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*Campan's empire was growing. Pretty soon nothing could stop Campan at all — not as long as he had his*

# Handy Man

BY FLETCHER FLORA

CAREY REGAN had word that Campan wanted to see him at his apartment, so Carey went up. It was Campan's wife, Phyllis, who opened the door.

"Hello, Phyl," Carey said.

Such abbreviations usually suggest intimacy, and in this case the suggestion was valid. Carey and Phyl knew each other better than Campan dreamed. She was wearing a white cashmere sweater tucked into the waist of a pair of blue velvet toreador pants. Her short black hair had a seductively tousled look, as if she'd just crawled out of bed, and the bright lips that could thin on provocation to a hard red line were now relaxed in a receptive pout. She put her arms around Carey's neck and her mouth on Carey's mouth, and for a long minute or two the situation was pretty exciting, but it couldn't develop much because of Campan, who was certainly near by.

Pretty soon she stepped back and said, "Campan's waiting for you.



Campan calls and Carey comes running."

He raised an eyebrow and hid his sudden anger behind a derisive smile. "Campan? You too? Has he started taking his ego to bed with you yet?"

"The last name stuff, you mean? Why not? It's the sign of a man getting big. It's a man riding a star."

"Sure. Drop the Adolph. Drop the Benito. In this case, drop the Joseph. Just Campan. Even to his wife, just Campan."

"You sound bitter, darling. Why? You're going along, aren't you? On the ride, that is. Campan needs you. He needs an errand boy. He needs a smooth, hard guy with practically no conscience."

"Where is he?"

"In the office. Stop and have a drink with me on the way out."

"Maybe."

He walked the length of the living room and went into a short hall and down the hall to the door of the room Campan used as an office. He knocked and heard Campan's voice telling him to come in. Inside, he closed the door behind him and leaned his shoulders against it. It wasn't a large room. There was a rug and a desk and three chairs and a green metal filing cabinet. That was all. Campan was a luxury-loving guy who would eventually run to fat, but in this one room he affected a phony Spartan simplicity. It was very odd. It probably indicated something or other about his character.

Campan said, "Come in, Carey. Sit down."

Carey crossed to a chair and sat, looking at Campan behind the desk. Campan looked the same as last time, but this was an illusion. He wasn't the same because every time he was a little bigger, and bigger is different. Every time he was a little

more Campan and a little less Joseph. The short body, the brown, tight, glossy skin that looked stuffed to bursting, the pale brown eyes, almost yellow at times, the small pink bud of a mouth — these were nearly constant, changing only in the very slow and indiscernible process of getting day-by-day older. But these were not Campan. These were only Campan's baggage. Campan himself was inside. Campan himself kept getting bigger and bigger. Campan was a voracious ego eating itself to immensity. Hardly anything bothered him. Danger didn't bother him. Cruelty didn't bother him. Death didn't bother him. Only the thought of defeat bothered him. He had been defeated a few times in his life, and the ones responsible for his defeat had lived to regret it. Or, precisely, had in certain cases *not* lived to regret it.

Carey wondered how he did it. All the money coming in. All the power coming in with the money. All the officials in his pocket. Growing right up in the fat rackets to measure stature with no one but the Swede himself. Someone had to go. Either Campan or the Swede. Everyone on the inside understood it and kept wondering when it would be and which it would be, because they thought, of course, that it would be very nice to get on the right side in good time.

"You wanted to see me?" Carey said.

"That's right." Campan's little

pink bud of a mouth spread on his teeth. "You like a drink?"

"No, thanks. Phyllis asked me to have one with her on the way out."

"Sure. You do that. You have a drink with Phyllis and then run on and do this little job I have in mind."

Carey found a cigarette and lit it. "What job?" he said.

Campan didn't answer directly. He sat back and folded his hands across the belly that would someday get sloppy. He watched Carey go through the business with the cigarette, and his pink mouth kept smiling, but his eyes hadn't even begun. They were more yellow than brown, Carey decided. There seemed to be a light behind them on the inside.

"I got a call from the Swede," Campan said.

"Yes?"

"I said so. Couple hours ago. He wants to see me."

"When?"

"Ten, he said. Tonight."

"Where?"

"You know that little office he keeps down on Twelfth?"

"Sure. Everyone knows it. It's the one he started in. So he's superstitious about it. So he keeps it."

"All right. I know the legend. That's where. At ten tonight."

"He told you to come? Like ordering up a bellhop?"

"That's the way. Real brusque. Does Campan run when someone calls?"

"Maybe when the Swede calls."

"No. Yesterday, yes. Today, no. Campan doesn't run."

"Who runs? Carey Regan?"

"Campan's shadow. Campan's right arm. The guy who goes where Campan goes and shares in Campan's take. Is that Carey Regan?"

"What does the Swede want?"

"He didn't say, but it wasn't necessary. He wants to draw a line. He wants to draw a line right in front of Campan. This far, he wants to say. No farther, Campan. Time's up, I mean. Tonight at ten, Carey, time's up."

"About the line. You going across?"

"Going? I'm already across. I've been across for longer than the Swede will ever know. Connections I've got. Strategy I've got. The Swede goes, Campan's in his place. Just like that. All at once, Campan's there. It'll look real simple, but it hasn't been. There's been work. There's been deals. There's been waiting."

"But the Swede's still there."

"Until ten. He set the time himself. It's sad to think of a big guy's last hours. To think about everything he's been and done, and all the time it's taken, and how in a little while it'll all be gone. Nothing left. Like it never was. It's sad as hell, Carey. Thinking about something like that could break a guy up. Well, he's been around a long time. He's had quite a run, and no reasonable guy can expect to last forever."

