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SHOCK



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Number 1

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Death Is

Was this lovely, smoky-eyed girl really his wife? Or was she Anne's twin sister—the tempestuous and evil-souled Zelda—biding her time until her next murder. . .

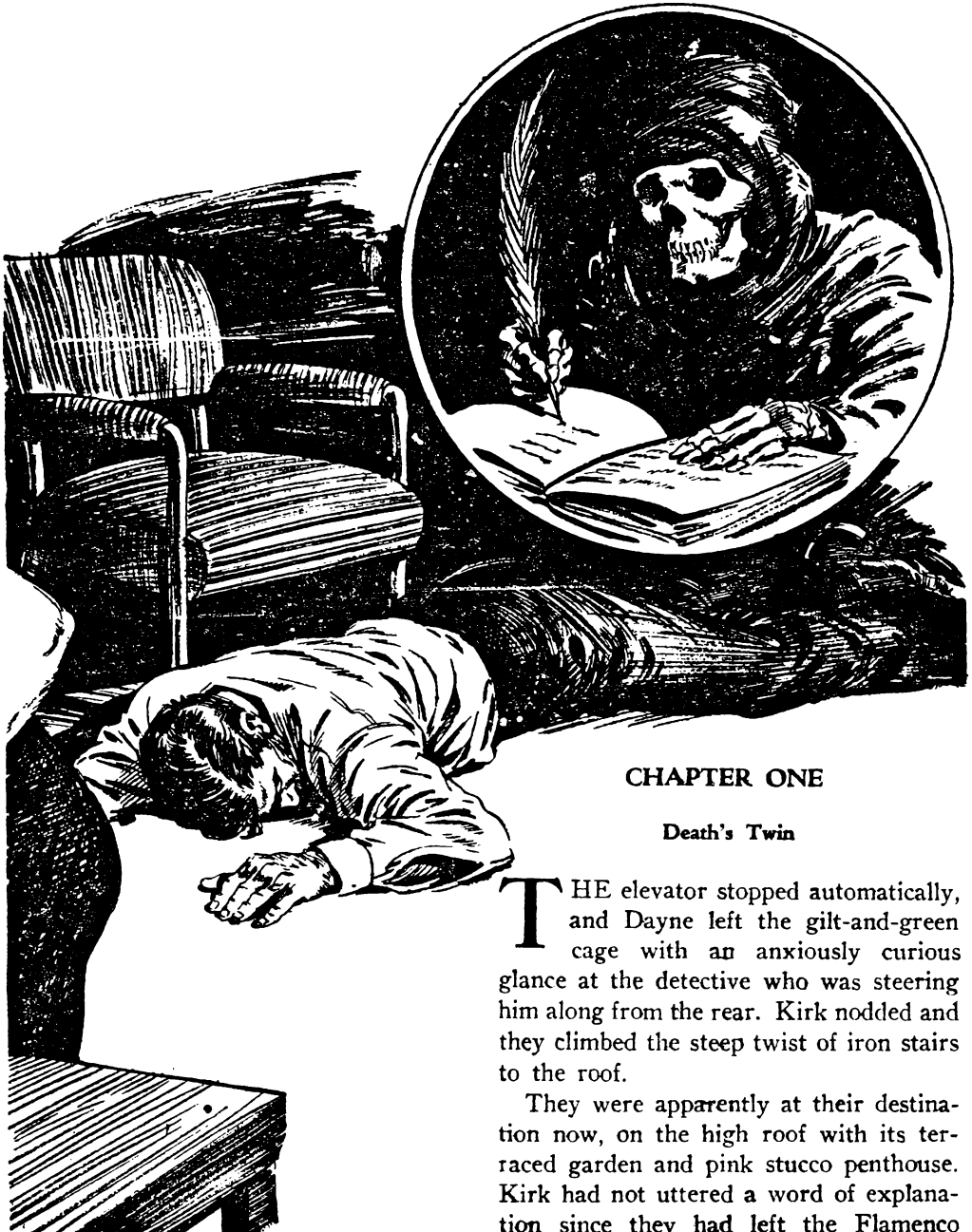
Their quarreling hit a murderous pitch. . .



**Exciting
Shock-Mystery
Novel**

a Dame

By Frederick C. Davis



CHAPTER ONE

Death's Twin

THE elevator stopped automatically, and Dayne left the gilt-and-green cage with an anxiously curious glance at the detective who was steering him along from the rear. Kirk nodded and they climbed the steep twist of iron stairs to the roof.

They were apparently at their destination now, on the high roof with its terraced garden and pink stucco penthouse. Kirk had not uttered a word of explanation since they had left the Flamenco

Club, where Dayne had been working up his new dance routine. Now the sober-faced detective said merely:

"You'll have to go in, Mr. Dayne. You'd better get yourself set for a jolt."

"A jolt? Why should I?" Foss Dayne looked hard at Kirk. "What's in there?"

Kirk shook his head. Whatever was in there, he wanted it to hit Dayne cold. Dayne lifted his chin and thrust the penthouse door open.

First he heard a woman's husky exclamation, made half in relief, half in friendly anxiety. "Foss, they found you!"

He had entered a small vestibule, facing a closed door, with a second door open on his right and giving into a small, expensively tricked-out "den." The voice had come from there—the familiar worn voice of Joyce Lane.

She was moving toward him, the usual paleness of her fine face making her hair seem a shinier black, her lips a more vivid red. Dayne—he and his wife Anne both—had been friendly with Joyce for years now—or perhaps it was the other way around; perhaps Joyce had built up this friendship with them. He was startled to see her here in this strange hideaway in the sky; yet it wasn't really surprising at all. More and more, lately, it had seemed to him that wherever he might turn, Joyce appeared at his elbow—a lovely presence, an electrical nearness which he tried to shrug off—and couldn't.

"Foss—Foss, darling, they wouldn't let me phone you. The police, I mean. I wanted to warn you—it's not a pretty thing to walk in on. I know, because I'm the one who found them like that."

"Found them?" Foss Dayne echoed, mystified still.

Joyce was wearing last night's evening dress—a full-skirted blue, dark as midnight, with a tiny star twinkling out here and there, like a facet of its wearer's beauty. Her jet-black hair was glossy as a raven's wing, and perfectly neat, even

though she'd evidently spent the night at the backstage party at the Bandbox Theatre. Foss Dayne and Anne had been there too, but had left earlier than most. Finally leaving the party herself, then, very early this morning, the restless Joyce had dropped in here at this penthouse and found—what?

Dayne repeated, "Them?"

Sergeant Kirk had turned the knob of the other door and now he pushed it open. Joyce stiffened and Dayne stood still, gazing into a lavish living room.

Lavish and garish both. Pure Hollywood in technicolor, this penthouse studio. Soft couches, concealed lights, fur rugs, a built-in-bar, a non-stop phonograph obviously loaded with heart-softening melodies of the *Parlez Moi D'Amour* variety. All the trimmings were there, with something extra very recently added.

The something extra was death.

From where he stood Dayne could see the dead man. Wearing dark trousers and a white shirt, he lay face down on the floor. A bottle—evidently he had been holding it when the bullets struck him in the face—had shattered beside him, mixing his lost blood with premium Scotch. He was a smooth, well-curried corpse. No doubt it would have pleased his vanity if he could have seen how little the process of getting murdered had mussed him up.

"This is his place—or was, Mr. Dayne," Sergeant Kirk said. "Recognize him?"

"Steve Squire. Knew him slightly, just as I know thousands of other night-crawling characters who haunt the hot-spots." Dayne shook his head. "Who did this to him?"

"We think," Kirk answered quietly, "*she* did. The woman over there in the corner. Not so long ago, either—they're both still warm."

