the arms is at present under embargo."

"Then you have no recourse," Thornton said.

"I do not agree. Those arms are mine, purchased by me with funds entrusted to my care. I must recover them."

"Who did you buy them for?"

"That I will not say. I will tell you this, however, if I am able to reclaim my property, it will not be used against Coruna, and it will not implicate your company. That should

satisfy you and Miss Vargas. Further than that, I will pay you a bonus of five thousand dollars for pertinent information. Is that satisfactory?"

Thornton shook his head. "I don't know a damned thing, Eberhart. You're wasting your time."

Eberhart took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead. "Mr. Thornton, I appeal to you. Consider the position I am in. I am responsible for those arms. There will be very unpleasant consequences for me if I do not produce them."

"That's a risk you took when you started dealing in illegal goods."

"Yes, I accepted the risk. But I will be killed if I do not deliver the weapons."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Thornton said. "However, I suppose a lot of other people will be killed if you do deliver them. Under the circumstances, I can't feel too sympathetic."

"Then you won't help me, even to help yourself and Miss Vargas?"

"I can't help you," Thornton said in his most earnest tone. "I've been tagging along with Mr. Dain, trying to find the arms. Now I don't even know where Dain is."

Eberhart rose stiffly to his feet. "Very well, we shall not discuss this again. I am going to recover my property. Stay out of my way. I advise you to get out of the Caribbean as soon as it becomes possible for you."

He tapped on the cell door. The guard came and unlocked the door. Mr. Eberhart gave a stiff little bow, to which Thornton responded with the barest indication of a nod. Mr. Eberhart left.

CHAPTER

23

HALF AN HOUR LATER, the guard returned and unlocked Thornton's cell. He indicated that Thornton was wanted upstairs. Thornton brushed off his jacket and put it on, straightened his tie, and followed the guard to Captain Alvarez's office. This time, Estella was there.

"I have consulted with my superiors," Captain Alvarez said. "We find that you and Miss Vargas are guilty of three separate infractions of the Penal Code. All are punishable by jail sentences."

Thornton started to protest, but Estella gave him a warning look. He kept silent and listened.

"We could jail you with perfect legality. Your consular representatives would protest, but nothing more. If the decision were mine, that is what I would do. However, my superiors tell me that there are certain extenuating circumstances. Also, jailing you would conceivably have a bad effect on the tourist season, which begins next month. Under the circumstances, we have decided to release you."

"Thank you, Captain," Thornton said.

"There is nothing to thank me for. You and Miss Vargas will leave Santa Catarina within the hour. Miss Vargas has promised me that neither of you will return to Santa Catarina for at least a year. If the hypothetical Mr. Dain comes here, he too will be asked to leave. Is that understood?"

"It's understood," Thornton said.

"Good. I have arranged for your luggage to be sent to the airport. Sergeant Menzies will now escort you there."

"Are you sure there's room for us on the flight?" Thornton asked.

"There is room. Miss Vargas telephoned and reserved two seats. I believe that is all."

Captain Alvares turned back to the papers on his desk. Sergeant Menzies stepped forward and led them out of the police station.

It was an embarrassing way to leave, but Thornton decided it was all for the best. When they were back in Miami, they would be able to contact the proper authorities. Perhaps someone else would be able to pick up the trail and find the arms. Estella seemed resigned to the idea of leaving. She clung tightly to his arm as they walked, with Sergeant Menzies behind them, across the brightly lighted airport waiting room to the field. She seemed very nervous. Thornton decided that the events of the day must have upset her more than she had realized. He was glad that she was getting out of this.

He didn't realize anything was wrong until they reached the steps of the airplane. There, brightly illuminated, he saw a sign which read: *Flight 103. Kingston, Panama City, Quito.*

"Estella," he said, "this flight isn't going to Miami."

"I know. I'll explain after we're on board."

"You'll explain what? Where are we going?"

"Kingston, Jamaica. Please, Bill, I'll explain everything."

"No!" Thornton said. "What are we going to Jamaica for? You can't simply—"

He felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned and looked into the broad, bland face of Sergeant Menzies. The sergeant jerked his chin at the airplane. Estella pulled at his arm.

Urged by the firm pressure of Menzies' hand on his back, Thornton climbed the steps and got onto the airplane.

CHAPTER

24

THE DC-6 WAS HALF EMPTY. Thornton and Estella had taken seats near the rear. Soon they were in the air, and the lights of Santa Catarina dwindled below them as the plane banked gently and set a course for Jamaica.

“All right,” Thornton said, after they had unfastened their seat belts, “now would you mind telling me why we’re going to Jamaica?”

“Because it’s our nearest safe point to Quevera,” Estella said.

“Go on.”

“I thought perhaps we could hire a boat in Kingston. We could hire a fishing boat and continue to Quevera. It wouldn’t take long, Bill. In a fast boat we could be there in twelve hours.”

“Sure we could. And what would we do when we got there?”

“We’d dump the arms into the ocean,” Estella said. “Don’t you see, Bill? A fast boat will get us there before the *Liberio* arrives. We could dispose of the arms and get away before they landed.”

“No,” Thornton said.

“Why not?”

“It’s the wrong way of doing it. Now that we know the location of the arms we should call the proper authorities in Coruna, tell them about it, and have them send a ship and soldiers to take care of the guns.”

"There isn't time for that," Estella said. "I don't think it would work now."

"Why?"

"This invasion has supporters within the government. If the message went to the wrong man, either nothing would be done or action would be delayed until it was too late. And even a responsible official is going to think twice before ordering troops to Quevera just on the unsupported word of a new intelligence agent. You see, Quevera lies offshore a disputed area claimed by both Coruna and Nicaragua. At present, a state of near-hostility exists between us and the Somoza government. No official is going to order troops into that area without conclusive evidence. Perhaps they would act on Mr. Dain's word; they would not act on mine."

"This is ridiculous," Thornton said. "I thought the Coruna government used the advice of its agents."

"It does, but the process is complicated. I am supposed to report only to my superior, Dr. Medilla, who is in charge of Security North Sector. He in turn reports to the head of the Internal Security Division, which makes its recommendations to the President and the Cortés. All of that might take five or six days. We don't have five or six days."

"Why don't you telephone Dr. Medilla and ask him?"

"I tried to from Santa Catarina, but I couldn't reach him. Dr. Medilla is in Mexico at a conference of Inter-American security officers. He is expected back in three days."

"He picked a hell of a time to go."

"Coruna has been continually threatened with invasion for three years now. Do you expect Dr. Medilla to stay at his desk for three years?"

"I guess not. Estella, you would be exceeding your orders if you did this."

"In an emergency I am supposed to act on my own initiative."

"It just won't work," Thornton said. "Those cases weigh half a ton apiece. We'd need heavy machinery to work them."

"We could break them open and dispose of the weapons individually."

“Suppose there’s a change in the *Liberio*’s schedule? We wouldn’t have a chance.”

“Of course we would!” Estella said impatiently. “When we arrive at Quevera, we’ll be able to see if the *Liberio* has arrived. You can’t hide a thousand men on an island that small. If they have arrived, we go to Coruna. If they haven’t, we can do something about the guns. We’ll keep watch. If the *Liberio* comes into sight while we’re on the island, we’ll still have plenty of time to reach the mainland.”

“It sounds possible,” Thornton said reluctantly.

“You don’t have to go with me if you don’t want to.”

“I realize that,” Thornton said. “Let me think about it.”

He leaned back in his seat. Through the window he could see a faint pattern of lights far below. Santiago de Cuba, he thought. They were less than two hours from Kingston airport.

Estella’s plan ought to work. If no one was on Quevera, they could dispose of the guns. If the landing party had arrived, they could run for the boat. The first problem was to get a fast enough boat, one which could outrun anything the invaders were likely to have. How would Dain do it, if he were there? For that matter, where in hell was Dain? An expedition like this was more his sort of thing. . . .

