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CORPSE IN WAITING

CHAPTER ONE

Kill to Go

CANTRELL ducked into the gin mill, walked straight back to the phone booth. He could have hidden in the men's room, but if the girl had spotted him, she'd just wait till he came out. From the phone booth he could watch the front door. Three minutes later she marched in, white-faced and hard-heeled. She gave the bar one sweeping glance and headed for the phone booth. Cantrell

sighed and opened the door of the booth.

"Hi, Peggy," he said.

Of the two Shane girls, Peggy, with her red hair, creamy, satiny skin and blue eyes, was the more beautiful. Barbara had been black-haired, a Madonna of a girl. Barbara was dead. A bullet, a bare ounce of lead, had shattered her beauty forever.

Overnight, Peggy had changed into a hard-faced woman, looking years older, but her brother, Dave, was worse. Dave was half demented, a self-appointed avenger scourged with concentrated fury.



*A voice said furiously,
"I'll shoot you—even if
I have to do it in the
back. . . ."*

● *As a detective, his best girl thought Cantrell
was out of this world—and did her best to
send him there!* ●

By Larry Holden



Peggy said shortly, "Where's Dave?"
"Back in the hotel room," Cantrell's
voice was quiet, soothing. "I gave him a

pill. He hasn't slept for three nights."

"What are you doing here in Newark?"

"I was following up a lead. On the
dame that gave Van Wyk his alibi. She
had a room on Mount Prospect Avenue."

Van Wyk had been Barbara's husband.
He had stood trial for the murder, had

been acquitted. That is, the court had acquitted him—but the Shanes, brother and sister, had not and never would.

Peggy said, "Well?"

Cantrell touched her arm. "Look, Peg," he said persuasively, "why don't you and Dave let me handle this mess? Let's say Gracie Bonnel lied when she gave Van Wyk his alibi. Let's say Van Wyk wasn't ever near her that night. Now, if I can break her down, we can get a new trial on the basis of perjured testimony, and Van Wyk'll get the chair. That's what you want, isn't it? So why don't you two keep out of my hair and let me work it out?"

She listened, flinty-eyed, and when he finished, she thrust a newspaper under his nose with a shaking hand and said harshly, "Have you read the newspaper recently, mastermind?"

Cantrell looked down at the newspaper, up into her white, hate-pinched face, then muttered, "Ah, hell! Come on, I'll buy you a drink."

He didn't have to look at the paper. He knew what was there. The pic was on page one with the caption—UNIDENTIFIED. And underneath it said, "Hit-and-run victim dies in St. Luke's Hospital without recovering consciousness." But the face was the soft, weak face of Gracie Bonnel, Van Wyk's alibi girl. It was impossible now to prove that she had lied, and Van Wyk was safe.

Safe—except for the half-crazed Dave Shane and the bitter fury of Peggy.

Peggy said accusingly, "He killed her, just as he killed Barbara for her money."

She always referred to Van Wyk as he. She never spoke of him by name, as if the very sound of those syllables would contaminate her.

Cantrell ordered two ryes at the bar, then said, "Could be. I mentioned that angle to the police last night. They looked into it. I went back this morning and talked to the chief of detectives, a tough

monkey and good cop named McNeil."

"Well? Well?"

Cantrell threw down his drink with a practiced flip of his wrist, then said slowly, "He gave Van Wyk a clean bill."

Peggy stared at him, then hissed, like a cat striking, "That's a lie!"

Cantrell misunderstood. "No," he said earnestly, "McNeil was leveling. He's not the kind of cop to cover for Van Wyk, or anybody. He was really convinced Van Wyk was in the clear and—"

The girl's hand licked out and the crack of her palm left a livid track across his cheek.

"You're the one who's covering for him!" she cried wildly. "How much did he pay you? Barbara left him a quarter of a million dollars. How big a slice are you cutting for yourself, Judas!"

He said reproachfully, "Peggy, you know better than that."

"You know where he is, don't you?"

Cantrell was silent. Van Wyk had disappeared immediately after the trial, but for the past ten days, Cantrell had known that Van Wyk and his brother, who was a lush, and his sister, had taken a cottage at Lake Powhatan, a summer resort.

Peggy said contemptuously, "I know you know, because I found out from the same place you did—the office boy of the lawyer who sends him his checks. You've known for nearly two weeks. Deny it!"

Cantrell did not deny it. "All right," he said, suddenly weary, "so now you know. What are you going to do, put a bullet in him, like Dave wants to? That'd be smart, wouldn't it? A cheap, quick trip to the electric chair."

"You knew and you kept it to yourself! Dave's paying you to find him, and you kept it to yourself!" Peggy cried witheringly. "How does it feel living with yourself, Judas? Do you go around patting yourself on the back, or do you just sit there admiring yourself in the mirror? How does it feel to be a louse?"

She laughed into his stricken face, a brassy, painful laugh, as if the hurt were deep inside her.

"No," she said. "I'm not going to shoot him. I'm going to do better than that. I'm going to make him wish he had never lived. He married Barbara for her money, you know. I was the one he really wanted. I was the one he loved, but I couldn't stand him. They're rotten, the whole clan of Van Wyk. I'm going back to him now, and I'm going to make him love me until he's out of his head with it. I'm going to marry him, and I'm going to make his life something that will make hell seem like an opium smoker's dream of paradise. He's going to suffer sixty seconds in every minute, sixty minutes every hour and twenty-four hours around the clock, until he puts a gun in his mouth and pulls the trigger. And I can do it! After he married Barbara, all I had to do was walk in the room and he'd turn veal white, and he'd get drunk and stay drunk for a week. I can do it!"

She laughed again, and it was half a sob. She knew what she was doing to Cantrell. Cantrell would never have touched the case if it hadn't been for her. The insurance companies were his clients, and he had never undertaken any private investigations. She and Cantrell were—had been—engaged to be married, and she had worn his ring proudly. Now she stripped it from her finger, then, with an oddly trembling gesture, laid it on the bar beside his empty glass.

"You're not to interfere with me," she said in a steely voice. "And I'm going to fix it so you don't. I'm going to the police myself. I'm going to tell them if Dave finds him, Dave'll kill him. I'll tell them that Dave is paying you to find him. So, if Dave does kill, that'll make you an accessory before the fact."

Cantrell said hoarsely, "For the love of God, Peg."

She went on woodenly, "You've been

wanting to keep Dave from finding Van. . . ." In actually speaking the name now, she seemed to be serving notice that she was in deadly earnest. "All right. That's your job from now on. You keep Dave away. I don't want Dave to hang for murder. I want Van to suffer, and I'm taking care of that myself. But if Dave *does* kill Van, believe me, you're going to hang with him, if I have to take the stand against you myself!"