"Woman?" Dayne echoed tensely.

"Over there," Kirk repeated. "We

figure she shot him during a liquored-up scrap—using the gun he kept here—then killed herself.”

FOSS DAYNE stepped into the room, stiffening himself. He saw now the other squad men and homicide dicks putting the details of the scene on record with camera and notebooks. Kirk preceded Dayne to a spot behind the door where a sheet was spread over a huddled form, and gently dragged the cover off—and Dayne, frozen, started down into a face that was lovely even in death.

She lay in graceful repose, her honey-colored hair a glistening pillow, her eyes open but not staring—smoky green eyes gazing up at nothingness, seeing it a little sadly. Her soft coral-red lips were parted as if to murmur a reluctant farewell. Three strands of pearls encircled her lovely white throat, in stunning contrast to the rich maroon dress with its sweeping V. Her skirt had swirled beautifully as she fell, revealing her gorgeous legs. On one ankle, a diamond anklet twinkled. . . .

The jarring note was the blood caked around the dark hole in her forehead and the revolver lying near her delicate, scarlet-nailed hands.

Sergeant Tom Kirk was saying, “As a matter of formality, Mr. Dayne, will you identify her for us?”

He drew a slow, deep breath. His first glimpse of her had been a jolt, yes—one jarring him down to his dancing toes. For one ghastly instant he had been uncertain; but then he had felt a surging sense of sureness and relief. This couldn't, after all, be Anne—not his wife. Everything about this girl was too gaudy for Anne—and Anne would never be here in this penthouse hideaway of a notorious rounder like Squire. . . .

“Yes, I can identify her,” Dayne answered, finding his voice after that brief but chilling shock. “She was my sister-

in-law. She was Zelda Sequard—my wife's twin sister.”

* * *

Now, hours later in his own apartment, he sat facing a lovely girl whose hair was a soft honey-colored glow, whose smoky green eyes watched him intently, whose coral-red lips were parted a little as she listened. She had tucked her slender ankles under her and in the long tapering fingers of one hand she held an emptied wine glass. She wore a dark, plain suit; but otherwise, in every line and detail, she appeared to be the same girl he had seen lifeless on the floor of Steve Squire's penthouse.

But of course she was not. She was the dead girl's twin sister.

“Anne,” Foss Dayne said quickly, noticing her empty glass, “let me get you more sherry.”

She brought herself quickly to her feet. “Never mind, Foss, darling. I'll get it for myself.” To the others she added, “Please go on. Tell me the rest about Zelda, no matter how horrible and shocking it is. I'll hate every word of it in the papers, but there's no use trying to escape the truth of what happened. After all, we're grown up enough to take it.”

Joyce Lane smiled—still lovely and trim in last night's gown. “I hope so, Anne. Because it's going to be pretty rough.”

Foss Dayne gave her a quick frown; and they were quiet again, watching Anne, tall and blonde and graceful as she moved to the buffet.

This was the Dayne apartment, a small one, showing Anne's tidy taste in the furnishings and decorations. Coming here from the penthouse with Sergeant Kirk and Joyce—of course Joyce—and finding that Anne had returned, Dayne had broken the news as gently as he could.

Anne had said simply:

“You know, Foss, I've been afraid of something terrible, like this, for a long time now—and here it is.”

Dayne had expected her to go to pieces under the shock of her sister's scandalous death, and he admired the grip she'd taken on herself—particularly the game way she had faced Sergeant Kirk and answered his countless questions. The sergeant, seeming inclined to make it a little rougher than necessary, kept frowning at his notes and showing an inexplicable reluctance to leave.

Joyce asked him with characteristic boldness, "What's bothering you, Tommy?" She had known him only a few hours now, and strictly officially at that, but she was never one to curtsy to formality. "It's just what it seems to be, isn't it? A fine, juicy case of murder, suicide and high-class debauchery?"

Sergeant Kirk rose, his lips twisted, saying nothing again—on his guard against Joyce, as well he might be.

"After all, it was in the cards, Tommy—wasn't it?" Joyce insisted, her dark eyes studying him. "There was Zelda, in Squire's plushy love-nest, as the tabloids will certainly call it, with each of them two-timing the other. Sooner or later it was bound to explode—especially with Zelda being just the kind to flare up in a jealous alcoholic rage. You might say it turned out the only way it could. Inevitable. Wouldn't you say that, my talkative Tommy?"

"Sure, that's it. The wages of sin is death, sure." Kirk grinned briefly. "Thanks, Mr. and Mrs. Dayne, for cooperating—and my sympathies. I hope I won't have to see you about it again. So long now."

IT WAS Joyce who hurried to let him out of Anne's and Foss's apartment. She came back looking darkly thoughtful. Anne had returned to her chair with her filled glass. Foss had begun pacing up and down.

"How come I didn't know this was building up?" he said. "This pretty little

affair between Zelda and Squire, I mean. Was Zelda's taste improving—was she keeping this one under wraps for a change?" He went on, "I can't get used to it—the enormous difference between Zelda and you, Anne. Identical twin sisters—the two of you looked exactly alike—yet inside you were as far apart as heaven and hell."

Anne said softly, "No, that isn't quite true, Foss. We were exactly alike in our inner selves, too. But because Zelda's upbringing was so different from mine, she let her emotions storm out, while I learned to keep mine under control."

Dayne nodded as he went on pacing. He could understand that. A fascinating case to study, these twin sisters.

Their mother was an actress, their father a dramatic director. Both were touring in a stock company when the twin girls were born. For a while the babies had followed the tradition of living in their mother's dressing-room trunk; but soon it had become necessary to find homes for them. Their parents had been unable to arrange for their care without separating them. Anne had been placed with an uncle in Ohio, a minister. Zelda had been taken by friends of mercurial fortunes and the temperaments of gamblers, breeders of racing horses in Virginia. Anne had been disciplined as a little lady—not a stuffy little angel, but charmingly and naturally well-behaved. Zelda, in contrast, had run as wild as any high-strung colt.

Later, the lure of the stage strong in them both, they had headed for Broadway, and for a time they had shared an apartment. Anne had made a slow, quiet start on a career as a dramatic actress only to give it up willingly in order to devote herself to her new husband, that exciting new dancer Foss Dayne, who, she felt, would soon shine among the great dancing stars of all time.

Zelda's chosen career had been night-

club torch-singing incidentally, but chiefly men. Perhaps she had never stopped, or hadn't cared, to ask herself what her objective was. Dayne felt fairly sure, however, that her goal had not been a cold and lonely bed six feet under the graveyard sod—at least not so soon as this.

Joyce said, with a knowing smile, "Tell you the rest about Zelda, did you say? It makes fascinating listening, my fine friend. In fact, Foss, you haven't dreamed the half of it."

Foss halted, turning to her uneasily. "Zelda's romp in that penthouse wasn't all of it?"

"No, my sweet." Joyce gazed at him through her long dark lashes. "Unsuspecting lad, aren't you, Foss? You imagine other people are as naturally decent as you are. You make it seem a fine masculine quality, but not many people are that way, brother—and at the risk of disillusioning you a little more I'll confess that, for example, I'm not one of the few. But compared with little Zelda—" Joyce smiled slowly. "An adventurous lassie, Foss. Curious about life, let's say. Eager to fill her cup to overflowing—not always with stuff as high proof as good rye, either."

Anne sat straighter. "I don't know what you mean, Joyce—and how could you know more about Zelda than I do?"

"My big brother is a busy theatrical producer, remember?" Joyce said smoothly. "I like to spend a lot of time backstage, where the grapevine is always humming. It has carried a lot of choice tidbits of news about our Zelda—stuff I've never told you before because I knew that two guys as nice as you wouldn't like hearing it."