Thornton realized that he had committed himself to the plan. “All right, Estella,” he said. “We’ll give it a try.”

CHAPTER

25

THE DC-6 CIRCLED over Kingston airport just after dawn. Estella was sleeping on Thornton’s shoulder, not looking at all like a girl who was planning on stopping an invasion.

She looked, in fact, like a small and bedraggled kitten who has been out hunting dogs. She slept with determination, his lapel clutched firmly in her hand.

Thornton shook her gently. "Kingston," he said.

"Already?" She yawned deeply, sat up, and glanced out the window. She opened her purse and took out comb and compact. "You should have awakened me sooner. This is really Kingston already?"

Thornton nodded. Estella shuddered slightly as she combed her hair. Thornton touched her hand. It was icy cold.

"Anything wrong?"

"Bill—do you really think this will work?"

"I think so. I can't see any reason why it shouldn't."

"And you are going with me?"

"Of course," Thornton said.

"I'm very glad. Because I'm not sure I'd go if you weren't coming. Bill, I had a terrible dream. I dreamed I was dead, and I was watching the funeral procession take me to the cemetery. You and Mr. Dain were watching the procession go by, only you weren't really watching. You and he were arguing, and you didn't even notice when the hearse passed you, and I felt very angry about that. . . . I wish I hadn't dreamed I was dead."

"It was a perfectly natural dream to have," Thornton said, his scalp tingling. "You've been in serious danger. As for Dain and me—well, he's off somewhere, and I was against going to Quevera. Naturally you'd dream of death and neglect."

"You make it sound very simple," Estella said, with a faint note of hope in her voice.

"I'll be damned if I'll read it as a sign and a portent. People often dream about death. I dreamed about being dead at least twice overseas. We're going to come out of this thing all right."

"Are we really, Bill?"

"Definitely. We're going to get through with this damned business and go back to Miami. You are going to resign from the secret service. I will march up to Ryerson and tell

him I want my vacation time, and after that, a change of position. I think I should be an export manager, spending about eight months or so a year in the States. Ryerson says yes or no, but I think he'll say yes. I take the vacation time. We sit in the sun and hold hands. I tell you that I am frugal, romantic, and extremely sincere. I tell you how much I love you. I propose."

"And I say yes," Estella said.

"We get married and buy one of those ridiculous Florida houses with the marble floors. We buy a car, a boat, some fishing gear—"

"You haven't let me get a word in," Estella said. "After you propose and I say yes, but before we get married, I think we should visit your aunt and uncle."

"I hadn't thought of that."

"And we definitely should visit my family. They live in a large white house near the University. My father will ask you many questions, and my mother will cry. My aunts will also cry, I think. My father will take you into the patio and give you a glass of very good sherry. He will tell you that women cry at weddings due to their natural perversity, and he'll ask you if you've read Santayana."

"I think I'm going to like your father," Thornton said. "I'll read Santayana."

"Read Ortega y Gasset, too. Will your family like me? Don't just say yes. What do you really think?"

"I really think they'll like you."

"And will you propose to me very nicely and seriously, and with no joking about it?"

"Yes, I will."

"I'm very glad. And we will do all this right after Quevera?"

"Yes," Thornton said. "Just as soon as we're finished with Quevera."

After they had been checked by customs, health, and immigration, they went to an open-air café and had coffee and rolls. It was nearly six o'clock. Already an impressive stream of traffic was pouring into Kingston on truck, car, bicycle, and foot. The sun took on heat, and the air took on the odor

of pungent fruit and salt water. A man sat down at their table. He was short, round and sloe-eyed, dressed in white, and looking very pleased with himself. It was Mr. Cualilla.

"I thought you might come to Jamaica," Mr. Cualilla said. "Allow me to extend my welcome."

"Were you watching for us?" Thornton asked.

"Watching is scarcely necessary in a place like Kingston. One can't help knowing of arrivals. Tell me, have there been disturbances in Santa Catarina?"

"Nothing serious," Thornton said.

"No riots? Was my shop burned, perhaps?"

"Certainly not. Why should it be?"

"It is a little fantasy of mine," Cualilla said wistfully. "If my shop were burned or looted, I would have no reason to stay on Santa Catarina. After I had collected the insurance, I would be able to live in Jamaica. This would make my wife very happy."

"I didn't know you were married," Estella said.

"Oh, yes. And I have four children. My oldest daughter is nearly eighteen—very near your own age, Miss Vargas," he added gallantly.

"Do they live in Santa Catarina?"

"Most certainly not. Our residence is a house on the outskirts of Kingston. The house itself is small, but the patio and garden are quite magnificent. We would be delighted to have you both as our guests."

"Thank you very much," Estella said, "but I'm afraid we'll only be in Kingston for a few hours."

"Perhaps you are returning to Miami?"

"Perhaps."

"And possibly you have found the place where the weapons and the men intersect?"

"Possibly."

"You do not trust me," Mr. Cualilla said mournfully. "I find that very sad."

"Should we trust you?" Thornton asked. "If we told you where the intersection point was, who would you sell the information to?"

"The Dutch," Mr. Cualilla answered promptly. "They are

very safe people to sell information to. Because of their Caribbean possessions, they have an interest in these matters. But they rarely act on the information they receive. The secret would be safe with the Dutch, and I would earn a few dollars in an otherwise unprofitable venture."

"You are very frank with us," Thornton said. "But I think we shouldn't tell you."

"Perhaps not," Mr. Cualilla said. "It may be for the best. I talk too much, and in the end I am forced to be guided by other men's honesty. It is really just as good as having an honesty of one's own. Have you seen Mr. Dain?"

"No. Have you?"

"I have heard that he is in Washington."

"Washington!"

"Of course," Mr. Cualilla said. "It is a very natural place for Mr. Dain to be, is it not? An agent draws spiritual strength from Washington, the incomparable home of the CIA, the FBI, the Secret Service, the estimable Treasury Department, the—"

"But he's supposed to be in the Caribbean!" Estella said.

"A man like Mr. Dain," Cualilla said sententiously, "is not supposed to be anywhere. He is of the position that chooses where and when it will be. There is an accounting only afterwards. That is the way with important agents. Still, what I hear is only a rumor."

"Have you heard any other rumors?" Estella asked.

"Nothing of any importance," Mr. Cualilla said, with elaborate unconcern. "Just the usual talk of the cafés and the bazaars. Idle chatter of Russian submarines and Chinese freighters. An interesting little story about a certain General Mendoza, and another story about a freighter named *Liberio*."

"What have you heard about General Mendoza and the *Liberio*?"

Mr. Cualilla smiled. "They are both interesting little stories."

"What do you want for them?"

"Merely an exchange of information."

"So you can sell it to the Dutch?"

Mr. Cualilla shrugged his shoulders. "What harm will the Dutch do you?"

"Who will they tell?"

"It won't matter. By then it will be common knowledge, and therefore useless. These little items of news are negotiable for only a short time. People will pay for a secret, but they will never act upon it. It is this strange fact which makes spying an ethical profession."

Thornton looked at Estella. She nodded.

"The weapons," Thornton said, "are on an island named Quevera."

"Thank you," Mr. Cualilla said. "Believe me, you have not compromised yourselves."

"Now tell us about General Mendoza."

"Certainly. Yesterday morning, the general appeared at Miami International Airport with a ticket to Guatemala City. He said he was going there for a short vacation. Agents of the Immigration Bureau found his papers not quite in order. He will be detained for at least a week."

"That's interesting," Thornton said. "What about the *Liberio*?"

"A most unfortunate ship," Cualilla said. "It reported the breakdown of one engine in heavy seas to the south of Cuba. It is proceeding to its destination at a lessened speed."