She turned and, with her hand to her mouth, ran for the door. Cantrell, crying her name, lunged after her, became entangled in his bar stool and fell heavily. By the time he had picked himself up and sprinted out to the sidewalk, she had disappeared.

DAVE SHANE was still sleeping on the hotel bed when Cantrell strode into the room. Dave was a big man, six-two, rawboned, with a wiry thatch of harsh red hair. Even in repose, his angular face was forbidding, a face of raw violence.

Cantrell went straight to the closet, jerked out his suitcase and began throwing clothes into it. Dave sat up and stared at him.

"What's got into you?" he asked drowsily.

"Got another lead," said Cantrell without looking up.

"Leads, leads, nothing but leads," Dave grumbled. "If I'd known you were going to make it this tough, I'd of hired a bloodhound. Where we go this time?"

"This time it's solo."

"Come again?"

"This time you're staying put. I'll send you a telegram if anything turns up."

Dave lazily swung his legs over the edge of the bed and stood. "You been out in the sun too long?" he asked curiously.

Cantrell ignored him and walked over to the chest of drawers and began throwing shirts, underwear and socks into his

bag. Dave watched him with his hands on his hips. His suppressed violence was like an aura around him. You could almost smell it. He stood, hunched in poisoned, swelling silence as Cantrell swiftly stuffed his bag. He took a plunging step forward, and with a sweep of his arm knocked the bag from Cantrell's hand. Cantrell spun around and faced him, hot-eyed.

Dave said heavily, "Where you go, I go. Keep that straight. When you turn up that murdering brother-in-law of mine, I'm going to be right there on the spot."

Cantrell made a sharp, chopping motion with the side of his hand. "This time," he repeated evenly, "you're staying put."

Dave stared at him as if trying to puzzle it out. "Cut the horsing around, pal," he said, half angrily, half trying to laugh. "You're just going to make me sore and, hell, I don't want to get sore at you. Now be a good guy and tell me what's up."

Dave had a quarter of a million in the bank, but he looked, talked and acted like a stevedore. He was a throwback to the time when his family fought for blood and lived in trees. The Shanes were a tempestuous clan.

"I told you what was up," said Cantrell, as if deliberately goading the big man. "I'm going, and you're not. I'm tired of having you in my hair twenty-four hours of the day. You're a public menace, and you're going to get both of us in trouble. Is that plain enough?"

"Is this the cross, pal? Is this the kiss-off?"

"Act your age."

"I'll kill you, boy. And I mean that."

Cantrell knew he meant it, but he laughed. "You're not going to kill anybody," he jeered. "You might as well know it now. If anybody gets Van Wyk, it's going to be the state."

With a roar, Dave sprang at him. Cantrell stepped in and lanced a straight, hard right to the jaw. Dave's head snapped

back, but he kept coming. Backing up, Cantrell jolted him with a right and left to the sides of the head, then shot in another hard right to the jaw. Dave just grinned wolfishly and shuffled forward, pawing out with his big, bony hands like a wrestler. Rough and tumble was the kind of fighting he liked, get in close with everything working, butt, knee and gouge. Cantrell knew better than to let him get in that close, better than to let himself get cornered where Dave could work over him with those steely fingers. He bobbed and hooked an unexpected left to Dave's nose, but in skipping back he tripped over the bag on the floor and flailed wildly as he tried to regain his balance. Dave lunged and caught him around the middle. Bracing his legs, he laid the side of his head against Cantrell's chest and heaved. Cantrell desperately kept his legs and tried to bow his back, at the same time raining sharp blows to the side of Dave's head.

Dave grunted and tightened up another notch. His strength was tremendous, and the bow of Cantrell's back was gradually straightening. If he arched, Dave could break him like kindling. Dave was not entirely sane, had not been since Barbara's murder. Cantrell had committed himself and would not ask for mercy.

Dave tightened again and snarled, "I said I'd kill you—"

Despairingly, Cantrell chopped three times with the hard edge of his hand against the neck that corded against his chest, then staggered backward as Dave fell limply against him. They fell to the floor together. Cantrell rose slowly, panting. Dave lay still.

Cantrell felt as if he could flop on the bed and lie there forever, but painfully he gathered together his strewn clothes and stuffed them back into the bag again. There was a kind of misery in his eyes.

He wished he hadn't had to tangle with Dave, but the man wasn't in his right mind. He couldn't be reasoned with. Can-

trell had known from the beginning that Dave wouldn't let him out of that room alone, had known from the very first word Dave had uttered.

Well, he was getting out alone, but this wasn't the showdown. He had made an implacable enemy. He would now share the hate Dave bore for Van Wyk. Someone would die.

Cantrell closed his bag and left the room. Downstairs was his car, and he would be on his way to Lake Powhatan before Dave recovered consciousness. This was a job he was going to have to do alone.

Nobody was going to thank him.

CHAPTER TWO

Killer's Island

THE ADDRESS he had was a vague one—Box 422, Lake Powhatan, Moburg, New Jersey.

Lake Powhatan was five miles in length, shaped something like a saxophone with the bell of the horn at Moburg's ear. Some of the summer cottages were as much as a mile back from the lake, into the hills. Nine months of the year Moburg was just a little farming town, but during June, July and August it burst at the seams with shrill characters in gaudy shorts, bras and sun glasses. Cantrell inched down Main Street behind a lumbering haywagon, and behind him was a canary yellow Cadillac convertible, loaded with kids singing to the music of a guitarist, who sat astraddle the hood.

The Old Moburg House was as jaunty as a grandfather with a new toupee. The lobby was bedecked with a dozen tubed palms, borrowed from the undertaker, and the dining room was so hung with new festoons of varicolored crepe paper that it resembled a maypole. But most important of all, it was crowded. That was its freshest decoration.

The clerk, who spent nine months of the year hopping what bells there were to hop, selling newspapers, cigars, cigarettes and chewing gum, but mostly tending bar, smiled vaguely at Cantrell over the counter.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, fluffing the gardenia in his buttonhole, "but really, we've had every room reserved since May." He leaned over the counter and dropped his voice to its lowest confidential register, "But maybe I could tell you where to get a room, friend."

Cantrell blew the perspiration off his upper lip and growled, "What else did you think I wanted, a bed in it, too?"

The clerk chuckled. He could appreciate a joke. "But I'll probably have to make a few phone calls," he suggested.

Cantrell gave him a dry glance. He took a five dollar bill from his wallet and slid it under the register. "You'll probably need some nickels," he said.

The clerk deftly extracted the bill and said, "Right you are," and scribbled a name and address on the back of one of the hotel's business cards. Cantrell pocketed the card after glancing at it.