Frowning, Foss asked, "Such as?"

"Such as the time she let you believe she'd gone up to the Catskills for a month of bucolic relaxation. That's not where she really was. Actually you'd have found her putting on two shows nightly down

at the Love Apple, that low dive deep in the Village. Shows is the right word for them. She was billed at Gilda, the golden-masked Venus. Stripping just to see what it was like."

Startled, Foss saw Anne staring at Joyce with her soft coral mouth opened a little in dismay.

"That's a fair sample, my sweets," Joyce assured them. "She also went to Rio once. An uninhibited little girl, I'm afraid. Very bad, really. The Squire penthouse was a step upward for her—and the fact that she finally got what was coming to her won't really surprise anyone who knew her as she really was."

Joyce added, "I'm telling you this so you'll understand the blood-spilling a little better. You'd soon hear them from other sources anyway. But even I don't know all of it, pals. There's still more—but I haven't quite been able to tease it out of our close-mouthed friend Tommy—so far."

Anne exclaimed, "The detective? Joyce! Do you actually mean he knew about Zelda *before* this morning?"

"I've a hunch he did, my precious—and officially," Joyce answered wryly. "Judging from his reactions, in fact, I'm pretty sure he knows one or two hidden chapters in her busy life. Zelda must have had a little brush with the law some time earlier—something she didn't noise around. And of course Tommy wasn't spilling it. Not that quiet lad. Not on such short acquaintance, anyway."

FOSS stared at the dead girl's sister; and Anne's green-gray eyes gazed widened and frightened into his.

"So in any case, Anne, dearest, don't weep too many tears over the dear departed Zelda. She had her fun—plenty of it. More of her kind of it than you would want in twenty lifetimes." Joyce smiled her attractive, sophisticated smile. "Or me in, say, four or five."

Anne brought herself to her feet, putting her wine glass aside. "We can't deny it. Zelda was really evil. But she's gone now. We've faced the truth about it—" Anne steadied her shoulders—"and now I want to begin forgetting it. I—I'd like to be alone for a little while, if you won't mind. Please—excuse me."

Foss Dayne hurried to the bedroom door with her. Her fingertips stroked a light caress across his cheek; she smiled, then went quietly in and closed the door behind her. Turning back, he found Joyce wearily picking up her fox jacket—ready at last to leave him alone with Anne. She still wore her dark, cynically amused smile.

"What you said about Zelda and the cops—that really worries me, Joyce. For Anne's sake."

"Then let's hope they'll let it lie, Foss, darling," Joyce said. "These next few days are going to be rough on you both anyway. You'll be hounded unmercifully by stony-hearted reporters and fiends with news cameras. But if I know you—and I do—you'll be out there dancing tonight as usual. The show must go on, and all that noble sort of guff—mustn't it?"

Foss was eyeing her. "Certainly I'll go on tonight. What kind of trouper would I be if I didn't? And why don't I tell you to stay the hell out of my life? You never stop needling me."

"That's because you're such a very upright young fool, my lad," Joyce said. "So *damned* upright!" She laughed ruefully.

"Now listen. It's getting later every day. My famous producer brother will soon have his big new musical all whipped together. He needs a feature dancer for it, but he's looking for a name. But my big brother Jonathan respects my judgment in such things, bless his heart, and a little persuasion on my part about a dancer named Dayne would get you that dazzling spot, my boy."

Dayne shook his head. "No, thanks,

Joyce. There's nothing I'd like better, but if I were good enough for it, or big enough for it, the great Jonathan Lane would pick me on his own. His kid sister wouldn't need to point me out to him. But I've told you a thousand times, Joyce, I don't want to get ahead on pull."

"Especially not mine, because you know I'm not being too damned unselfish about it." Joyce smiled at him wistfully and added, "It would be a lovely billing, darling. Your name in lights actually, for a nice long Broadway run. After that you could bank on Hollywood on your own terms. Everything on your own terms, darling."

"You make it plenty tempting, Joyce." Dayne laughed shakenly. "But I'll get there on merit or not at all."

Joyce narrowed her dark eyes. "Aren't you being too upright for your own good, laddie? You don't want me to nudge you out of your comfortable little rut—your cozy little apartment and your pretty homebody of a wife."

She lifted her shining black head. "You wouldn't risk hurting Anne, not for the whole world. She's so sweet, such a tender, trusting girl. She wouldn't deserve it from you, would she—no matter how much you might deserve it for yourself?" Joyce laughed again, a little bitterly. "Well, she's had a bad shock this morning—maybe that's the answer."

"The answer to what?" Dayne said, his voice sharper. "What are you driving at?"

"Anne has never drunk anything stronger than sherry, remember? So maybe she's changing, Foss—maybe she's becoming a little less the sweet and tender soul you think she is. At any rate, she did pour this for herself. I watched her doing it."

Joyce took up the wine glass that Anne had left on the table and pushed it into Dayne's hesitant hand. Then she turned, trailing her jacket. As she opened the

door she said, with a dark glance across her shoulder, "Good night, my noble darling."

As he stared at the amber liquid in the glass—just a few drops of it left—he heard Joyce's high heels ticking away.

Sherry, of course. Anne had always disliked more potent drinks. Foss had never known her to take anything stronger than dry sherry, absolutely never. But as he raised the glass to his nostrils he smelled the drink she had poured for herself and liberally swallowed during their talk. . . . Straight rye.

CHAPTER TWO

Blood Red

THE applause broke more explosively and held longer than Foss Dayne had ever heard it before. He bowed and bowed again in the spotlight while it beat around him like a warm surf.

At last escaping from the glare and threading his way through the crowded tables to his dressing room, he realized that the acclaim was not a tribute to his dancing tonight so much as it was a salute of admiration for him simply for appearing. After the day-long nightmare of aggressive reporters and prying lens men, another headliner would have ducked under cover; but Foss Dayne had faced it through, and now, his last show finished at three in the morning, it was, thank God, all over for now. At last he could go back where he was really needed, back home to Anne.

Not taking time to remove his soft-soled dance shoes and his tails, he ducked out the Flamenco's service entrance. At once the ordeal began—the silent blasts of flash bulbs and reporters crowding at his elbows. Head ducked down, fists thrust deep in his pockets, he strode swiftly along the sidewalk—and heard, gratefully, a voice saying, "Taxi for you, Mr. Dayne.

Here, Mr. Dayne, please get right in."

He ducked through the open door, escaping the news hounds—and then discovered Joyce Lane sitting beside him.

Staring at her in resignation—but not entirely displeased—he told himself he should have expected this of her. It was this way with Joyce all the time. She haunted him—a dark ghost in the flesh—and such lovely flesh it was, too. Couldn't she fully realize it was Anne who rated the Number One woman in his life?

"Joyce, my pretty," he said, "there's certainly nothing coy about you; and you're no dope, either; so what makes you think you're not wasting your time?"

"I just keep hoping, darling," she said, smiling at him. "After all, there isn't anything you can do to stop me if I want to be in love with you."

He couldn't ignore the electrical charge these words sent surging into him, but he answered banteringly. "You're a doll in a million, baby, and don't think I'm not flattered; but it isn't quite cricket, is it? I have a very delectable wife very much in the picture, and I'd be a chump to risk losing her."

"You never let me forget her, darling," Joyce said pungently. "But now I'm beginning to have certain doubts about her. They're really special, too, these doubts of mine. Let's talk them over, shall we—seriously?"