"Have you heard anything else about Mr. Dain?" Thornton asked.

"No. But I would guess—only guess, mind you—that he is back in Miami, questioning General Mendoza. Or he might have turned the case over to someone else."

"Is that likely?"

"It is possible. In any case, it is completely aside from the immediate problem which concerns you."

"What problem is that?"

"Why, obviously," Mr. Cualilla said, "you are en route to Quevera. You have gone as far as you can by public carrier. Now you must make arrangements with some reliable private party. For an airplane, perhaps, or a boat."

"How clever you are, Mr. Cualilla," Estella said.

Cualilla smiled with half-closed eyes. "Thank you, Miss

Vargas, but it is really not cleverness. These affairs are always the same. Men and arms and distances. The problem is invariably one of logistics. The arms must be disposed of before the *Liberio* arrives at Quevera. Otherwise, even General Mendoza's detention will not alter the flow of events, since Santos-Figueros knows quite well what to do with a thousand armed men. But you should have a larger party to remove the arms."

"There isn't time," Estella said.

"Quite so. In any case, I can supply you with discreet and trustworthy transportation to and from Quevera. Are you interested?"

"We're interested," Thornton said. "How much will it cost?"

"There is a standard commission for these things," Cualilla said. "We can discuss it on our way to the docks."

Within an hour, Mr. Cualilla had made full arrangements and collected his fee. Their transportation to Quevera was the *Bonefish III*, a forty-foot twin-screw fishing boat. It was capable, so its skipper said, of doing better than fifteen knots. The skipper was a large and cheerful Negro from Andros, who wore neat khaki slacks, a baseball cap, and a shirt with the sleeves cut out. His bait man and helper was his cousin, a short, older man, a Jamaican Negro with iron-gray hair and a look of dour efficiency. They said they would have the gas tanks filled and be ready to leave by noon. Mr. Cualilla wished them all an affectionate farewell.

While the boat was being refueled, Thornton and Estella walked back to Mullhouse Square and ate lunch. Thornton bought a two-day-old *Miami Herald*. On page three he read a small item about General Mendoza's detention at Miami Airport, and in the shipping section he read a brief notice of the *Liberio's* delay.

"If this is how it's done," he said to Estella, "I could be a spy, too. The trick is to read the newspapers before anyone else does."

"I suppose we've been cheated," Estella said. "But still, I'm glad you saw the news in the paper."

“Why?”

“I didn’t think that Mr. Cualilla was very trustworthy. This shows that his information is probably correct.”

CHAPTER

26

THE CARIBBEAN WAS CALM and flat under a pale blue sky. Far to the southeast, rain clouds marched across the horizon like a gray army. *Bonefish III*, its throttles wide open, pounded over a corrugated sea and threw rainbows at the noon sun. They ran all afternoon, and the skipper cut the speed slightly after sunset. Darkness spread out of the west, and the boat raced on under a three-quarter moon. Around midnight, Thornton dozed off.

He was nudged awake by the helper. He sat up, shading his eyes from the dazzling morning sunlight. Following the helper’s gnarled forefinger, Thornton could see Quevera, a low brown dot ahead of them. He took the mug of coffee which the helper gave him and awakened Estella.

“How do you feel?” he asked her.

“I’ll feel a lot better when this is over,” she said.

They were rapidly closing the distance to the island. Now Thornton could see Quevera more closely. It appeared to be a high, haphazard pile of sea-washed granite, gray and bleak, with here and there a narrow fringe of brown sand. When they were a hundred yards out, the skipper cut his throttles and looked down questioningly at Thornton.

“Circle the island,” Thornton told him. He climbed to the flying bridge and studied Quevera through the skipper’s binoculars. He watched carefully as they came around. There was nothing moving on the dark rocks, no telltale flash of

steel between the hunched boulders or on the sheer cliffs. They completed their circle and idled off the island. Thornton studied the horizon around him. Far to the west he could make out the low Central American coastline. The borders of the sea were empty of ships, and only scalloped waves danced in front of the binoculars.

He looked at Quevera again, then put down the binoculars. "If a thousand men are hidden there," he said to Estella, "they're damned well hidden."

"What about the arms?"

"I couldn't see anything from here."

"Perhaps the *Helios* wasn't able to unload. Perhaps it didn't even get here."

"I wouldn't count on that," Thornton said. "We have to assume that the cases arrived and were unloaded. That strip of sand at the north end looks like the only suitable spot."

"Are we going to look?"

"That's what we're here for," Thornton said. He took the revolver from his pocket, checked the safety, and put it away. He told the skipper to put them ashore on the north end of the island. The skipper nodded, not looking too happy about it, and threw in the clutch. The helper ran to the bow and unfastened a long bamboo pole marked off with black tape. When they were fifty yards from Quevera, he began to sound. The bottom shelved gently. Twenty feet from the beach, the skipper disengaged the clutch and let the boat drift in. Ten feet from the beach, the boat's bow grounded lightly on sand.

Thornton told the skipper and his helper to keep the engines going and be ready for a rapid departure. They nodded vigorously and sat down on the flying bridge. Thornton took a crowbar from the boat's tool box and slipped it into his belt. He and Estella climbed down from the bow into water which came just above the knees. They waded ashore.

The narrow beach ended in a rampart of granite boulders worn smooth by the tide. They threaded their way between them and found themselves on a tilted rock plateau. The place was very quiet under the mid-morning sun. They could hear the boat's exhausts coughing water, and the hiss of the

surf crossing the beach. Ahead, the rocks contorted into a series of miniature mountains and valleys, gray and dead, with diamond points winking in the weathered surfaces. Black volcanic cliffs rose on either side.

"Nothing yet," Estella said. She had dropped her voice to a whisper.

"No. But if anyone had been here, we wouldn't see signs of it. The beach must be under water at high tide, and rock doesn't take footprints."

"Even if the arms are here," Estella said, "I don't see how we can find them."

"That might not be too difficult. Those cases weighed too much to be carried far without animals or machinery. I'm pretty sure they had to be lightered ashore at this beach. So they should be nearby if they're here at all."

They walked forward, keeping a careful watch around them. Ahead there was a natural path between gigantic boulders. Thornton stopped and scanned the terrain with an infantryman's caution. He took off his revolver and clicked off the safety.

"You'll have to act as observer," he told Estella. "I'll have my hand on your elbow to guide you. Watch the tops of those cliffs, and keep looking behind us. I'll watch forward and on the sides. If you see anything, take cover fast."

They went on. Fifty feet further, they could see the mouth of a cave. The scoured rock in front of it shimmered in the sun. Shadows as dense and hard as ebony fell from the cliffs and lay across their path as though they had been etched in place.

Estella said, "I thought I saw something move up there."

She pointed. Thornton squinted at the high pinnacle of rock. Perspiration trickled down his arm and dripped from the butt of his revolver. Then a single gull rose from the rock, screamed triumphantly, and wheeled out to sea.

They came to the mouth of the cave. No particular attempt at concealment had been made. The black cases were stacked just inside the entrance. Thornton took the crowbar from his belt and walked toward them.

"Now," said a voice from behind the cases, "please put down that revolver very slowly."

Thornton had been dreading something like this, and therefore he had been expecting it. His reaction was almost instantaneous. He dropped to his stomach, pulled Estella down with him. A shot went over their heads.

"Do not be stupid," the voice said. "You must know that you are trapped. Put down the revolver immediately and you will not be harmed."

Thornton fired in the direction of the voice, and heard his bullet ricochet against the walls of the cave. They crawled backward, watching the rampart of cases.

As they came into the sunlight, two shots were fired in quick succession, and they moved quickly behind a boulder. The shots had come from above them and to their right, probably from a man behind one of the rock pinnacles. The rifleman hadn't even come close; a dropping shot into strong sun and shadow was difficult.