"I'm looking," he said casually, "for a friend of mine. Named Rolf Van Wyk. A big fella, blond, good looking, the fullback type."

The clerk frowned and looked as if he wished he hadn't sold Cantrell that address. "You'll find your friend," he said stiffly, "in the bar. If he's not in this bar, he's in the bar across the street, and if he's not there, he's in the bar at the Deer Head Inn on the Lake, and if he's not there, look under the closest tree, because he will have bought himself a bottle to take home, but didn't make it." Then he added sharply, "My mother doesn't allow lodgers to bring liquor into the house."

"Your moth—oh," Cantrell grinned and touched the pocket into which he had slipped the address the clerk had given him. "Don't worry, pal. I haven't touched

a drop since the day my grandmother got the DT's and thought she was a birdhouse. It took the whole fire department to get her out of the tree."

He tipped his hand from his forehead and strolled toward the bar, not particularly elated at having found a clue to Van Wyk so quickly. Finding him was not the problem. The problem was linking him with the hit-and-run killing of Gracie Bonnel before Peggy Shane got herself in trouble.

The doorway to the bar was guarded by a pair of potted palms that looked as if they'd seen every funeral since Daniel Boone. The bar itself was empty except for the professional drinkers, who knew that all else, including swimming, boating and blondes, was vanity. Van Wyk was at the farthest, dimmest end of the bar, his broad, heavy shoulders hunched over his glass. Cantrell had taken a half dozen steps toward him before he discovered that it was the wrong Van Wyk. It wasn't Rolf. It was Marty, his brother.

Cantrell slid up on the stool beside him and ordered a beer. He could use the beer, anyway. It had been a long, hot ride and, discouragingly, he had gotten a little lost in Morristown.

"Hi, Van," he said to the big man beside him.

Marty gave him a dull, glazed glance and mumbled, "Hi."

"Got a package here for your brother. He said to give it to you, but it's pretty heavy. I'll run it out in the car. Where's your cottage?"

Marty didn't say anything. Cantrell started to repeat his question when he discovered that Marty was studying him secretively from under his heavy eyelids. There was hostility there, and a belligerent urge, but Marty seemed to know he was too drunk at the minute to do anything about it.

"Nuts to you," he said heavily. "Beat it."

Cantrell shrugged. He lifted his glass of beer, murmured, "Happy days," and drained it thirstily. As he stepped off his stool, he slapped Marty on the shoulder and grinned, "Be seeing you, fella," and walked back past the two dead palms into the lobby.

He took a dollar bill from his pocket and looked around for a bellboy. One, a perky kid of seventeen, all freckles and grin, came shrieking through the lobby, calling for Mr. Kirtlebaum. Cantrell stopped him and tucked the bill between the first two buttons of his jacket.

"That big lush in there at the end of the bar," he said. "How often do you have to carry him out of here?"

The bellboy peeked into the bar and grinned. "That depends," he said. "In the afternoon, like now, he can usually make it under his own steam. But at night it's a different story. Sometimes his sister comes for him in the speedboat, other times I take him out myself, and they usually slip me a fin."

"Out where do you take him?"

"Bird Island. Say, make it two bucks and I'll give you a tip."

"If it's about the sister, Junior, forget it. Anything else?"

"Yeah," said the kid impudently, "if you see her, tell her Eddie's off at ten tonight." He jitterbugged off, screeching again for Mr. Kirtlebaum.

Cantrell picked up his bag, wondering why Van Wyk had tied up with his brother and sister again. After his marriage to Barbara, Van Wyk had closed the door on his disreputable family, but they had stood by him through the murder trial, and maybe it was gratitude that he had them with him again. Margo Van Wyk was a lovely dish, but she had never carried the daisy chain, and Marty couldn't stay away from a bottle long enough to take a breath of fresh air. Van Wyk's kink was that he had to have money, had to have cars, boats, clothes, the luxury

items that only a surfeit of money could buy. It was a wonderful family.

The hotel clerk's mother's name was Singer, and she looked like the mother of everything that had been born—ample, bosomy, smiling. The room was fifty dollars a week, and she was slightly apologetic as she told him and showed it to him.

"That's just during the season," she said, "and I think it's highway robbery, but I have to charge it because everybody else does, and I'd antagonize friends if I didn't, but you'll find it very comfortable, and don't pay any attention to what my son says. I always say a little nip now and then is very refreshing, and if you ask me, you look like you know when to stop."

THE DOORBELL rang and she walked toward the door, smoothing down her apron. She looked back at Cantrell and smiled.

"Now if you feel like having a drink," she said indulgently, "you go right ahead, but keep the bottle out of sight when my son comes home."

Cantrell laughed and after she had gone he wished he did have a bottle, because the old dame sounded as if she didn't mind a nip herself now and then.

He emptied his bag on the bed and looked ruefully at the wrinkled heap of clothes. Everything had to be pressed except his shoes, socks and gun. He took the gun from the holster, checked the load and slipped it back into the leather again. At the knock on the door, he tossed the holster on the bed and crossed the room, stripping off his tie and opening his collar, which clung wetly to his neck.

The man at the door was short but very heavy, and though he was cleanly shaven his jowls were blue-black under glistening perspiration. More noticeably, however, he was wearing blue trousers, a light grey shirt, a gun strapped around

his waist and the gaudy gold badge that proclaimed him chief of police.

He looked up and said, "Cantrell?"

Cantrell said warmly, "That's right."

The chief held out his hand. "My name's McCarty," he said. "I'm supposed to be police chief around here. Nice room you got."

He strolled in, uninvited, looking sharply at the holstered gun on the bed. He picked it up and hefted it, nodding.

"Nice gun," he observed, dropping it back on the bed. "You're a private dick, they tell me."

"Who tells you?" asked Cantrell flatly.

"Oh, you know how it is," the chief waved his hand vaguely, taking in half the points of the compass. "You hear things, a little here, a little there. That's a cop's life for you, know what I mean? Sometimes it all adds up to minus nothing."

There was something familiar in the easy, experienced way that McCarty handled himself. Nothing overblown or pugnacious about him. He was a professional and sure of himself.

Cantrell said, "Local boy?" and walked over to the bed, picked up his gun and tossed it back into his bag.

"Yes," said the chief, eyeing him, "yes I am. But I did have nineteen or maybe it was twenty years on the force down in the city. Homicide. But I picked up a little tickle in my bronchial tubes, and the doc thought I could breathe easier up here."

He wasn't just making talk. He was telling Cantrell that he wasn't just a local yokel in a chief of police suit. Cantrell lit a cigarette and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Okay," he said. "what's on your mind?"

"Well, I'll tell you," the chief clasped his hands behind his back and rolled forward on his toes. "I hear you're interested

in one of our local residents. Van Wyk. In fact, I hear you're the boy who put McNeil, of the Newark force, on Van Wyk yesterday. Something involving the death of a girl named Gracie Bonnel. Am I reading it right?"