Her tone disturbed him, and she didn't explain. She left to him the little formality of directing the driver; and Dayne told him, "Eight-eighteen East Eleventh"—his own apartment, where Anne was waiting for him. Joyce's response to that—since she had a cozy apartment of her own—was a sigh. As the cab veered off, Dayne eyed her.

"About that little incident of the rye," he said. "Anne was under terrific strain—simply didn't notice the difference. Or else she simply wanted to relax her nerves. That's all."

"I'm not so sure." Joyce sounded sobered. "Please, Foss, listen to me. I'm not straining for smart repartee now. This is serious. So serious it scares me." She whispered, "It's really *deadly* serious, Foss."

He said, frowning at her, "It has been deadly enough already."

"But this is worse. It will hit you even harder. If what I think is true—" Joyce's hand closed tightly over his. "I mean every word of it, because it means—danger. Life-and-death danger."

He frowned. "I'll always believe one thing, Joyce. You're pulling for me. In your own womanly way. But danger? Where?"

Her fingers tightened over his. "I've been with Anne this evening, Foss—went to your apartment after you left, so she wouldn't be alone. You see, I was concerned for your honey-haired darling. But when I came away, a little while ago, I wasn't worrying about her any more—not in the same way, at least. Instead, I was anxious for you."

As the taxi swung them down the avenue, he gazed at her hard. "What are you driving at, Joyce? Anxious for me—why?"

“ANNE seems changed, Foss. I know, she was hit by a terrific shock this morning; she's naturally not quite herself now. But I began noticing differences in that girl—strange little changes that can't be accounted for by nervous strain. I mean little mannerisms, small things that might really be much bigger than they seem.”

Not understanding this, he let her go on.

"Subtle little changes, Foss. Her mouth, for instance—in repose it used to seem content. Now it seems cynical. Anne used to look at you directly, without self-consciousness. Tonight her eyes were never at rest—they darted here,

there, everywhere, as if incessantly searching. Other things—the way she frowns, her laugh—suddenly they're not the same. There's an entirely different *feeling* in her, Foss. It's as if—" Joyce paused.

Dayne said skeptically. "Go on. Let's have it."

"It's as if she's not the same girl."

The cab had stopped. Foss gazed up at the windows of his apartment. The venetian blinds were drawn; an orchid-tinted glow shone out. Anne was awake, waiting for him, as she always waited up to welcome him home from work.

"Anne's upset worse than she has let on, Joyce," Dayne explained. "You're simply not making allowances."

"Foss," Joyce said earnestly. "Foss, listen. I'm trying to tell you something that will really shake you. You won't want to believe it. But anyway I'm warning you to keep your eyes sharp every minute you're with her. And think it over—think fast."

She drew a deep breath. "Because I've come to believe that girl up there in your apartment—the girl waiting for you now—is not Anne."

"Not Anne!" he blurted. "What are you talking about? Of course she's Anne! Who else could she be?"

Joyce said softly, "Zelda."

He stared at her stunned, then began shaking his head. "I saw Zelda lying dead in that penthouse this morning. I identified her as Zelda to the police. It was Zelda, of course."

"You saw a girl who looked exactly like Zelda. An identical twin. And you could have been wrong."

Foss Dayne continued to stare. "Good Lord, Joyce! You're saying you think it was Anne, my wife, instead of Zelda, lying there in Squire's studio, a suicide? She hardly knew Squire by sight. I'm absolutely certain of that. Yet—you say it's Zelda, posing as Anne, that I've been with all day—Zelda pretending to be

Anne, who's upstairs even now? Good Lord, surely I know my own wife!"

"I hope I'm utterly wrong, Foss. I wish it wouldn't keep adding up to the same answer, in my own mind, at least. So for your own sake—and maybe for mine too, because I do love you, remember?—keep those guileless eyes of yours wide open."

"But Joyce—what earthly basis could you have for dreaming up this nightmare?"

"I was coming to that," Joyce went on, her hand still on his. "It goes back to how I happened to find those two dead bodies this morning. I walked in on them like that because Steve Squire had phoned, asking me to drop over."

Frowning up at those softly glowing windows, Dayne asked, "At that hour? You knew Squire that well?"

"No," Joyce answered. "My own taste runs more to the Boy Scout type. He called me because I was as close to Zelda as anyone. He'd grown afraid of her, Foss. They'd quarreled repeatedly and she was drinking like mad. He was afraid that unless some friend of hers took her in hand, she might blow her top. He said he'd tried to get help from Anne but hadn't had an answer from her. Such an affair might be a little too noisome for Anne's sensitive nose, of course."

"Odd Anne never mentioned—"

"A thoughtful angel like Anne wouldn't want to worry you with it, darling. Me, I'm not so subtle. More realistic, let's call me. I'd noticed Zelda on the loose and hitting the bottle hard—always rye—with a glitter in her eye that wasn't to be trusted, so I dropped in on Squire after the party this morning. It seems I was just a little too late. Zelda had already done just what he'd been afraid of, using that gun.

"But there was something wrong in that picture, Foss—a false note from the very start." Joyce stated it with con-

viction. "Zelda wouldn't have killed herself. She liked living too much, in her own feverish way. Rather than a bullet in the brain she'd much prefer to take her chances with a jury, I'm sure. She simply was not the suicide type, Foss."

Dayne had begun quietly to laugh.

"LISTEN to me, you well-meaning idiot!" Joyce flared up at him. "Can't you see it now? Zelda was drunk and desperate. She had committed murder. She saw a beautiful out—a chance to sidestep the whole thing by posing as her own twin sister—"

Laughing and shaking his head, Dayne said, "This is a very fascinating dream you've whipped up, Joyce, but it's just too far out of this world. Sorry, but I can't stay to hear the rest of it. Anne's waiting for me up there and I'm already late. Good night, my morbid little pretty."

Joyce sprang from the taxi after him, grasped his arm, stopped him. "I expected you to laugh it off this way, Foss. You just can't understand how evil other people can be. But don't forget what I've said. Watch her! Please, don't dare forget it for a single minute!"

He detached her clinging hand, shaking his head and chuckling. "Oh, really, Joyce." Aware of her gazing after him, but not glancing back, he hurried inside.

When he buzzed at the door of his apartment, on the tenth floor, the door was opened wide after a moment's delay and Anne, wearing a sunshine-yellow housecoat, came quickly into his arms.

"Foss, darling," she murmured. "So glad you're back. So lonely without you."

Lifting his head a little, to gaze past the honey-tinted glimmer of her hair, he saw a faint haze floating in the air.

"Smoke?" he said. "Someone's been smoking? You, Anne? But you never liked it before."

She stiffened, backed away and laughed briefly. "I still don't Foss. Just thought

I'd try it again, to see if it would ease my nerves a little. But it didn't—just left a bad taste in my mouth."

She went on quickly, "Did the show go well? You look tired. No wonder. I'm tired too, darling. It's been such a ghastly day. Do you mind if I go right to bed, now that you're home at last?"

"You shouldn't have waited up for me, sweet," he said. "Hustle right along."

She kissed his cheek. "You're such a nice guy. Good night, darling."

He watched her as she went into the bedroom, a beautiful figure with her yellow hair fluffed above her yellow, snugly draped robe. A slight frown darkened his face as he gazed around the living room. There was pungency in the air. Liqueur. Yes, rye. Rye, the stuff Anne never touched but Zelda always chose. And the ash-tray. It was crammed full of butts stained with lip rouge. But of course, Foss Dayne reminded himself, Joyce had been here with Anne for hours. . . .

With a smile Dayne turned to the bedroom door. Married these four years to Anne, he still took pleasure in watching her slip into bed. She did it with such natural grace—sliding her small feet from her slippers, whirling her robe off, then hanging it neatly on a hook, giving her lovely long body a last luxurious stretch with her long nightgown swinging at her toetips, then flying under the blanket as lightly as a ballerina. All of it was so beautifully characteristic of Anne—the neatness of the hung robe, each movement airily, flowingly smooth.