"Now what?" Estella asked.

"I think we'd better try to get back to the boat. The boys may have taken off when they heard the shots. But they might be lying offshore, waiting for us."

They heard a scraping sound. Peering cautiously around the boulder, Thornton saw that the man in the cave was pushing a small case up to the mouth, staying concealed behind it.

High above, the rifleman began firing again. Apparently he was trying to get the range. Bullets started to ricochet off the top of their boulder.

"Let's get moving," Thornton said. They backed cautiously away from the boulder.

It had been a short walk from the beach to the cave; it was an interminable crawl from the cave back to the beach. The rifleman on top of the cliffs moved parallel to them. They caught an occasional glimpse of him, a tiny khaki figure with ammunition bandoliers slung around his shoulders.

Thornton waited until the man came into sight between two rocks. Then, steadying the revolver on a rock and holding it with both hands, he fired. There was a puff of dust close

to the rifleman's feet, and he hurried back behind a rock. A revolver wasn't much use at that range; but at least the rifleman would be more cautious in stalking them.

The other man was out of the cave now and hidden among the boulders. He moved cautiously, not firing, staying out of sight.

Thornton and Estella reached the final border of rocks. Ahead of them they could see the narrow brown beach. The boat was still there, rocking gently in the surf. Both boatmen were standing up on the flying bridge, trying to see what was happening.

The rifleman came into view on a pinnacle above them. Thornton fired twice, and the man ducked out of sight.

"Now!" Thornton said.

They sprinted across the beach into the water. Not a shot was fired. They reached the boat and went around to its starboard side as a protection against gunfire.

"Give us a hand!" Thornton shouted to the boatmen. "We've got to get out of here fast!"

The boatmen were grinning at him, and each of them held a revolver. The skipper pointed to Thornton's gun. After a moment, Thornton dropped it into the water.

Still grinning, the boatmen herded them back to the beach.

The rifleman from the cliffs climbed down. It was Juan, whom Thornton had last seen in a warehouse in Miami. Now he was wearing captain's bars on his shoulders.

The man from the cave emerged, mopping his face with a large white handkerchief. He was short and plum-shaped, with a carefully trimmed mustache and thinning black hair. He wore GI fatigues with a general's star pinned to one shoulder. He carried a U.S. Army carbine.

"My friends," General Mendoza said, "I am sorry you must be welcomed to Quevera in this manner. The normal courtesies must be suspended, however, for we are now in a state of war. Come with me."

The general turned and walked back the way they had just come. Thornton and Estella followed. Behind them were Juan and the two boatmen.

CHAPTER

27

THEY WALKED past the first cave, up a path that wound around a steep-sided hill to a second larger cave. Its entrance had been widened artificially, for Thornton could see tool marks on the rock. They were led inside.

The passageway burrowed down for about thirty yards, then widened into a small natural cavern. By the yellow light of a kerosene lantern they saw a brown, pockmarked man in white cotton shirt and pants, carrying a slung Garand rifle and two bandoliers of ammunition, sitting on a stack of boxes. He came to his feet and saluted Mendoza, who gravely returned the salute. He grinned when he saw the prisoners and asked Mendoza in Spanish if the liberation had begun. Mendoza said it would begin very soon, and the pockmarked man sat down again on the boxes. Mendoza lighted a second lantern and led them past the guard, around a steep bend, to another natural cavern.

It was perhaps thirty feet square. The stone ceiling, glistening with moisture, was about three feet above their heads. The only visible entrance or exit was the one they had just come by, guarded by the pockmarked man.

"You will have to make yourselves as comfortable as you can here," Mendoza said. "As you see, our facilities on Quervera are extremely limited."

"What are you planning on doing with us?" Thornton asked.

"That depends on the turn of events. After our liberation of Coruna has been consolidated, perhaps we can release you.

Or we might be forced to hold you a little while longer to ensure the good behavior of the United States. At this stage, it is hard to know."

Estella accepted this with a quiet nod. Thornton felt less stoical about it. He said, "Mr. Cualilla arranged this last part, is that right?"

"Perfectly correct."

"He is an agent of yours, then?"

"No," General Mendoza said, "Cualilla is nobody's agent. He is an informant who sells information and services to anyone who will pay for them. His loyalty is only to himself."

"What about his wife and children?"

"That, I'm afraid, was merely a polite fiction. I knew that Mr. Dain was buying information from Cualilla. I offered more. All of these things have a price, you know; so much for information, so much for the judicious placing of reliable men, such as my two sailors."

"Why didn't Dain realize this? Why did he trust Cualilla?"

"You misread appearances," Mendoza said. "Mr. Dain never had the slightest trust in Mr. Cualilla. The man's single virtue is the reliability of his information. Everybody knows that."

Everybody, Thornton thought, in the small, self-enclosed world of agents and counteragents.

"As for trusting him—no, Mr. Dain never trusted him. Mr. Dain bought specific wares from him, and gave him only money in return. But when you young people were alone upon the scene, Mr. Cualilla saw an opportunity to make money from several sources at the same time. Naturally he told you that he was in Mr. Dain's confidence; but I would imagine you had only Cualilla's word for that. Surely Mr. Dain never said it."

"He never even mentioned Cualilla."

"I thought not. Really, Mr. Thornton, it is unwise to imagine that every person Mr. Dain speaks to is his confidant. You are, both of you, very new at this game."

"I guess so," Thornton said. "It's a lousy game."

"Yes," Mendoza agreed, "though it does have a certain

fascination. I can tell you, Mr. Thornton and Miss Vargas, that the course of events is now inexorably fixed. I have been in radio communication with the *Liberio*. The ship will be here by noon tomorrow at the latest. And before sunset, the liberation will begin."

"The invasion," Estella said.

"It all depends upon which side one is on," Mendoza told her. "The invasion, liberation, whatever we call it, will be propelled by one of the largest, best-trained, and best-equipped forces ever to land on Central American soil. The main road to the capital is defended only by a token force. The rest of the Corunan army—two poorly armed infantry regiments—are on the Pacific coast, patrolling a strike against the International Fruit Company. Two days from now, Coruna will have a new government. There is really only one question left."

"What's that?" Thornton asked.

"It is a small matter," General Mendoza said. "I would like to know the name of your real employer."

For a moment, Thornton didn't understand what Mendoza meant. Then he said, "You already know. I'm working for the Miami-South Corporation."

"At this late date," Mendoza said, "we can dispense with a discussion of your cover. I am well aware that your credentials are impeccable. I ask again who you are really employed by."

"I've already told you. My one and only employer is Miami-South."

Mendoza frowned and tapped the automatic in his belt. "Perhaps you don't understand why I ask the question, Mr. Thornton, since you are obviously inexperienced. You see the people behind you are obviously against the liberation. Now we know who Mr. Dain represents, and who Miss Vargas represents. That tells us who two of our enemies are. But we do not know a third enemy represented by you; and in the early stages of governmental reorganization it is very important for us to know from what direction we should expect trouble. For example, the Nicaraguan government has been most cooperative in this enterprise; but we do not know to

what end, since there is a matter of disputed territory. On our southern border lies Costa Rica, a peaceable country. We have no reason to suspect the Costa Ricans of subversion; but still, we must know for certain. We also share a few miles of border with Honduras, so a Honduran agent would be significant.

“And these are not the only possibilities. Cuba must of necessity be the most interested party in this, next to the principals themselves. An agent from Mexico or Guatemala would not surprise me; nor would a Venezuelan agent. Then there is Britain, France, and Holland, all with possessions in the Caribbean. I must even consider the possibility of Russia and China. They are distant, but their interest in Latin American affairs is obvious.”

Thornton said, “You’re making up fairy tales, Mendoza. I’ve told you who I represent.”

“I am sorry, Mr. Thornton, but your background does not favor such an interpretation. And you have not accounted for Mr. Eberhart.”