"Go on."

"That I will, that I will. As a favor to McNeil, I looked into it myself, and the night the Bonnel girl was hit, Van Wyk was at a dance in the Deer Head Inn with his sister."

"It couldn't have been his brother, could it?" Cantrell interrupted. "That Deer Head Inn deal sounds like Marty."

"That I'll grant you, son. But I happen to know both boys, know what I mean?"

"Yeah. You know both boys," said Cantrell irritably.

"And that's a fact. Rolf's the tall, dark, good-looking one. Marty's the souse and he's running to beef. Rolf was at the dance from ten till two and he's got maybe a half hundred witnesses to prove it. The Bonnel girl was hit just a little after midnight. Now, being we don't have any remote-controlled cars just yet, it looks as if that gives him a pretty clean bill."

"That could be a mistake."

"Sure I could. Anybody could be mistaken, even me. Even you. Especially you. And so—nothing personal, mind you—I just naturally can't have you running around bothering peaceful citizens. Leave Van Wyk alone. He's clean."

"If heaving him in the can for murder is going to bother him, I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to bother him."

"Just like that?" said the chief thoughtfully.

"Just like that."

"You're not going to make me get tough with you, are you, son?"

"That's up to you."

The chief's face hardened, then relaxed again. "Look," he said, "you're not going to make yourself anything but trouble. Forget Van Wyk. Go out and

swim on the beach. Hire yourself a boat and go fishing. Or stand on the street corner and whistle at the girls. Enjoy yourself. Have a good time. Or better still, go home. There's nothing here for you. Now what do you say?"

Cantrell laughed. "You're a card, Chief," he said. "You're a real cutup. I like it here. I'm going to stay."

The chief sighed. "Okay, boy," he said, "but you better have a million dollars worth of bail ready, and a lawyer on twenty-four hour duty, because the first complaint I get from Van Wyk, I'm going to throw you in the can, and as fast as you bail yourself out, I'm going to throw you in again, if only for spitting on the sidewalk. Some of the laws on the books here are almost three hundred years old, and take it from me, you can't as much as button your shirt left-handed without breaking a good half dozen of them. I think I'll take this with me."

He reached into the bag for Cantrell's gun. Cantrell angrily caught him by the wrist.

The chief said evenly, "Let go, boy, or I'll slap your ears down."

Cantrell tightened his grip and, with a wrench, lifted the chief's hand out of the bag. He closed the bag, lifted it and shoved it under the bed. The chief stood looking at his thick wrist as if he didn't quite believe it possible.

"Commando stuff," he grumbled. "That's the trouble with wars. You pick on a skinny little ribbon clerk, and the next thing you know, you're flat on your back. He'd been in the Marines or something. But you know, boy, if it wasn't for messing up Mrs. Singer's room here, I'd take you on regardless. Keep your gun—but don't try to wear it. I've only got four cops on my force, but they're all big, rough boys. Well," he plodded toward the door, "be seeing you in jail."

Cantrell said, "Wait a minute."

The chief turned, lifting his eyebrows.

"I'm not going to wear the gun," said Cantrell.

"Glad to hear it."

"But tell me who tipped you off that I was here?"

"You know better than that."

"No, wait. This is important. Was it a girl, a redhead, blue eyes, damn good looking? Beautiful, in fact."

The chief pursed his lips and murmured, "Maybe I got you wrong, Cantrell. I thought it was Van Wyk you were after."

"Was it the girl?"

The chief said, "Nope," and walked out.

Cantrell stared at the closed door long after the chief had gone, then he walked over to the window and watched the short, heavy man cross the street diagonally and enter the drug store on the corner. A round blue and white plaque on the window told passersby that there was a public telephone inside, and the chief had not looked as if he needed an aspirin.

Was he calling Van Wyk?

Cantrell found himself wondering how much McCarty made a year as police chief of Moburg, found himself wondering if, perhaps, McCarty wasn't supplementing his salary a little on the side. On Van Wyk's side, to be exact. It was McCarty who had given Van Wyk's alibi to McNeil down in Newark. How much was it worth?

As Cantrell stared thoughtfully down into the street, a truck, loaded with baskets of fresh string beans, crawled past the house, and behind it, honking furiously, was a black Packard roadster. Behind the wheel, fuming, sat Dave Shane, his bony face bleak and hard.

Cantrell grimaced and rubbed the knuckles of his right hand, for Dave's nose was swollen and red and there were two strips of adhesive high on his cheekbones.

Cantrell reached into his pocket for a

cigarette and watched the Packard inch toward the Old Moburg House. His lean face lengthened into hard planes as he scowled. This was something he had not expected. Now he had a wild man on his hands.

He turned, left the room and trotted down the stairs.

The hell with Dave.

CHAPTER THREE

Last Stop

HE WALKED down to the public dock at the lake. A large wooden sign announced that rowboats for hire were two dollars a day, and outboards were five dollars. Cantrell hired an outboard.

"Where's Bird Island, Admiral?" he asked the grey-haired character in charge of the boats.

The man looked at him and tittered, sucking noisily at his unlit cigar. "So you want to go to Bird Island?" he said finally.

"That's the idea, Commodore."

"Wouldn't, if I was you."

"Why not?"

"Dogs."

"I can take care of dogs."

The old man tittered. "Well," he said, "so be it. That's Bird Island down there, other end of the lake. Can't miss it." He pointed.

Cantrell said thanks and clambered into the boat. It was an ancient motor and he putt-putted along at about three miles an hour, but the water was so calm and clear, reflecting the high blue of the summer sky, that he felt a kind of peace and lazily lounged on one elbow, watching the other boats around him—the sailboats that seemed to stand motionless like snowy egrets, the plumed, roiling wake of the busy speedboats, the waterbug crawl of the rowboats, silent canoes that

still seemed to keep some of the stealth of their Indian origin. It took him almost an hour to reach the island.

He cut the motor and drifted close. Through the trees he could see a cool green and white house sitting in the lap of a cropped, rolling lawn. Three figures, two men and a woman, sat around a wrought iron table under a huge flowered umbrella. A radio was playing smooth Guy Lombardo music.

Cantrell's boat gently nosed aground about ten feet from shore, and two minutes later he fervently thanked his luck that it had, for out from the underbrush leaped a sleek, dangerous-looking Doberman. It stood at the edge of the water, head lowered, ears back, teeth bared, but not making a sound, staring directly at him. Cantrell hastily pushed the boat back into deeper water. He drifted, and the Doberman kept pace with him along the shore. There was a crackling of branches and two more Dobermans walked stiff-legged out to the beach. They watched him in absolute silence, but their menace was so obvious that only a fool would have ignored it. But the most disturbing thing was that they did not bark.