Dayne watched through the door as she paused beside one of the twin beds—and something completely unexpected startled him. Tonight she didn't ease lightly from her slippers—she kicked them at random across the room. She didn't hand the robe, but let it drop carelessly on the floor.

He stood there motionless, a chill sneaking into his blood. She twiddled her fin-

gers at him and murmured drowsily, "'Night, darl-ing."

As she lay there with her eyes closed he went closer slowly, the frost growing sharper on his nerves, and gazed at her hand reposing in the soft light. As long as he had known Anne he had avoided personal garishness—had, for one thing, used nail polish of a light shell-pink tint. But the hand lying on the coverlet now had nails lacquered a vivid blood red.

CHAPTER THREE

Poison of Doubt

THE slow, even rhythm of her breathing was the only sound in the room. The early murky gray of an overcast day hung outside the windows, and in its dimness Foss Dayne, raised on one elbow, gazed in unbelieving fascination at the girl in the other bed—and felt the nettles of an uncertain anxiety which he could not stifle.

While she slept he had lain there painfully awake during all the dark hours, telling himself over and over that this notion of Joyce's was fantastic. The strange changes that she had noticed in Anne were only natural under such unnerving circumstances.

After all, too, Anne had explained them away in a few words. What was Joyce trying to do—go so far as to poison his mind against his wife with sly, baseless suspicions? If so, it was a raw trick—damned underhanded of her to try to take unfair advantage of Anne at a time when she was suffering a nasty shock and was hardly herself.

Hardly herself. . . .

Foss Dayne argued with himself in this dogged way, with a frown for Joyce, as he gazed at the yellow hair glistening on the pillow of the next bed. And again, in spite of himself, his eyes shifted to the slender hand resting on the blanket—the

hand with the nails a bright scarlet which Anne had never before worn.

Suddenly Dayne swung his legs down and rose. The girl in the other bed remained quiet as he dressed. While she still slept he let himself out of the apartment. He had made a decision—to stop letting himself be nagged by such gnawing uncertainties—to check and make sure for himself, as far as possible, just what the facts actually were.

He strode rapidly along busy streets. Although it was an unusually early hour for a night-club dancer to be up and about, millions of others were hustling to start their working day. Dayne threaded his way through them nimbly, until, slowing in a side street, he paused to face an ornate doorway that bore in gold the name of *Kimball Mortuary*.

Dayne stepped into a reception room where a certain brisk businesslike air mingled with the atmosphere of a chapel. A black-garbed man left his desk with a smile to come over to Foss Dayne.

“Good morning, Mr. Dayne. I’d intended phoning you a little later in the morning to say we’ve overcome the difficulties I mentioned to Mrs. Dayne the last time she phoned. The arrangements are now completed for the service this afternoon.”

“This afternoon,” Dayne repeated softly, taken by surprise. It was sooner than he had expected—sooner than Anne had mentioned.

“Yes, we’ve managed to hurry it up a bit, just as Mrs. Dayne wished,” the mortician said. “Two o’clock. Would you like to go over the details with me, Mr. Dayne?”

“No, I’ll leave all that to—my wife.” He was disturbed despite himself at Anne’s surprising, almost stealthy haste. “I came to see my sister-in-law’s body. For only a moment,” he added. “Privately.”

“Certainly, Mr. Dayne.”

Kimball escorted him down a hush-filled hallway to a door. There he paused, bowing Dayne into a small room where the lights were amber and the scent of flowers heavy. Alone, he stepped to a couch where—

It shocked him again. The same sunshine-yellow hair sparkling on, this time, a pillow of blue satin—the sort of pillow on which only the dead slumber. The same oval face in repose, its sweetness seeming, this time, to be untouched by any slight hint of worldliness. The undertaker had skillfully removed all the caked blood, had concealed all traces of that ugly bullet hole in her forehead, so that the resemblance was all the more startling now. Perfectly, exactly like the girl sleeping in his apartment—sleeping a shorter sleep than this. And her hands?

Gently Dayne lifted the satin shroud. It revealed the dead hands, beautifully delicate, crossed in a gesture of eternal rest. And her nails were—bright scarlet.

Of course! Unquestionably, then, this really was Zelda, just as Dayne had believed at first. The scarlet enamel on Anne’s nails at the moment was another of those trivial details that she could explain away with a word, in half a moment. . . . It was Anne sleeping now in her bed, at home, and the dead girl here was Zelda. Of course. . . .

Foss Dayne sensed a soft step behind him. He turned to see that a quiet-mannered young man had appeared in the doorway—Sergeant Tom Kirk.

“’Morning, Mr. Dayne. Didn’t mean to disturb you,” Kirk said respectfully. “We’re both in circulation pretty early today, aren’t we?”

Dayne moved toward the detective. Kirk stepped back from the doorway politely, as if to let him pass; but Dayne paused.

“What interests you here, Sergeant? There’s nothing left in this case officially. Is there?”

Kirk smiled slowly. "You'll have to excuse a cop for having a doubting mind, Mr. Dayne. It's our business to be suspicious. Nothing in it this time, I guess—but I keep wondering why Zelda Squard seemed to forget, all of a sudden, at the last minute, how beautiful she was."

"Forget? How?"

"A woman's beauty is highly important to her, Mr. Dayne. Even when she gets to the point of destroying her own life she's still not willing to destroy her good looks. That's why, almost invariably, a woman uses poison or gas. But Zelda used a gun—fired the bullet spang into the middle of her nice high forehead—messed herself up. Well, maybe she didn't care any more—maybe that's why she was an exception to the rule. But I just keep wondering, Mr. Dayne, that's all."

Dayne said tensely, "Wondering whether she was really a suicide, you mean?"

KIRK looked straight at him. "I didn't say that. But if it wasn't what it appeared to be—if it was actually a double murder, with somebody plugging *both* Squire and the girl and then rigging her to look like a suicide—that would explain certain puzzling things about it, Mr. Dayne. And it would also keep me interested in the case."

Dayne stood still, shaken by the return of his deepest doubts. Kirk's very quietness chilled him. The detective disappeared into the reception room beyond, and Dayne turned to stare again at the girl lying dead on the flower-banked couch.

Anne! In one instant of stabbing grief Dayne thought wildly that if this dead girl were actually Anne—if his Anne were actually a victim of murder—

There he checked his riotous thoughts, clenched his fists hard in his pockets and forced himself to leave that room of blossom-scented death.

Kirk was not in the reception room when he strode through and out into the street, but he felt hauntedly that he had not seen the last of Kirk. He kept telling himself as he strode along the sidewalk that the whole picture—as both Joyce's notion and Kirk's tenuous theory had it—was fantastic. He ordered himself heatedly to quit thinking about it. He damned well couldn't go on this way, questioning Anne—actually questioning her identity, her very existence—over nothing.

When he let himself into his apartment he was greeted by the familiar, reassuring odors of coffee bubbling in the percolator and bread browning in the toaster. Anne was up and busy. She heard his step and came hurrying from the kitchenette.

She was barelegged, her small feet in fluffy slippers; a bright-colored peasant apron over her swingy skirt. Her lovely hair was tumbled high on her head, as she always wore it first thing in the morning—beautifully casual. Her bright smile, she ran into his arms.

"It frightened me, darling, to wake up and find you gone!"