“Why do I have to account for him?”

“Because he is an arms smuggler and a paid agent of the Castro regime. Because he visited you in the Santa Catarina prison. Because you were released immediately after he left.”

“My release had nothing to do with Eberhart.”

“Then why did he visit you?”

“He wanted information about the arms. I didn’t give him any.”

Mendoza raised both eyebrows. “You were released from prison and flew to Jamaica. Mr. Eberhart and several of his friends followed on the next flight. In Kingston, they arranged for the charter of a seaplane.”

“That still has nothing to do with me. Why don’t you ask Eberhart about it?”

“That will not be possible. According to Mr. Cualilla, the seaplane met with an accident shortly after takeoff. None of the bodies have been recovered yet.”

“I suppose you arranged that?”

“No. Mr. Eberhart defaulted on an arms shipment and his

employers became impatient. How long did you work with him?"

"I have never worked with him."

"Who is your employer?"

"I've told you."

Mendoza shook his head sadly. "Mr. Thornton, I do not want to threaten. I think you are a very nice young man. It would disturb me to have to use harsh measures."

"In that case, don't."

"It may become necessary for the security of the revolutionary government."

"For God's sake!" Thornton said. "You don't even have a government yet, and you're worried about security. All you have is four men on an island."

"Ten men," Mendoza corrected. "I stationed lookouts at other points, in case you didn't choose the north beach. But that is beside the point. Of course we don't have a government yet; but we will have tomorrow. Our security then will be a very serious issue. Mr. Thornton, I am not asking you to give away any secrets. I am merely asking for the name of your employer."

"Ask me tomorrow when you have a government," Thornton said.

For a moment he thought he had gone too far. Mendoza's face colored, his plump body stiffened perceptibly, and his eyes were as hard and bleak as granite chips.

"We will discuss this again later," Mendoza said. "And you will answer." He turned and left.

"Well," Thornton said to Estella, "I've made a mess out of it."

"No, Bill. If anyone's made a mess, it's me. At least I've had a little training in this sort of thing. I should have known better."

"I don't agree with you," Thornton said, "but let's not bother trying to fix the blame. What do you think they'll do with us?"

"That will probably depend on how their invasion goes. If it's very successful, they might let us go in a few weeks.

If the invasion fails, they will be war criminals, fugitives. They might shoot us."

"How do you think the invasion will go?"

"I think it will be much more difficult than they believe. Coruna has only a small army, but the government has a great deal of popular support. Even if the capital falls at once, Mendoza may have a long war on his hands. Perhaps there will be time for Rio Treaty intervention."

"Where would that leave us?"

"Mendoza will wish to appear as legitimate as possible. We would be an embarrassment to him."

Thornton nodded and tried to think. He was responsible for Estella as well as for himself. It was a strange feeling, somewhat unexpected, and very dear. But it was a heavy weight to bear under these circumstances. Should they stay quietly in the cave and see what fate the invasion would bring them? The idea was distasteful. Considering it carefully, Thornton decided that waiting might be more dangerous than trying to break free.

"The odds for our survival don't sound very good," Thornton said. "We'd better see if there's a way out of here."

They searched the cavern, but there were no ancient and forgotten tunnels concealed behind the rubble. The only way out was through the passageway by which they had come. That meant putting the guard out of action. It was risky; but gambling on Mendoza's humanity seemed riskier.

"We'll have to take the guard," Thornton said. He bent down and selected a chunk of rock. "A knife would be better, but we can't be too choosy."

Estella bent down and lifted her skirt. She fumbled for a moment, then handed Thornton a short, slender knife.

"Is this standard equipment?" Thornton asked.

"I simply felt better having it. But Bill, I've been told that an inadequate weapon is worse than no weapon at all."

"Don't be fatalistic," Thornton said, testing the knife for balance. "If I can take that guard, we'll have a gun. Then we'll be in business. You stay here."

"No!"

“Estella, it’s important. You stay here and keep on talking. Just pretend I’m answering.”

“Perhaps we should wait and see what they’re going to do?”

Thornton shook his head. “If they decide we’re in the way, it’ll be too late for us to do anything about it.” He kissed her lightly and stroked her hair. “I think this is the best way, darling. Talk.”

She clung to him for a moment, then released him. Thornton dropped to his hands and knees and moved softly to the passageway. Behind him he heard Estella saying, “According to the mutual security provisions of the Rio Treaty—”

Thornton crept down the narrow tunnel and reached the sharp curve beyond which the guard was stationed. Flat on his stomach in the darkness, he peered cautiously around. He could see that the man was perhaps forty feet from him, seated on a box and facing in his direction. The guard was singing to himself and tapping time with one finger on the butt of his rifle.

Thornton waited for him to turn away. Nothing was possible as long as he was in the man’s direct field of vision. But the guard stayed as he was, singing to himself. Thornton waited, holding the knife loosely by the blade. Forty feet was a long cast for a small knife. Too long. He had learned the rudiments of knife-throwing in army basic training. But the trench knife had been longer and heavier, and the distance over which he had practiced had been much shorter. Even so, he had missed the target a good deal of the time. It was a tricky skill, and one he had never tried very hard to master. Wasn’t that guard ever going to turn?

Thornton lay on the stone floor for uncounted minutes. The guard finished one song and began another. The kerosene lantern flickered, and the guard stopped singing. He frowned, put down his rifle, and bent over the lantern. Thornton started to rise. The guard finished adjusting the lantern and picked up his rifle again. Thornton lay back.

From the direction of the cave’s entrance there was a sudden sound of booming laughter. The guard rose to his feet and turned. Thornton stood up and threw the knife.

As it left his fingers he could feel that he had thrown well. The arc of the knife was true; he could see the blade turning over slowly in the air. The guard had started to swing around, too late.

Then the knife hit the low ceiling of the cave and fell to the ground.

Thornton backed hastily away. The guard fired a round into the passageway, and Thornton prayed that Estella had not been near the bullet's path. The guard looked at the knife. He shouted at Thornton in Spanish. The meaning was clear enough; he intended to work him over, perhaps break an arm to prevent any more throwing. As for the girl—

Thornton waited. The guard came into the cavern, saw him and stopped. He grinned and raised the rifle, his finger white on the trigger. Thornton braced himself to jump, and knew he would never make it.

"Enough!" General Mendoza shouted, coming up behind the guard. He spoke in rapid Spanish, and the guard grinned sheepishly and backed away.

"We are coming in," Mendoza said to Thornton. "Do not try to be heroic. There is no opportunity."

Thornton stood near Estella. General Mendoza entered, followed by Stephen Dain. Thornton barely remembered the next man; then suddenly he placed him. It was George Claris, the harbormaster of Port Cocoa. Behind him were two khaki-clad men with submachine guns.

"Now," General Mendoza said, "we are all together."

Dain nodded, his face expressionless. At first Thornton thought his hands were clasped in front of him; then he realized that Dain's hands were tied.

CHAPTER

28

"YOU HAVE NO IDEA how enjoyable I find this," General Mendoza said. "You may stand with your friends, Mr. Dain."

Dain, tall and wooden-faced, dressed in a soiled cord suit, crossed the cave and nodded to Thornton and Estella. He turned and faced Mendoza. His face showed no hint of defeat. Perhaps there was no defeat in Dain's world, and no victory. Just a series of inconclusive clashes, some moderately successful, some not, all of them tinged with a faint absurdity, yet all of them necessary in spite of that. Dain's face, polite, attentive, faintly amused, remote, looked as though it had never experienced hope, and therefore was not subject to despair.

"Having all one's antagonists in one place," Mendoza said, "gives one a certain sense of security. I realize that my sense of satisfaction is premature. There is still a war to be fought. But at least I know now that there will be a war."