Cantrell stood up in the boat and pointed a finger at them. Immediately they scattered, crouching low and weaving, but not leaving the shoreline. Cantrell pursed his lips and whistled. These dogs had been trained to know that something pointed at them would probably be a gun. They were either army dogs or police-trained animals.

Now that he knew, Cantrell did not attempt to land again. He looked again toward the house, but the three persons under the umbrella had disappeared. He was practically certain that the girl had not been Peggy Shane, for her red hair would have been an unmistakable flame against the yellow of the umbrella.

Still watching the house, Cantrell pretended to tinker with the ancient motor,

yet keeping a good, safe twenty-five feet from the dogs. As he drifted by the private dock, to which was tied a twenty-five foot, gleaming launch, a girl came walking lightly down the shell path from the house. She stood at the edge of the dock and waved to him.

"Hello, there," she called.

Cantrell stared at her with more than casual interest. He had a dozen photographs of her, but he had never seen her in the flesh—and she was practically in the flesh, for her scrap of bathing suit covered police regulations and not a thousandth of an inch more. It was Margo Van Wyk.

In her photographs she had been really lovely in a sultry, wide-mouthed, heavy-lidded sort of way, but photographs are often deceiving. Cantrell expected to find, in reality, that she had a mouth like a torn pocket and the pouchy eyes of dissipation, for the stories told of her were strong. He was startled to see that she was slim and fresh as a nineteen-year-old—a dark-eyed blonde, like Marty.

He waved back and said, "Hi. Nice dogs you got there."

"Vicious brutes, you mean," her smile flashed. "Are you the detective? Come up and have a drink."

She watched with amusement as his jaw dropped. She laughed.

"It's not as mysterious as all that," she said. "Peggy Shane sent us a telegram, warning us." She laughed again. "Come on up and let's see how terrible you are."

She watched narrowly to see if he'd hesitate because of the dogs, which were now clustered at the end of the dock beside her, but Cantrell picked up one of the oars from the bottom of the boat and poled himself shoreward.

"Hold it, Sherlock," she cried hastily. "These brutes'll eat you alive. Some day I'm going to take an ax to all three of them." She turned to the dogs. "Kennel,"

she ordered in a piercing voice, "kennel!"

Sullenly, with a last hungry glance at Cantrell, they turned and trotted up the shell path toward the house.

"We didn't really want man-eaters around," explained Margo, "but we've been robbed three times, and the last time they made off with Rolf's speedboat. That made him pretty grim. Hence the menagerie. Hm, you do look pretty tough, at that."

She looked at him with frank appraisal as he leaped lithely from the boat to the dock. She pressed his forearm.

"And all steel," she murmured. "Not just lard, like Marty." She raised her eyes to his, and in a flicker all her resemblance to a fresh nineteen-year-old was gone.

He grinned. "You should be in the movies," he said. "You could make a million with eyes like that."

"That sounds trite. You can do better than that."

"Sure, but let's save it. Let it come as a surprise."

She took his arm and held it close to his side. "Come on, Cantrell," she drawled, "I'll buy you a drink. I'll buy you a whole flock of drinks."

She made him conscious of the warmth and softness of her every step of the way up to the house. Consciously, deliberately. She did not take him into the main house, but to a screened patio on the west side, shaded by lowering, blue-black spruce. It was as cool as a cave, and had draperies of violent, slashing colors, raw reds, yellows, greens. The furniture—a pair of chaise longues, a sofa, wide chairs—were functional in design, but with a subtle difference that changed them from the stark to the insinuatingly voluptuous.

She looked at Cantrell with her head to one side, her eyes bright, and murmured, "Like it? I designed it myself. It cost pots of money, but," deliberately, "Rolf has got pots and doesn't mind spending it."

Cantrell looked around with one eyebrow lifted. "What," he drawled, "no gilt mirrors, no red carpets, no—" He stopped and swung around.

THE DOOR crashed open and Marty stood there, swaying in the doorway. His eyes were bloodshot and he looked generally terrible, but he was soberer than when Cantrell had last seen him in the bar of the Old Moburg House.

He didn't bother with Cantrell, but glowered at the girl. "Are you crazy?" he demanded harshly. "Don't you know who this is?" He swept his arm floppily at Cantrell.

Margo was coolly amused. "He's a detective," she said. "His name is Cantrell. What are you doing away from your bottle? Don't you feel just a little naked without it?"

He ignored the thrust. "He came up here for Rolf. Don't you realize that?"

"Of course I realize it, but I also realize that he's not going to wrap Rolf up in a paper bag and carry him off."

Marty shouted, "He's here to make trouble!"

"What trouble can he make?"

"Get him out of here!"

"Oh, go back to your bottle. You're noisy, disgusting and tiresome."

His face congested. He took a plunging step toward her and whipped his hand across her cheek, then turned and lunged out of the patio. Margo held her hand to her cheek and stared after him. She jerked up her chin and her eyes blazed. She turned back to Cantrell and fashioned a smile.

"You'd better go now," she said. "I think Marty's on the verge of the DT's again, and it won't be pleasant here. I'll have to take care of him."

"When can I see you again?"

She touched his cheek with a lingering hand and murmured, "Sweet. I'll meet you tonight at the Deer Head Inn. Around nine." Her hand slid around the back of his neck. "Tonight," she said, breathing heavily "Tonight, Cantrell." She turned and ran into the house after Marty.

Walking down the path to the dock alone, Cantrell paused to look at the house with automatic disgust. He saw the three Dobermans streaming silently around the end of the house, scattering the shell of the path with their thrusting paws. He leaped for the tree beside the path, caught the lowest branch with desperate fingers and pulled himself up with bare fractions of a second to spare. The dogs, growling, ranged around the base of the tree, looking up at him, jumping futilely for his dangling legs. Their teeth snapped together inches below his feet. They were not just watchdogs; they were killers.

When he bought them, Rolf Van Wyk had not been thinking just of protecting his property; he had been thinking of punishment and revenge. Dogs like that were more dangerous than a gun. One of them ranged back ten feet, ran at the tree and tried to climb it, whining, to get at Cantrell. He kicked at it, caught it on the side of the head, and it fell back, snarling.

Angrily, Cantrell twisted on his perch and looked toward the house. A man was standing at the front door with a black-thorn walking stick in his hand, leaning heavily on it, as if he needed its support—a tall, slim man, dark, a fashion-plate in sharkskin slacks, a camel's hair sport jacket and a wine-colored scarf tied in an Ascot around his neck and into the V of his jacket. From the way he stood, he seemed to find the dangerous scene below only of remote inertest. Then, slowly, he plodded down the path, carrying the walking stick, not like a cane, but a club.