In spite of himself he found himself puzzling, even as he held her close. Was it Anne speaking? It was her voice, of course—just as Zelda's voice would have seemed to be Anne's—but those words she'd spoken. Weren't they a little *too* wall-flowerish? Anne wasn't given to being silly about such things. Waking up and finding Foss's bed empty, she'd have realized at once, in a commonsense way, that Foss had most probably gone out for an early walk.

"Frightened to find you gone. . . ." Were these Anne's words really—or those of someone skillfully but not quite perfectly impersonating her?

Dayne found himself holding one of her hands, frowning at her long crimson nails.

"Terrible, aren't they, darling?" he heard her saying. "I ran out of my favorite color several days ago—not a

single drop of it left—and I just happened to have a bottle of this brilliant red stuff that somebody gave me for Christmas years ago. Awful, isn't it? I'll get more of my regular tint next time I go shopping." She kissed him suddenly. "Breakfast ready in a few minutes, darling."

She pressed her lips over his again, lingeringly this time, and with their warmth he felt a great surge of reassurance. It was just as he had promised himself—Anne had made it seem so entirely natural, had banished those prodding demons from his mind. Suddenly everything was right again—perfect as it had always been between them. It seemed utterly ridiculous now that he had ever seriously considered the slightest doubt of his one-and-only Anne.

"Be right with you, honey," he sang out, and he stepped into the bedroom.

Slipping off his coat, he froze. There on Anne's vanity he saw a small bottle sitting among flacons of perfume. The small one was the familiar size used for nail enamel. The color of the enamel was not the scarlet that Anne had worn last night, not the same glaring red she was wearing now. Instead, it was the pale-tint called "naturelle."

Anne had said, "Not a single drop of it left, darling." But the bottle wasn't empty. It was more than half full!

Foss Dayne stood very still, held there by a dread that broke through all his

defenses. It was a thought that hit him with a more shattering impact than anything that Joyce or Kirk had said. He found himself thinking—as he felt the sting of terror—*If what they say is true, then Anne is dead—my Anne has been killed—and the woman who is here with me now is her murderer!*

CHAPTER FOUR

To Live With Murder

SHE paused at the door—Anne in every lovely line, so far as his eye could detect. She was sliding her hands into Anne's black gloves. She wore Anne's smartest black hat, Anne's jacket of shaggy black fur, Anne's gossamer nylons and shiny black sling-back pumps. It was impossible for Foss Dayne to believe she was not Anne—yet even as she spoke to him in Anne's voice his torturing doubts would not let him be certain of her.

"Won't be gone long, Foss, darling. Just a short walk for a little fresh air. I'll be back in plenty of time for Zelda's funeral service."

"I'll wait here, then," he said. "Good-by—Anne."

He watched the door closing, heard her high heels clicking down the hall, then the elevator humming. He turned to the windows that opened on a shallow little balcony that was more decorative than useful.

Leaning out, he watched the entrance of the building ten stories below. He saw her appear, hurry along to the corner, then turn and vanish.

He straightened, his face set, and said half aloud, "Now, damn it, I'll do something about this. I'll settle it somehow. There's got to be some sort of answer right here—and I'm going to find it."

He strode into the bedroom, to the corner where Anne's closet door stood open, where her vanity sat. The inner nook of the apartment knew Anne more intimately than any other. Here he should be able to discover some small item to settle his unbearable doubt. So far, after hours of listening to her and watching her, he still didn't know. Each time, just when he had told himself that certainly this *was* Anne, new suspicions had risen to mock him. Every dubious question could be given a glib answer—and yet they remained as haunting doubts. *He still did not know.*

How could he make sure? So far he had thought of no entirely reliable way. He was hunting for one now, here in this corner of the bedroom; he was determined to find one before she returned. That damned bottle of nail polish, for example, proved nothing, really. Pointed out to her, she would have said, probably, "Why, yes! There it was, all the time—how ever did I overlook it?" And he would have to leave the point right there, in unanswerable uncertainty.

Now he grasped an opportunity to probe into her closet. Five minutes of that got him nowhere. Every single garment here was, of course, Anne's—and every one of them a perfect fit for Anne's twin sister also. There was nothing here which he definitely could say was not Anne's but Zelda's—absolutely nothing.

He turned next to her vanity and poked into the small drawers, among handkerchiefs and ribbons and neatly rolled stockings. Again he found nothing—until his

fingers felt a hard object hidden under scented lace in the rear of the lower drawer. He brought up the thing, staring at it in disbelief. *An automatic.*

It was his own gun, a Luger, a souvenir of a visit into the interior of Europe via the Normandy beachhead. Back home as a civilian, he had been accorded the official courtesy of a license for it. But he hadn't expected to find it here in Anne's vanity. He had kept it in a box on his closet shelf, out of harm's way. But now—here within Anne's quick reach—and *loaded—*

If he should ask her about it, what answer would he get? "Why, let me see, Foss, darling. Oh, yes, it was the week you played Boston. Months ago! I stayed here, remember, with a bad cold? I was frightened one night—rumors of a prowler in the building. I just thought I'd better have your gun handy. Silly of me, I know, with the door safely bolted and all that. Afterward I just forgot all about it."

So easy to explain away—yet so chillingly reminiscent of the gun in Squire's penthouse—a gun used to blast out two lives not so many hours ago.

Foss Dayne dropped the clip from the automatic's butt and stripped it of its load of cartridges. He dropped them into pocket, seated the emptied clip again and returned the gun to its hiding place in the drawer. Then having done it, he felt foolish and guilty, as if he had committed a small act of faithlessness against a wife who didn't deserve it.

But he pressed on with his purpose, looking intently for proof or disproof, whichever it might be. His search took him now into the living room, to the desk where Anne kept her household accounts and answered her mail. He opened a packet of letters and found them to be notes of a social nature, of no consequence. Then, separated from the others and tucked away under the blotter, he un-

covered two others. Both were typed awkwardly; and the first began:

Dear Mrs. Dayne,

I don't like to write you about a matter as personal as this, but I haven't been able to catch you at home or on the phone. I guess you and I circulate at different times of the day and night. Anyway it's about your sister Zelda. She's getting to be too hot-headed to handle and it's time she got cooled off, if only for her own good. If I could talk to you about her, Mrs. Dayne, and if you could get her to go away for a while, maybe up in the country somewhere—

In cold astonishment Dayne skipped to the signature: *Steve Squire*.

ANNE hadn't mentioned these notes to Foss. Had this been because she had taken time first to earnestly think the situation over?

Squire's second note, pressing the matter, made clear that he still felt Anne was the one best able to help:

Dear Mrs. Dayne,

I can't blame you for wanting to avoid getting mixed up in such a mess as this, but I thought you would be the best bet to steer your sister away from the real trouble she's heading into unless—

The rasping note of the door buzzer interrupted. Dayne rose, scanning the rest of the second note, and felt that Anne could not have ignored Squire's appeal. It had been sent by Special Delivery early yesterday morning, only a few hours before murdering bullets had knocked Squire's last drink from his hand.

Shaken again, Dayne thrust Squire's notes into his coat pocket as he opened the entrance. Joyce Lane and Sergeant Tom Kirk came in quickly, unbidden, and shut the door firmly behind them.

"Foss," Joyce said breathlessly, "where is she? Do you know?"

"Of course I know," Dayne answered impatiently. "She went out for a walk."

"She walked, all right, laddie, but do you know where?" Joyce said quickly. "To a place on Third Avenue run by a

man named Krona, an undertaker. That's where Steve Squire's body was taken after it was carted out of the morgue."

"Squire's body?"

"She went there for a last regretful look at her boy friend. Right now she's sitting inside a bar on Lex, trying hard not to soak up too much rye before the start of the funeral services. And don't tell me I dreamed up this part. Tommy tailed her all the way, and I went right along."