"That must be a great satisfaction to you," Estella said.

"No, I am not a warlike person. Few generals are, paradoxically enough. War is simply the quickest and surest way of gaining my objectives. Mr. Dain, I am sure you will admit that."

Dain said, "Your former enterprises in this line have not turned out well, General."

"The situations were different, Mr. Dain, and far more complex. Also I had the dubious pleasure of contending with you. But now, thanks to the good offices of my partner Mr. Clarris, you are out of the picture."

They all looked at Clarris. Red-faced and sweating, Clarris

looked extremely ill at ease. For the first time, Thornton noticed that Clarris was wearing a gunbelt and a holstered revolver.

"Mr. Clarris is a very useful partner," General Mendoza said. "Through his cooperation, we were able to take our shipments out of the country through Port Cocoa. And now, through his judicious use of misinformation, he has brought Mr. Dain to us. You have done very well, Mr. Clarris."

"All right," Clarris said, "let's leave me out of this."

"Let's not," Dain said. "Do you realize the position this leaves you in?"

"I'd rather not discuss it."

"Think about it, though. How will you ever return to the United States?"

"I'm not going back for quite a while. When I want to return, I'll figure something out."

"What about your wife? Have you figured something out for her?"

Clarris reached down angrily toward his holstered gun. General Mendoza laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Please, Mr. Clarris. There are still questions to ask."

"We'd be better off with them dead."

Mendoza looked at him thoughtfully, and Clarris stared angrily back. After a while, Mendoza laughed. "Perhaps. But you are in too great a hurry. You mustn't let Mr. Dain disturb you. He likes to disturb people—even with his hands tied."

"We won't be safe while they're alive," Clarris said.

"You won't be safe. For me, it is an entirely different matter." He turned to Dain. "Would you mind telling me who is the real employer of your young friend, Mr. Thornton?"

"It doesn't matter now," Dain said. "Mr. Thornton is an observer from the State Department."

"I should have guessed it!" General Mendoza said. "No other position explains so well his curious mixture of bull-headedness and political naïveté." The general had the pleased expression of a man who has just made an epigram. Dain nodded politely.

"Would you mind untying my hands?"

"But of course! How forgetful of me!" The general spoke to one of the guards, who cut Dain's bonds with a pocket-knife. Dain rubbed his wrists for a moment, then folded his arms across his chest.

"Now we will leave you for a while," Mendoza said. "Mr. Clarris and I have matters to attend to. For your own safety, do not come into the passageway."

Mendoza, Clarris, and the guards left. Dain selected a spot on the floor of the cave and sat down. He leaned against the wall and closed his eyes. Estella asked, "Mr. Dain, what happened?"

Dain opened his eyes. In the yellow lantern light, his face was gray with fatigue. He said, "I received a cable on Santa Catarina. There was no time to speak to you; a plane was leaving at once for Miami. I assumed that you would receive my message, and that you would act in the spirit of it. I didn't think you would run into so much trouble. And I certainly didn't expect you to come here."

"It seemed the only thing to do," Thornton said.

"I know. Our trouble was a lack of communication. It just couldn't be helped."

"But what about Clarris? Why did you trust him?"

"I didn't," Dain said, "but I considered him harmless. My information at the time was that the Immigration Bureau was holding General Mendoza. More lack of communication; I didn't know he had been released."

"How did you get here?"

"We flew to San Juan del Norte, then rented a speedboat. Mendoza's men sank the boat shortly after we arrived."

"What happens now?" Estella asked.

"Let's wait and see," Dain said. He closed his eyes again.

At nine in the evening by Thornton's watch, a guard brought them packages of U.S. Army C rations and a canteen of water. After that, the night dragged on interminably. Dain was uncommunicative. Thornton and Estella found that they had very little to say to each other. The cave became very

chilly by midnight. At last, Thornton fell into a restless sleep.

He awoke suddenly. The lantern had burned low. Looking at his watch, Thornton found that it was nearly five o'clock in the morning. Estella was sleeping on his shoulder, her long hair spread across his chest. Thornton looked around the cave, trying to find out what had awakened him. Then he saw a man standing in the shadows near the entrance. It was George Clarris, a revolver in his hand, moving quietly toward Dain.

Thornton pushed Estella away from him and stood up abruptly. He heard Dain whisper sharply, "Take it easy, Thornton. It's all right."

CHAPTER

29

THEY WENT DOWN THE PASSAGEWAY to the outer chamber of the cave. The guard was unconscious, sprawled across the cases and breathing shallowly. Dain and Thornton pulled him aside and propped him against a wall. Clarris produced a large screwdriver and began to pry open one of the cases.

Beneath the boards were packages of oiled paper. Thornton ripped them open, Clarris wiped off the heavy grease, and Dain assembled the parts. He put together three submachine guns.

"Now let's see if we can find ammunition," Dain said.

They had to break open five cases before they found clips for their machine guns. They loaded, then stuffed their

pockets and shirts with the heavy clips. Clarris handed Estel-
la his revolver. She took it, and slung the guard's canteen
around her shoulder. With Dain in the lead, they moved
to the mouth of the cave.

A moist gray dawn had come to Quevera. The rocks were
wet, and patches of mist clung to the ground. Dain said,
"We'll try to reach that boat you came on, Thornton. Maybe
we'll be lucky."

In single file they left the cave, Dain leading, Clarris
bringing up the rear. Nothing moved, no one challenged
them. They reached the end of the trail and came to the
final rampart of rocks. Across the beach they could see *Bone-
fish III* bobbing in the surf at the end of an anchor. Then
they heard a shout and a burst of machine-gun fire. They
ducked down behind the rocks. There was more shouting,
and a second machine gun began to fire, sweeping the rocks,
interdicting the beach. Their advance was stopped, even
though the boat was only a few dozen tantalizing yards away.
Between bursts, they could hear Mendoza's clear voice giving
orders.

"Damn it all," Clarris said, "we've got to get on that boat.
Dain, do you think we could make it from the far end of the
rocks?"

Twenty yards to their right, the rampart of rocks swerved
across the beach almost to the sea. If they could reach that
point, they would have shelter across most of the width of
the beach. But they would still have to swim to the boat
under machine-gun fire.

"Let's get there and see," Dain said. They hurried down
the length of the rampart, keeping low, reaching the end be-
fore any of Mendoza's men had a chance to get there first
and turn their flank.

Dain surveyed their new position. "I don't think it looks
very promising. They've got at least four machine guns going
now."

Thornton said, "If you gave me fire support, I think I
could reach the boat. I could let the anchor go and bring
the boat back here."

"You wouldn't have a chance."

"I think I would," Thornton said. He handed his machine gun to Estella and moved to the edge of the rampart. Dain told him sharply to wait.

Mendoza's machine-gunners had changed the direction of their fire. *Bonefish III* recoiled under a stream of bullets. The bursts crept down the side of the boat to the waterline. Tracer had already ignited a small fire on the bridge. The boat leaned perceptibly toward shore and began to sag at the bow. Soon it was only a question of whether the boat would sink or burn first.

Mendoza had isolated both groups on the island. Dain led his party around the far end of the rampart, then inland.

At the extreme eastern end, Quevera narrowed to a high rocky spur a hundred feet above the sea. Dain took his party in that direction. Flankers appeared briefly behind them, then ducked out of sight. The terrain favored Dain's group. They were above Mendoza's men, and moving toward the highest point on Quevera.

Two hundred yards from the end of the island, they were met with a burst of machine-gun fire. Mendoza, acting with admirable speed, had dispatched one man to the extreme eastern end. The machine-gunner was high above them, concealed between boulders, in the place which Dain had wanted to occupy. Mendoza and the rest of his men were somewhere behind them.

"We're in trouble," Clarris said.

"Not yet," Dain told him. "One man really can't hold that position. I think we can outflank him."