And the closer he came, the less natty he looked. His expensive sport jacket was spotted down the lapels, his hair was disordered, and there was a bristly growth of beard on his narrow, aristocratic face. His thin nose was high-bridged, hooked and as cruel as a hawk's beak, but it was the color of putty.

Without glancing up at Cantrell, he

walked among the dogs, slashing at them with his walking stick, and each time he hit, it sounded as if he were hitting a sodden bass drum. The dogs whimpered and dodged.

"Kennel!" he said. "Kennel, dammit! Kennel!"

The dogs scurried up the path.

Cantrell looked down at him and said evenly, "I'm going to break your neck, setting those mutts on me."

Rolf Van Wyk seemed not to hear. "I want to talk to you," he said dully. "You're Cantrell, the city detective, aren't you?"

Cantrell dropped from the tree. Fury boiled inside him like hot oil, and though his fists were doubled into hard knots, something kept him from lashing at the tall, narrow man. Perhaps it was the rotting look of tragedy in the man's dark eyes.

He controlled his voice and said, "Talk to me about what?"

Van Wyk said remotely, "Peggy. I was to meet her at the station in Moburg. I didn't. You're in love with her, aren't you?"

"What the hell difference does that make?"

Van Wyk waved his hand vaguely. "I know all about Peggy. She was going to marry you. I know. Where is she now? Did she go back home? I want to see her."

"How come you know so much about her?" Cantrell asked belligerently.

"I wanted to marry her once myself. I—"

He turned his head and looked bleakly back toward the house, around which the three dogs had disappeared. "It didn't work out." There was poignant sadness in his faraway voice. "Where is she now? Why does she want to see me? She hates me, I know."

"With good reason, pal, with good reason."

FOR the first time, Van Wyk showed a flash of hot emotion. "What do you know about it?" he demanded angrily. "What does anybody know about it, except me? Even Peggy doesn't know. She thinks she knows, but she doesn't." But the heat burned out as quickly as it had flamed, and he went on in the same old dull voice, "I want to see her. I want to talk to her. It won't do any good, but I want to see her. Where is she?"

Cantrell said wonderingly, "Are you nuts?"

Van Wyk's eyes opened wide. He looked at Cantrell for a moment, then broke into a low, jarring laugh. "I've thought of that. I've asked myself," he whispered. "You do, you know, especially when that big hand of night comes down, reaches for you and squeezes you as you'd squeeze an orange to see the juice spurt through your fingers. But it's other things, other things, too. I can see that you won't tell me where Peggy is. But never mind. It's all right. I'm not angry. It was always something I had to work out for myself."

He turned and plunged down the path toward the dock in a ragged run. Cantrell stared after him, muttering uneasily, "Nuts. Absolutely nuts."

A few moments later, the gleaming mahogany speed launch roared out into the lake, spun on its stern, and thundered toward the public dock of Moburg at forty-five miles an hour, with Van Wyk crouched over the wheel like a jockey.

This time, returning, the sedate pace of the old outboard was an agony. A half mile from the dock, it gave a few thin, complaining sputters, then died, seemingly forever. Cantrell tugged at the starting rope until his eyes bulged, then finally looked into the gas tank. It was bone dry. He rowed the last half mile, watching the sun sink lower and lower behind the far trees. It was quite dark when he reached the dock. He tied up the boat hurriedly, looking around for Van Wyk's

mahogany launch. He had seen it tied there when he was out on the lake, but now it was gone.

He trudged dispiritedly back to his lodging house, stopping first in the liquor store to pick up a bottle of bourbon. There were no lights on in the house, and he felt his way up the stairs to his room. As he opened the door and stepped in, the darkness exploded in a brilliant sheet of searing light. With a groan, he tumbled into something that thrust him back and hit him again.

When he recovered consciousness, he was lying on the bed. The room swam slowly into focus and his eyes traveled hazily around the angle of the wall and ceiling until finally they came to rest on a bulky outline that loomed at the foot of the bed. A cigarette glowed redly, died and glowed again—and behind it was the gaunt face of Dave Shane.

Cantrell struggled dizzily to sit up. Dave smashed him back with the bony heel of his hand.

"All good things come to an end, champ," he said harshly, standing beside the bed now. "This is it. Didn't think I could find you, did you? But I did. Don't think I didn't know you and Peggy were working against me. I knew, all right. So after you went, I watched her. I watched her buy a train ticket to this whistle stop. Now it's just you and me, so make it easy for yourself, champ, and tell he—where is he?"

Consciousness was the moon, and Cantrell groped for it, mumbling.

Dave gritted, "Okay, champ," and dug down into him with both hands. Cantrell's arms and legs jerked spasmodically and a groan wrenched from behind his clenched teeth.

Dave lifted his hands slightly, and said softly, "Come on, champ, I can hurt you worse than that. Where is he?"

Cantrell tried to talk, tried to curse him out, but his tongue clattered in his mouth.

Dave swore and leaned into him again, hunching his shoulders as if to pour more strength into the brutal, bony fingers. Cantrell yelled, then bit his lip and feebly beat at Dave's face with pain-weakened fists.

There was a click and the room lights burst into incandescence, and a voice said furiously, "Get off him, Dave, or I'll shoot you, even if I have to do it in the back! I followed you because I thought you'd be up to something like this."

Dave jerked upright and said incredulously, "Peggy!"

CHAPTER FOUR

Answer in Blood

WITH the sudden cessation of pain, Cantrell felt as if he were drifting, disembodied. He could not move his physical arms or legs, but he seemed to be floating midway between the ceiling and the floor. He could see Peggy clearly as she stood with her back against the closed door, a heavy, black gun in her small hand, her face so white that it seemed flooded by the blue of her eyes. He could see Dave crouched dangerously on the edge of the bed, leaning toward her, his big hands held out, half clenched. All this Cantrell could see as sharply as if it were etched against a white background by floodlights. But he could not seem to move.

Peggy said wildly, "Get out of here, Dave. I'm not bluffing!"

"Sis!"

"Get out of here, get out of here!"

"Sis, listen! Sis! He knows where Van Wyk is, and I can make him tell. That's what we want, isn't it? Van Wyk. He killed Barbara, Peg. You haven't forgotten that, have you?" Dave's heavy voice was thick with pleading. "Barbara, your sister. Remember when we were kids, Peg? Barbara was always the gentle one.