Dayne stared at them. "But I keep telling you, Ann can't be expected to act entirely normal at a time like this. Anything she might do now, upset as she is, is no proof—"

"Foss, we know it's not conclusive proof," Joyce broke in. "That's what we're hunting for—something to clinch it. Because, meanwhile, you're in terrible danger."

Foss Dayne thought of that automatic hidden in the vanity drawer. He kept a grim grip on himself as Kirk cut in:

"Exactly, Mr. Dayne. Now, think this one over hard before you answer it—it's plenty important. Do you know of any way, any way at all, of telling those twin sisters apart?"

After a long moment of strained silence Dayne said, "No. There is no sort of mark, no scar or blemish that only one of them has and not the other. Physically they have always been exactly alike. But there have been certain differences between them—such as background, experience, general attitude—"

Joyce said quickly. "Exactly the sort of things I noticed—the little differences that make me *sure* this girl is really Zelda and not Anne. . . . Tommy, give him the rest."

Kirk nodded gravely. "I've got a statement from an assistant janitor at the building where Squire lived. This bird isn't bright enough to figure what happened upstairs, but he knows what he saw."

He said—get this—that while he was sweeping the sidewalk this morning Miss Sequard went in twice but only came out once.”

Joyce took it up. “What he actually saw, Foss, was one twin going in, then the other. The one who came out seemed to be Anne—and the one who didn’t come down stayed up there dead.”

Dayne’s throat was tight and dry. “Anne hasn’t mentioned going up there. . . .”

“Because she’s dead, Foss. Anne is dead.” Both Joyce firsts were clenched white. “This girl who has been here with you is *not* Anne!”

KIRK went on: “Better take a good clear look at it, Mr. Dayne. Zelda was there in that penthouse with Squire. They were liquored up. Their quarreling hit a murderous pitch, with Zelda grabbing Squire’s gun and blasting him down. Then Ann came in. She came in and found Zelda and the dead man.

“Remember Zelda had gone berserk, crazy with drink. She was grasping about in selfish desperation for some way, any way, to get out of this murder mess. Anne, as a witness, made it worse for her. In a panic already, she must have gone to pieces a second time. A few words from Anne would have been enough to set her off again, even to the extent of shooting down her own sister. Then, once Anne was killed, Zelda saw that her dead sister was her way out.”

Joyce took it up. “The substitution was easy for Zelda to fix, Foss. A few little characteristic touches to make Ann seem to be Zelda—then hurrying back here to take the place of the sister she had killed. . . .”

“Remember, Zelda and Anne didn’t always live apart; they shared an apartment for a while. What’s more, Zelda had hundreds of opportunities to observe Anne as your wife when she dropped in on you.

Especially considering the acting talent in her blood, she was perfectly able to step into Anne’s shoes and fool even you—for a time, at least. But she had to guard against only one small danger to her masquerade—little lapses of habit, the very things I began to notice, Foss. . . . Please, for your own sake, Foss, can’t you see it now?”

Dayne braced himself against their earnestness. “I still say you haven’t one bit of proof—”

Kirk was silent for a moment, gazing intently at Dayne.

“No, no proof,” Kirk said softly. “That was the trouble before. You see, yesterday’s murder wasn’t her first.”

It rocked Dayne. “Not the first!”

“No. You remember the Cason case several years ago in Connecticut? Big broken. Suicide by monoxide—or so the papers had it. And the Blighton case last year, the drug manufacturer. Suicide again, by gun this time. The papers played both cases down. Convincing enough, both pictures—except for an odd coincidence. Both Cason and Blighton—like Squire—were mixed up with a hot-blooded babe named Zelda Sequard.”

Dayne felt Joyce’s dark eyes fixed on him as Kirk softly went on: “We couldn’t prove anything either time, Mr. Dayne. Sure, we have a scientific lab and plenty of special sensitive tests, but more often than not they’re no practical good. We were morally sure the babe had done it both time, but we lacked evidence and couldn’t touch her legally. So I’ve been waiting for her to show in another rigged-up suicide, and yesterday she did. Her own this time—apparently. Well, Mr. Dayne, I think three are enough. I don’t want her staging a fourth suicide. Not when it’s too likely to be that of a guy named Foss Dayne.”

Dayne said, from a painfully dry throat, “But why—why me?”

“Because the day is sure to come when

you'll stop making allowances for her, Foss!" Joyce said forcefully. "Once this scandalous little affair dies down, she should return to being her old self. But she won't—not quite. There will be unavoidable differences. They'll bother you. You'll begin to wonder—and sooner or later, Foss, you'll have to be silenced." She burst out at him, "Damn it all, Foss, you've got to see it—I don't want to lose you!"

He frowned at them, licking his lips. "What do you want me to do?"

"Help us fine proof," Kirk said emphatically. "A test—something really decisive. Can you do it?"

Dayne walked over to the window and stood looking out, thinking of Anne and the girl who looked so much like her. . . . At last he turned.

"All right," he said. "Heaven knows I want this thing settled. . . ."

"There isn't much time, Foss," Joyce said. "She'll be coming back any minute now. Tell us—is there any way?"

Dayne nodded. "Yes, there's a way. I'm keeping it under my hat—but you can help, Joyce. You and your big brother Jonathan, the celebrated producer."

Dayne smiled wryly. "Ask him to phone here in an hour or so, when Anne is reasonably sure to be here. This is Saturday, so have him invite us out to his place in Westport for the weekend. He'll probably be working late at the theatre, staging his new musical, and he'll pick us up at Grand Central. We'll all catch the last train together after my last show tonight. That's all, Joyce. I'll handle the rest right here—alone with Anne."

Kirk asked, "Are you sure it will work, Mr. Dayne? A slip-up, you know, could be—fatal."

"I'm certain enough," he answered. "It will satisfy you as to whether she's Zelda or Anne—and me, too." Dayne forced a smile. "We'll all know then for sure. . . ."

Kirk nodded. "You're doing the right

thing, Mr. Dayne." He turned briskly to the door.

Joyce hurried after him but paused. Dayne's pulse quickened as she gazed back at him in silent anxiety. She had never seemed lovelier, never more audaciously forthright. . . .

Then he shut the door—and alone now, bracing himself to meet the test, he drew a breath laden with dread.

CHAPTER FIVE

Devil's Trial

THREE-THIRTY a. m. In the living room of the Dayne apartment an overnight bag sat near the door, packed and ready to go. Near it stood the girl whom Foss Dayne had watched so quietly and carefully these long hours.

All during the funeral service in the Kimball chapel, and during the burial also, he had kept himself keenly aware of her every move and gesture. Over and over again he had told himself, "She's Anne—of course she's Anne. Now that the strain is letting up she's more her natural self."

He had felt a steady lifting of his heart until now he was almost blithe in his reassurance, inwardly laughing at himself for the foolish way he had worried. Gazing at this blonde girl standing in willowy loveliness near the door, he told himself he had been a fool to doubt her.

"It was so thoughtful of Jonathan Lane to invite us, Foss—especially since we don't know him at all well." She smiled as she drew on her long black gloves. "Joyce fixed it for us, I'm sure. I know we'll have a heavenly time. They're such charming people, and it will be such a marvelous chance to—forget. . . . All ready to go, Foss?"

He stepped into the bedroom, out of her sight, his smile fading. He wasn't going to like these next few minutes; but

he couldn't dodge them. It was imperative; he had to make absolutely certain, if for no other reason than to prove to Kirk and Joyce how wrong he was now sure they were. He was going to do it thoroughly, for Anne's sake—banish every possible doubt now and forever. In a very short time now it would be entirely settled—all fears destroyed, only happiness ahead.