"Outflank him? You mean climb up there and try to shoot that man out of the rocks?"

"I can't think of any other way."

Clarris stared at the cliff. His hands were trembling. "I should never have listened to you, Dain. Please be sensible. We can't go climbing around those rocks under machine-gun fire."

"It's not as bad as it looks," Dain said. "And frankly, Clarris, you knew what you were getting into. You didn't have to come back to Quevera."

"Sure. I could have stayed in Port Cocoa and been arrested. You made my choice very clear."

"The original choice was yours," Dain said. "You went into the smuggling business, and you were caught. Ordinarily you would simply have been arrested. You wouldn't have gotten this chance."

"It's a hell of a lousy chance," Clarris said. "Damn it, those people mean business. They shoot to kill."

"So will we."

"I don't find that a very comforting thought. You seriously expect us to scramble around those rocks?"

"We can't stay down here."

Clarris said, "Listen, Dain, I'm too old for this sort of thing. I'm fifty-four years old, I—"

"Shut up!" Dain said, his face going dull red with anger. "Don't go bellyaching to me about it. You should have thought about this before you started smuggling arms. None of us would be scrambling around these rocks if it weren't for you. I gave you a choice in Florida: to come back with me and help get Thornton and Miss Vargas out of Quevera, or to allow due process of law without extenuating circumstances. Now I'll give you another choice. Stick with us and do the best you can, or go back and join Mendoza."

"He'd kill me."

"I doubt that," Dain said, calm again, his face wooden. "He'd be too grateful for an extra man."

Clarris wiped his forehead with a large and shaky hand. "I'm sorry, Mr. Dain. Of course I won't go back. I made up my mind in Florida. I'm afraid my nerves aren't too good, though."

"Don't worry about it," Dain said. "Nobody's nerves are too good for this sort of thing." He put his hand on Clarris' shoulder, and Clarris looked grateful. "Now let's get going."

Dain separated them into two groups. Dain and Clarris moved out to the right, Thornton and Estella to the left.

Thornton afterward could remember little of that nightmare climb through the rocks. The heavy machine gun was slung around his neck, and his pockets and shirt were

weighted down with ammunition clips. Most of the time, he and Estella were shielded from the machine-gunner. On one open stretch, bullets raked across the rocks near them; but then the gunner was diverted by Dain and Clarris firing from the opposite side.

And when they had circled one last immense boulder and reached the top of the spur, the remaining part was sadly easy. The machine-gunner, caught in a crossfire, backed away from the two groups. He fired wild, sporadic bursts, trying to keep under cover; but he couldn't protect himself from three machine guns situated at different angles. A long burst from Dain's side reached him. Thornton could see the bullets striking the rocks, kicking up fragments as they walked toward the man. There was a single muffled yell. The man dropped his machine gun and started to run, crouching low, both hands hugging his stomach. Silver bars winked on his shoulder; it was Juan. He ran for a dozen yards, then stumbled and fell on his face, and didn't move again.

Now they were in possession of the high eastern end of Quevera. Dain spread them out to cover the paths through the boulders. To Thornton's eye, their fortress looked impregnable. An airplane could bomb them out, but men on foot could never penetrate the interlocking fields of fire.

"Hold on to your ammunition," Dain told them. "Don't fire unless you have a definite target."

Thornton asked, "How long will we have to hold out?"

"One way or another, it won't be very long. What bothers me right now is General Mendoza. He still hasn't moved his men up."

"That's all to the good, isn't it?"

"I don't think so," Dain said. "Mendoza is a very good soldier. He would have pressed us immediately unless he had a better plan."

"What plan could he have? Do you think he's bringing men around the rear?"

They looked over the eastern edge. The cliffs fell in a sheer cruel line to the foaming sea.

"No," Dain said, "we're safe from the rear."

“Perhaps he’s going to starve us out.”

“He doesn’t have enough time for that. We’ll just have to wait and see. Whatever he does, it’ll probably be good.”

The sun was midway to noon, and a haze of heat hung over Quevera. The sea was flat and dull, and the low Central American coastline was not visible. They waited for Mendoza’s move.

CHAPTER

30

BY NOON, an occasional burst of machine-gun fire established the presence of a gunner below them and slightly to their right, well concealed, covering the exits from the eastern end of the island. No attempt had been made to climb the rocks and infiltrate their position. The sun glared down out of a cloudless sky, heating the pale stone until it was painful to touch. Gun barrels were scorching-hot even before firing. It was like being on the surface of a mirror.

They were spread out in a semicircle. At one end, Clarris leaned against a rock, his face a mottled red, his eyes half closed. He seemed dangerously close to a heat stroke. Thornton and Estella were at the other end in the shade of a needle of rock. Estella, too, was beginning to succumb to the heat. Thornton made her as comfortable as possible. He touched her forehead, and she smiled at him through cracked lips. She was feverish; at that moment Thornton could cheerfully have killed Mendoza with his bare hands.

Dain was in the middle. He gave water to Clarris, then came over to Thornton and Estella. Even Dain didn’t look too fit. Stubble was thick around his face, and dirt was

smudged across his nose and forehead. His eyes were narrow and feral. He had the look of an escaped convict.

"What are our chances?" Thornton asked.

"They should be fairly good. I asked the U.S. Navy to intercept the *Liberio*."

"Can they do that?"

"Certainly. No arrests will be made, but they'll hold the ship up for a day or so, searching for deep-sea diving equipment."

Thornton looked puzzled. Dain said, "The excuse will be alleged interference with the Caribbean cable system. The trouble will be finding the *Liberio*."

"Is that so difficult?"

"Yes. We can only make a guess as to where she is."

"Then the *Liberio* might get here after all?"

"It's possible," Dain admitted.

"What about the Corunan government?"

"They've been given all the available information. I've urgently requested them to send a destroyer to Quevera."

"Did they say they would?"

"They said they'd look into the matter. The destroyer will probably be sent. The big question is when. You must remember, Thornton, most invaded countries have had prior knowledge of their antagonists' plans. It hasn't done them much good. And the disputed status of Quevera serves to complicate everything."

"But they can't just sit there and wait to be invaded!"

"I'm afraid they can," Dain said. "We simply don't know what they'll do. They might dispatch a destroyer to Quevera at once, or they might debate the question in the Cortés for the next three days. They might send troops to the coast, wait for the invasion, then request immediate U.N. action. Or they might dismiss the whole thing as U.S. war jitters. It's very difficult to predict what any government will do in a crisis, and how long they'll take to do it."

"That's cheerful news," Thornton said. "It sort of leaves us out on a limb, doesn't it?"

Dain nodded. He was used to being left out on a limb.

"You've made a lot of arrangements," Thornton said. "I

wish you'd talked the Immigration Bureau into holding Mendoza."

"I did speak with them. I asked them to release him."

"Why?"

"I wanted him to be captured on Quevera," Dain said. "As long as he was in Miami, there was no real evidence against him. We found out about Clarris, of course, and the Delacourt company. Miami-South seems to be in the clear, though the trucking company you use may not be. But we had nothing on Mendoza. Left alone, Mendoza would be planning another war next year in a different country, and I'd have this whole thing to do over. But taken here, conspiring to overthrow a government by force—"

"I see," Thornton said. "Then Estella and I ruined the timetable."

"You didn't help it any," Dain said. He grinned suddenly. "Don't worry about it."

"I do worry about it," Thornton said. "Estella and I were incredibly naive to believe Mr. Cualilla. We shouldn't have come here."

"Forget it," Dain said. "If you want to be precise, I shouldn't have come here after you. But Miss Vargas felt a responsibility to her government, you felt a responsibility to her, and I felt responsible for both of you. We pulled each other in, and now we must pull each other out. I just hope—"

Dain was interrupted by a dull, flat sound, like a paper bag exploding. There was a long silence, then an explosion on the rocks fifty yards behind them. Before its last echoes had died away they heard the dull noise again, and saw a black object rising high overhead, arcing lazily over them and exploding against the rocks.