You and I, we were the crazy Shanes, and when the old man made his million, we were worse. Who was it who got us out of our scrapes, Peg? Who was it who tried to take the blame when the old man would beat hell out of the pair of us for a lead penny? Who was it who slipped us a fin or a sawbuck when we were in disgrace and had our allowances cut off?" Curdled tears were running down Dave's face at the memory. "Who was it, even after we grew up, we always ran to when we were in something over our heads. It was Barbara. It was always Barbara. Then Van Wyk married her and gave her a bullet. She gave him a quarter of a million bucks, and he gave her a bullet. That was a fair exchange, wasn't it? Wasn't it, Peg?"

Under the powerful throb of his voice, Peggy's gun wavered, and it was only with desperate effort that she steadied it again.

"Get out of here!" she cried. "Get out of here. All you know how to do is stick your fist in somebody's face. You made Barbara's life a hell with the trouble you were always in with your fighting. Now that's she's dead, you love her. When she was alive, you were always making fun of her. Remember what you used to call her, Dave? Remember? Miss Milquetoast. She didn't love Van when she married him, but she married him, and one of the reasons was that she wanted to live a life of her own and get away from the messes you were always leaving on her doorstep

like something the cat dragged in and wouldn't eat. Don't talk to me about Barbara. And wipe those crocodile tears off your face. You make me sick!"

Dave's head jerked under the impact of her words. He was as rigid as if iron had replaced the blood in his veins, then very slowly his lips spread back from his teeth in a wolfish grin.

"Thank you, dear sister," he said with grating irony. "Thank you for showing me exactly where you stand. Get out of here? Sure, I'll get out of here. But take my advice. Pull that trigger now!"

Peggy screamed, "Get out, get out, get out!"

"Sure. Sure."

He rolled forward to his feet and swaggered toward the door. She circled away from him. He stood in the open doorway and looked contemptuously at her.

"If you call yourself a Shane," he said, "I'm changing my name to Hitler. So long, dear sister. I'll be seeing you. You, and the champ over there on the bed, and your mutual friend, Van Wyk." Grinning, he flipped the door shut with a reverberating slam.

Peggy sprang to the door and twisted the key, choking on the sobs she strove to stifle. She darted to the bed and her fingertips feathered over Cantrell's face.

"Did he hurt you?" she moaned. "Oh, darling, did he hurt you?"

Cantrell tried to raise a grin. "Jus'

horsin' 'roun'," he said thickly. "Jussa li'l light exercise. . . ."

She smiled tremulously.

He said, "Bottle—"

She understood. Her glance darted around the room and found the bourbon bottle on the floor against the chest of drawers, where it had rolled when Dave had slugged him. She snatched it up and poured a half tumbler with shaking hands. She lifted his head and held the glass to his lips. The first few swallows welled out over his chin, then the bite and strength of it made a small, hot glow in his stomach and gradually snaked out into his arms and legs. He looked up at her and gave her a genuine grin.

"Hi, Peg," he said.

As if the warmth in his voice had burned out something in her, the tenderness in her eyes turned to ashes. She pulled her arm from under his head and stood stiffly.

"I'm glad you're—all right again," she said jerkily. "I'm—going to marry Van. I saw him just a short while ago, and it's all settled. Leave us alone. You owe me something, and that's it. Leave us alone. You won't have to worry about Dave. We're going away tonight, alone, and he'll never find us. You could, I know, if you tried. But don't try. I couldn't stand it!"

She ran for the door. She fought for a moment with the key, then twisted out into the hallway and slammed the door.

Cantrell pushed himself up from the bed, crying, "Peggy, wait! You don't have to—"

THE key grated in the lock, and he heard her swift footsteps beat down the stairs. He swung his legs over the edge of the bed and fell to his knees. Dave's taloning fingers had hurt him more deeply than he had realized. There was no strength in his legs. He gritted his teeth and reached for the bottle on the night table beside the bed.

But it wasn't the rush of liquor that gave him strength. The raw sting of the bourbon left him only gasping. A surge of emotion thrust up from a dark, unsuspected part of him. He pushed himself to his feet, stood wavering for a moment, then hurtled against the door. The room spun as the jar shook him, but he went back three feet and lunged at it again. He lost count of the times he hit it with his shoulder, but the wood of the panel splintered and he reached through the opening to turn the key she had forgotten to take out of the lock. He staggered out into the hall, found the handrail of the stairs. He took the first step, but on the second, his foot tangled in a tear in the carpet and he plunged head first into the stairwell.

He came to with his head cradled in the ample lap of Mrs. Singer.

"My goodness, Mr. Cantrell," she cried in relief, half laughing, half crying, "I thought you were dead! Here, drink this."

It was bourbon and he pushed it away.

"But it's good for you," she said. "See?" She tossed it down with a practiced flip of her wrist, burped and covered her mouth with a genteel hand. "See?"

"I don't want the damn stuff," he said more roughly than he intended. "What time is it?"

"Quarter to ten. I just came home from the movies."

Quarter to ten. He'd been out for more than an hour! He sprang to his feet, wavered for a moment, then through sheer force of will, forced back the nausea that threatened to engulf him.

"Where can I get a speedboat?" he asked evenly.

She looked aghast. "At this hour of night?"

"Where can I get a speedboat? It's important!"

"Well," she said doubtfully, "my son had one tied up at the dock. But that's only to give the vacationers speedboat rides during the day. He charges two

dollars, and I think it's a crime because—"

"Listen, honeybun," Cantrell interrupted, "you've got a key to it, haven't you?"

"Y-yes."

"Give it to me. Give it to me and I'll buy you a whole case of bourbon exactly like the bourbon you've been drinking there, and I'll never say a word to your son about it. He doesn't let you have your little nip now and then, does he? He disapproves." Cantrell dug her in the ribs with his elbow. "But what's wrong with a little drink for your stomach's sake? Nothing. That's what. Nothing. Give me the key to his boat, sweetheart, and I'll put a full case of bourbon under your bed where he'll never find it."

Her glance wavered. "I shouldn't," she stammered. She looked full at him. "Make it rye," she said.

As Cantrell walked out of the house with his gun holstered under his arm and the key to the boat in his pocket, a tall young cop, with the shoulders of a Notre Dame guard, loomed up out of the shadows of the maple tree before the walk, reached out a heavy hand and clamped it on Cantrell's shoulder.

"Now just a minute there," he began easily.

Cantrell ducked under the arm and came up inside, slugging savagely for the big jaw that hung above him. His fists spatted against it three times, and the big cop went down on his back, floundering in the dust of the gutter. Cantrell sprinted down the street toward the public dock. A police whistle splintered the silence of the somnolent night.

It was a lucky thing that Cantrell had been on the public dock earlier that day, for then he had seen the gaudy red and white, twenty-foot speedboat tied at the end, lettered along the side—**SPEEDBOAT RIDE \$2.00**. He leaped into the boat, turned the key in the ignition and pressed the starter button, pumping the gas lever on

the steering wheel. The big motor roared, and from the sound of it, Cantrell judged it to be about a hundred and thirty horse, a little big for the size of the boat, but terrifically fast.