He hummed a snatch of a song as he made his first planned move—to Anne's vanity. He drew the lowest drawer open noiselessly, slid his hand deep into the rear of it. But then he stiffened. The gun—the automatic he had left where he had found it hidden under the lacy handkerchiefs—was gone.

The gun—gone. . . .

Her voice reached him from the living room. "We'll have to hurry, or we'll miss our host and the train, too, darling."

"Coming," he said quickly. "In just a second—Anne."

He returned to the living room, coldly puzzled. The missing gun, startling as it was, could wait for an explanation. It brought him a shudder, but it was not the crucial thing. He had another question to ask—the all-important one—and only a few moments left for it. He paused, gazing at her in teetering silence.

"All set now, darling?" she asked, smiling.

"All set, except—" With a twinge in his heart he forced himself to add it—"except for one thing."

"Yes, Foss?"

This was it. This was the moment he still dreaded in spite of all his gnawing reassurances. He felt he was about to do a sneaking thing, yet it was inescapable. . . . This was it.

"The knife, Anne."

She gazed at him with her smoky-green eyes, her coral-red lips curved a little in a smile. "The knife, Foss?"

"Yes," he said. "That very special knife

from Jonathan Lane's collection, remember? We've got to return it to him, of course."

She stood there near the door, beside a lamp shining into her glimmering honey-golden hair, looking prettily puzzled as he waited for an answer.

"Well, then, Foss," she said, "hustle up Mr. Lane's knife, and let's go, darling."

"But I don't know where it is, Anne," he said. "You'll have to tell me."

She drew her coat snug at her slender throat as if needing its warmth. It *was* a little chilly in the apartment, with the heat lowered for the night, Foss thought. Or perhaps he felt the chill of lurking fear. Why was she hesitating? Why did she seem so bewildered?

"Foss, I'm terribly tired and mixed up. Please don't play a game with me now. Really, darling, I'm not quite sure what you mean."

Play a game? If this could be called a game it was a deadly grim one—with Death taking a hand. Foss tried to appear casual, to conceal the increasing tightness of his nerves as he watched her lips curve in a softly imploring smile.

"I know, Anne, darling, you've been under a terrific strain," he said. "It has been much tougher on you than on me, of course, but I feel it, too—sometimes I'm not quite sure of my own name. But it would be a little embarrassing for us to see Lane without returning his knife—so please try to remember where you put it."

She said hesitantly, "Are—are you sure you're not the one who tucked it away somewhere, Foss?"

He stiffened himself and said, "I'm sure of that, Anne. Shall I tell you how it was? Maybe it will refresh your memory. First, you remember, I'd planned a new number for the Flamenco show—a Mayan dance, very colorful. While I was whipping it together, Joyce brought me

this knife. It would make a good publicity angle to play up, she said, because it was a genuine Mayan sacrificial knife, a true museum piece from her brother's collection.

"That was only a few days ago and as it happened, I changed my mind soon afterward about the Mayan thing—chucked it out in favor of my new deep-sea ballet. That left me with the valuable knife which I no longer had any use for. You remember all this, of course, don't you, Anne?"

"Of course, Foss," she said impatiently. "But the rest—"

"The other evening we were here alone together, honey," he went on, watching her sharply. "I was sitting here in this chair, reading. You were over there, somewhere behind me. You said, 'This knife worries me, Foss. It's too valuable to leave lying around, and besides, somebody with a few drinks in him might begin clowning around with it, not realizing it's sharp as a razor. I'm going to put it out of reach until we have a chance to return it.'

"I didn't look around, Anne; I just said, 'That's a smart idea,' while I went on reading. Then you said, 'Now—it will be safe there.' You'd put it somewhere, Anne—but I didn't see where."

He watched her. She said, looking abashed, "Of course, I remember now."

HE DREW a deep breath. Here was the answer he had been praying for. She was recalling something which only Anne in all this world could remember—something of which Zelda would necessarily be completely ignorant. She knew, as only Anne could know!—and that one little certainty was enough to demolish all his doubts for evermore.

He smiled in dizzy relief.

"Sure you remember! So if you'll just get that knife out from its hiding place,

Anne, we'll be right off to our wonderful weekend."

Pulling her long black gloves tighter, she said, "Please get it for me, darling. There, on the top shelf of the bookcase—far over in the corner. Just reach back in the space behind the books and you'll put your hand right on it."

"Sure thing!" he sang out.

With a happy melody on his lips he swung a chair into the corner beside the window. He stepped up and reached to the topmost shelf. Stretching on the tips of his dancing toes, he slid his hand along behind the books, through dusty emptiness.

"Can't seem to find—"

He paused, still with his lean body stretched up, but looking down over his shoulder at the girl who was standing now in the center of the room. Her eyes were narrowed at him. Her lips, not soft now, were a cruel, vindictive line. One of her gloved hands was lifted, formed into a hard black fist. She had the Luger in a tight grip, aiming it at him with deadly steadiness.

"Don't move, Foss," she said. Her voice was edged. "Not a muscle—darling."

He held himself still there, dizzy with the jolt of it, as the slit-eyed girl came closer.

"It was a test, wasn't it, Foss?" she said, a low, husky note creeping into her voice. "You couldn't let bad enough alone—you had to find out the worse. So now you know, and it's going to cost you. The works. Your life. . . . Damn you, you've forced me to it!"

Holding himself motionless under the threat of the gun, Dayne said, "it will be one time too many."

"I'm not so sure," she answered steadily. "As your grieving widow, I'll have a neat story to tell the police. It will go like

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DEATH IS A DAME

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this, Foss. You were infatuated with Zelda and madly jealous of her. That's why you killed Squire, then shot Zelda, too, in that penthouse, and made her death look like a suicide.

"But since then it's been preying on your conscience — particularly because your wife is such a sweet, unsuspecting little girl. It reached the point where it wouldn't let you sleep—you couldn't stand it any more. So then, overwhelmed with remorse, you shot yourself."

He was smiling pungently. "With an empty gun?"

Her face a mask of stony cruelty, she moved quickly closer to him, pushing the gun out at arm's length—pushing it upward in a dead aim at the center of his forehead. She pulled the trigger—once, then again—and heard only empty-sounding clicks.

"Damn you!" She screamed it and in a burst of fury, throwing the useless gun aside, flung herself at him.

For an instant he knew the helpless panic of the trapped. He was poised on the chair, with nothing behind him except a window—a window looking out on space, with a narrow, low-railed balcony outside it—and an enraged woman hurling herself at him. For another instant he could imagine people reading of his death in the papers — *Accidental Plunge from 10th Story Window*—could hear them commenting idly, "Guess even a professional dancer loses his balance once in a while."

Then all his supple muscles snapped at once in a desperate, instinctive effort to evade the girl's murderous thrust.

He leaped, projecting himself out of the corner, forming himself into a hurtling ball in midair, spinning over the girl's deadly arms. He bounded toward the center of the room—and as he alighted on his toes he heard the crash of glass, and

SHOCK

a ragged, hoarse scream of doom—an ugly sound that never could have torn itself from the sweet throat of Anne.

He spun about. She was gone. The window was vacant, framed with broken teeth of glass, shards glittering on the floor under it. Again he heard the ugly scream, this time from far below—a horrible sound suddenly ended.

Foss Dayne went slowly to the window, leaned out and gazed at the street far down. There were two figures moving across from a doorway. The man, Dayne knew, was Sergeant Kirk; he had been on watch. The other, he knew even more surely, was Joyce—Joyce the dark, the bold, the lovely, pausing now to lift her face to him. . . .

They were bending over a small dark spot on the pavement—all that was left of Zelda—the period on a dark and evil life.

THE END