"That's what took Mendoza so long," Dain said. "He was assembling a mortar. Now we're in trouble."

At first Thornton didn't appreciate the absolute nature of the danger. The mortar seemed just another weapon; deadly, but no deadlier than machine guns. It was incredible that the addition of a mortar could seriously threaten the safety of their fortress.

More shells exploded behind them. The gunners had ranged on the furthest spur of rock, where they could observe hits. Now, with the range established, they were bringing their fire inland, systematically probing the narrow defence area. Within a minute, the fortress had turned into a trap.

Clarris left his position and hurried over. "What do we do now?" he asked Dain.

"We wait."

"But we can't wait! We're being shelled!"

"They can't cover the entire area simultaneously," Dain said. "We'll wait until the shells reach that outcropping. Then we'll run for the far end."

Clarris said, "We can't keep on dodging mortar fire."

"There's nothing else we can do. If Mendoza captures us, we'll probably be shot. I think we're better off dodging mortar shells for a while."

The shells probed inland. Dain gave the signal, and they sprinted to the far end of the island. They reached it, and saw shells exploding in the positions they had just vacated.

"Do we run back when they shell this end?" Thornton asked.

"No. Mendoza has probably moved his men up to our positions. We'd better get outside these rocks."

Ten feet behind the final barricade of rocks, the face of the cliff dropped away abruptly to the shallow sea. They had some protection against the mortar fire, very little against an assault by machine-gunners. They waited while the mortar threw its black missiles into the sky, while shells halved and quartered the fortress area.

Dain was looking over the side of the cliff. He said, "I think it's possible to climb down from here."

Clarris looked over the edge and shook his head. "It would take us at least half an hour. For half an hour we'd be a perfect target for machine gun fire."

"We'll have to try it," Dain said. "Thornton, you lead off. Then Miss Vargas, then Clarris. I'll bring up the rear."

"What about the machine guns?"

"Don't worry about them."

"You aren't by any chance planning on staying behind, are you?" Thornton asked.

"My plans are my own business."

"The hell you say!" Thornton said. "Dain, you can't do it."

"I'm employed to do it. Don't worry, when the time comes, I'll reach an accommodation with the general. We understand each other. It's even possible that—" He stopped and listened intently.

"What's wrong?" Thornton asked.

"They've stopped firing the mortar."

In a few seconds, they heard Mendoza's voice rising thinly in the distance.

"Mr. Dain! Are you and any of your party alive?"

"Come up and see!" Dain shouted back.

"That is a very good answer," Mendoza said. "Mr. Dain, you have put up a gallant resistance. I congratulate you."

"Thank you."

"You would make an excellent infantry lieutenant. But over-all strategy escapes you. You should never have allowed yourself to get into a cul-de-sac. It was an error of judgment, Mr. Dain."

"I admit that."

"Had you acted otherwise, we could have enjoyed a longer game of hide-and-seek. But now the game is over. I call upon you to surrender."

"On what terms?"

"Unconditionally, of course."

"That is not satisfactory."

"It will have to be," Mendoza said. "You are in no position to bargain."

"We're in an excellent position. These rocks have enough overhang to shelter us from mortar fire, and we're as safe as ever from frontal assault."

"Mr. Dain, you're bluffing. Your position is hopeless. Must I send men around the island to machine-gun you from the rear?"

"You don't have enough men."

"I have more than enough. The *Liberio* has arrived."

"I don't believe it."

"We are wasting time," Mendoza said. "You may stand on one of those rocks and look for yourself. I promise that no one will fire. Will you accept my word on that?"

"Of course," Dain said. He turned to Thornton. "As you can see, the general has a number of old-fashioned ideas about warfare. That's why he wins battles but loses wars."

Dain put down his machine gun and climbed to the top of a high boulder. He stood for a moment, outlined against the sky. Then he climbed down.

"It's the *Liberio*," he said.

There was a sudden chattering of machine-gun fire. Dain ducked down behind the rocks. Thornton listened, and thought that the fire sounded curiously distant. He could hear voices shouting in Spanish, could hear the deep-throated hoot of a ship's fog horn.

"They aren't firing at us," Estella said. "It's coming from the other side of the rocks. Mr. Dain, could General Mendoza's men be revolting against him?"

"It's possible," Dain said. "This would be an ideal time for Santos-Figueros to take over."

"But if that's what it is," Thornton asked, "where does that leave us?"

Dain shrugged. "Let's wait and see."

CHAPTER

31

IT WAS COLD in the dining room of the Clayton Hotel. Air conditioning had been carried to the point of absurdity; now, while the streets of Miami roasted in the late September

heat, the guests of the Clayton could feel that they were in a drafty New York restaurant in mid-winter.

Thornton and Estella had appropriated a table for four. They had spread it with newspapers. Each of them was hunting through a paper, then putting it down and taking up another one.

"I can't find a thing," Estella said. "Perhaps it wasn't carried in the papers."

"It must have been," Thornton said. "Wait a minute, here it is. On page five."

"Page five!"

"I'm afraid so. It says, 'Invasion attempt. A shipload of invaders were captured yesterday in coastal waters off the coast of Coruna. The capture was made by the Corunan destroyer *La Sala*, commanded by Captain Ernesto Rodriguez. After taking over the insurgent ship *Liberio*, Captain Rodriguez proceeded with his prize to the island of Quevera, where the invaders were reported to have cached a store of ammunition. Several more invaders were captured on Quevera, after a brief battle in which no casualties were reported. It is believed that the invaders were trained in Cuba's Oriente Province. The Corunan government termed the invasion attempt "not a serious threat." A formal protest has been lodged with the Cuban government.' "

"But it's all wrong!" Estella said. "The invaders came from the Dominican Republic, and it was very serious. If that destroyer hadn't found the *Liberio*, Coruna would be at war now."

Thornton nodded and tore out the clipping. He put it in his wallet. Already his coffee was cold.

"And they didn't mention Mr. Dain or General Mendoza," Estella said. "They didn't even mention us!"

"Does that bother you?"

"Of course not. But I don't see why this Captain Rodriguez should get all the credit. He simply followed orders. He wasn't really involved in this at all."

"Forget it," Thornton said. "He saved our necks."

"I know. He's a hero now. But the newspapers should get their facts straight. What do you think will happen now?"

"Well, Clarris will probably be allowed to resign. General Mendoza will go on trial. They've got plenty to throw at him: smuggling, revolutionary activities. He'll probably get ten or fifteen years in jail."

"Is that all?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Won't he be tried for murder?"

"I don't think so," Thornton said. "I don't think they call it murder when you're leading an army."

"That is very unfair," Estella said. "What about Mr. Cualilla? Will anything be done about him?"

"I doubt it. What is there to accuse him of?"

Estella sighed unhappily. "That's the unfairest thing of all. Couldn't Mr. Dain do something about him?"

"Dain didn't seem interested. He said there are always loose ends. He wished us luck before he left."

"I suppose he's in Washington by now," Estella said.

"I suppose so." Thornton thought for a moment of Dain at the Miami International Airport, tall and very quiet, trying to look like a hundred other people and failing miserably. Dain, a little embarrassed now that it was all over, withdrawn and cold, uninterested in details now that his part of the work was finished, unwilling to contemplate what might have been.

Dain had said, "It would have been much easier if that damned fool Rodriguez had done what he was told to do. His orders dispatched him straight to Quevera, but Rodriguez decided to find the *Liberio* first. Well . . . Good luck, Thornton. She's a fine girl. Good luck to both of you."

Dain had shaken his hand quickly, as though he were shaking the hand of a stranger. Then he had gone to the airplane.

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