From the twinkle of town lights up the hill, he heard the banshee wail of a police siren swooping down toward the dock. He eased the speedboat out into the lake, pointed it in the brittle path of the moon over the waters toward Bird Island and opened it wide. The nose surged up toward the sky and he had to grab the wheel against the backward fling as the boat shot out under him.

It was a fast boat and the noise of the motor was like a lion proclaiming his prowess. It seemed to plane on the last two inches of bottom, flung across the water, standing on the screw alone, weightless, pursued by furies. He was on top of the island before he knew it, and had to make a wide, plumed sweep to keep from ramming. He cut the motor but still hit the beach hard enough to send him sprawling on his hands over the windshield. He leaped out into a foot of water and splashed to shore. The shell walk gleamed straight ahead before him. He sprinted up it, swerving violently once to avoid the bloody body of one of the Dobermans. He stopped and bent over it. It's skull had been crushed, but even so it was a beautiful dog, even in death. A few feet farther he came upon the body of a second Doberman with its neck broken, and twenty feet up the path, the still body of Dave Shane with the body of the third Doberman viced in his knucky hands.

CANTRELL knelt down beside him, running his fingers down the corded forearm to the wrist. Dave's face was a shawl of blood, hiding the features. There were tooth slashes on his arms and his trousers were in ribbons, but Cantrell's finger pads found a slow beat of pulse in the wrist—slow, steady, strong.

He rose slowly, wiping the sweat from his forehead with the palm of his hand. Dave was still Peggy's brother. He had never borne Dave any great affection, but he had liked him in the days when Dave was not a madman, but merely a reckless, open-handed roughneck.

The avenue of maples did not shade him, for the moon was in the west, and he stood out like a silver man against the shadows, gleaming. A shot stabbed the night. He weaved and a hysterical burst of shots orangely tongued the darkness. He made a shallow dive into the shadows, jerking loose his gun as he rolled over and over under the spreading branches. He crouched, waiting. Every night sound was stilled. The tree toads had stopped piping, the big bulls in the lake were holding their breath, and even the little owls were waiting it out.

Another shot came probingly out of the darkness, and Cantrell fired instantly into the flash. There was a heavy sound in the rhododendrons around the screened patio, then absolute, breathless silence again.

Cantrell did not investigate. Crouching low, he ran along the border of maples, his gun clutched sweatily in his hand. There was a light, a subdued amber light, in the main room of the house off the voluptuous patio, partially screened by the leafy rhododendrons.

Cantrell squirmed through them, raised himself to the window edge. The room was large, dominated by a huge fieldstone fireplace. On the hearth stood four large pigskin bags, bulging with what had been packed inside them, and standing stiffly around this pyramid were Peggy Shane, Van Wyk and Margo.

Van Wyk's narrow face was raised to the light and the hollows of tragedy seemed carved out of his cheeks. His spade chin jerked up and he said something, which was lost to Cantrell, because the windows were closed.

Trembling just a little, Cantrell lifted

his gun, for he knew what was coming. Peggy stood, proud in her despair, beside the heap of luggage, unaware of the bullet that was marked for her. Van Wyk spoke again and gestured sharply at Peggy, his arrogant, thin nose held high, his lips thin and incisive. Margo stood with her head bowed, scourged by the lash of his voice, her arms submissively behind her. Van Wyk pointed at her and, face pale, scourged her again, accenting his words with thrusts of his forefinger. Sweat gleamed on his face. Peggy turned to him and flung out her arm and said something, as if pleading with him to moderate his tone. He chopped impatiently with his hand, flinging off her plea, then lowered his head, looking at Margo, thrust out his lower jaw, wrinkling his nose, wolflike, as he spoke again.

Margo winced, and every word made her wince again. She threw up her stark and despairing face and swung out her arm, as if to plead. . . .

Cantrell sucked in his breath and fired. He fired again, and a third time. The first shot caught Margo in the shoulder and spun her around, flinging her to the floor, but desperately she clawed after the gun she had dropped; his second shot ploughed splinters in the floor, and his third shot hit the shining, nicked gun on the cylinder and threw it into the fireplace.

He slashed the window with the barrel of his gun, clearing the frame of glass, and leaped wild-eyed into the room, pointing his gun at Van Wyk, who stared down at his moaning sister, then covered his eyes.

Outside, siren moaning to a stop, the police boat sidled into the dock.

Peggy looked at Cantrell, took a tottering step toward him, said pleadingly, "Darling—" and fell.

CHIEF McCARTY, stocky and swart, dominated the living room. Van Wyk, crushed, sat dully in the lounge chair beside the fireplace. Peggy clung to Cantrell

on the sofa, every now and again touching his arm, or his hand, as if to reassure herself that he was real; Dave Shane, his face unrecognizably bandaged, stood in the doorway with subdued docility.

Cantrell, in a low voice, was finishing his talk.

"When he," a gesture at Van Wyk, "married Barbara Shane, he cut himself away from them, Margo and Marty. He was ashamed of them, yet he felt a responsibility toward them. He wasn't a bad guy, if you want to look at it that way. But to their way of thinking, he left them without a cent. They needed money. Marty to drink and Margo because she had to surround herself with luxury. They—Marty and Margo—killed Barbara Shane, so that their brother would take them in again and shower them with money. They killed the Bonnel girl because they knew she was weak. Rolf had been with her during the killing of Barbara, but they were afraid that, under pressure, she might develop an uncertainty, so they killed her. And they were about to kill Peggy, here, because they knew they would be cast off again, that Van Wyk would repudiate them. Peggy could

not stand their rottenness, and they knew it. If Van Wyk married her, it would be the end of easy living for them."

Dave spoke up beggingly from the doorway, "Kids—you, champ; you, Peg. Listen to me. I'm a reformed character. No more trouble, honest. I promise, no more fights, and that's cross my heart. All I want is that you name your first kid after me—Dave. I got a quarter of a million bucks in the bank, and it's all his. I don't want it. I don't need it. I can make my own way. I'm sorry for everything I did. I was wrong, I apologize. If you want me to grovel, I'll grovel, dammit. But it'll never happen again, I promise!"

Chief McCarty growled, "Shut up and do it in private. Don't you have any decency?" He glowered at Cantrell, and thrust out a jabbing forefinger, "And don't you think you're in the clear. There's a few points I want cleared up—"

Dave started down the room, snarling, "You want some points cleared up, do you! That's fine. That's just ducky. Well now, you just listen to me, sweetheart—"

He caught himself and looked at Cantrell and Peggy on the sofa.

"Ah, hell!" he said.