"Will he be alone?"

"As alone as he ever gets."

"He and Johnny Derry?"

"That's right. He didn't say Johnny would be there, but you can count on it. He's always there. The Swede's getting old, and there are a lot of guys around who think it would be a good thing if he didn't get any older. You can always count on Johnny being around."

"The two of them. The Swede and Johnny."

"Two. No matter how many times you add it, it comes out two."

"It'll be quite a job of work."

"I like a guy who can do a job of work. A guy like that is a guy Campan likes to do something for."

"You'll want a report?"

"Naturally. I'll sleep better if I have a report."

"Here?"

He shook his head. "Not here. I'll be with a few boys at the Line Club. About eleven I'll slip out to the Caddy in the parking lot in back. You know my slot. Come there."

"I'll come. About eleven."

"You're a good boy, Carey. You're Campan's good boy. You sure you don't want a drink?"

"I'll have it with Phyllis, if you don't mind. She's prettier."

Campan was pleased, and he laughed. It pleased him to have people tell him how pretty Phyllis was. She was his property, and it was right that Campan's property should be a credit to him. It was

good that people should envy Campan his property.

"Sure," he said. "Campan's good boy and Campan's pretty wife. Have your drink together."

"Thanks."

Carey stood up and went out into the hall and down the hall into the living room again. Phyl had a shaker ready. She poured twice and held out a glass. He went over and took hold of the wrist behind the glass and pulled her to him, and she stood leaning against him with her arms spread and a glass in each hand and her face lifted for his kiss. When the kiss was over, she stepped back with a deep breath that was like a shudder running through her body. She lifted her glass and drained it and turned away to set the empty glass on a table.

"Too bad you're just a handy-man," she said. "Too bad you're just big enough for odd times."

"Sure," he said. "Too bad. Do I get that other drink?"

She turned back and handed it to him, and he drank it and dropped the glass on the carpet and set his foot on the glass deliberately. She looked down at the foot on the glass and listened to the grating sound of shards being ground into rich wool pile.

"See you later," he said. "Some other odd time. Right now I've got an errand to run. Campan's good boy with an errand to run."

He left the apartment and went downstairs to his car in the street.

In the car, he drove to a bar where the name and tastes of Carey Regan were known. Without having to specify it, he got a bourbon on the rocks and sat on a stool in cool shadows and nursed it. There was a baseball game on television, and one team was ahead, but then the other team tied it, and it was the ninth frame, and it looked like extra innings. Which it turned out to be. He nursed the bourbon through inning ten and got a fresh one for inning eleven, and in the top of the eleventh the visitors scored once on a double and a single back to back, but then in the bottom of the eleventh the crumby pitcher walked a pair and threw a gopher ball, so the home team won by two, and everyone lined up at the bar seemed to think it made a pretty exciting and satisfactory game, and anyhow the game and the second bourbon were finished at the same time. Carey got off his stool and went back to his car and drove to his apartment, which was smaller than Campan's and cheaper than Campan's and just about right for Campan's right arm.

In the apartment, he took off his coat, took off his tie, sat in a chair. That's all he did. Just sat in a chair. He didn't drink, he didn't smoke, he almost didn't move. This was a kind of conditioning process and was something he always did when there was a job to do that was a little bigger than the usual jobs. It was peculiar how it worked. He sat there

for a long time, for hours maybe, and he didn't do anything but think of this and that, whatever came into his mind, and all the while the thought of the job was there too, the thought of the job that had to be done, and he could feel the hardness start and spread outward from a tiny core in the center of him, the cold impervious hardness that was like stone and made him a stone man, and when it was time at last to go on the job he was someone who could do this job or any job in the world.

The last part of the afternoon passed, and the time for eating passed without recognition, because there is no hunger in stone, and the first part of the evening passed in turn. He thought about the Swede, the legend of him, how he had started from nothing and grown to something and how he would soon go back to nothing much faster than he had come from it, and he thought of Campan, drop the Joseph, and of what a bad day it had been for the Swede when Mrs. Campan, not Phyl, had gone into confinement with her sixth son, the same Joseph before the drop. From there it was quite natural to pass on to the thought of Mrs. Campan, Phyl, and of numerous odd times that might become steady times if only a man got big enough to drop a name or fill a place someone moved out of. He thought of these things, as well as other lesser things, and lights came up in the streets outside, and time

passed, and it got to be nine-thirty.

Getting up from the chair, he put on shoulder harness and put a silenced .45 in the holster under his left arm and put his coat on over the harness and the holster and the .45. Then he remembered the tie he had taken off, and he put that on too, standing in front of the mirror in the bedroom and watching the sure, stone hands fashion the knot and never seeing at all the face above the hands. The knot tied and adjusted, he went downstairs to the street and his car and started for Twelfth and, on the way to the narrow street in the shabby section where the Swede had started and would shortly end (cross fingers and never doubt it), he began for the first time to think in detail about the best way to do the job.

They would be in the little office, the Swede and Johnny Derry, and chances were they would be alone, the pair of them, although there was an outside chance they would not, and if they were not it would be just too bad, but this was a chance a right arm had to take on a job like this, and anyhow they would probably be alone, just the pair of them. One way would be to go up and knock and go in when invited, but then they would see that it was not Campan, but Campan's right arm, and this would certainly make them wary and reduce the chance of success. Another way, the only other way that he could think of, since the window was not accessible, was

to go up and knock but not go in when invited, standing instead in the hall and doing the job from there, with only seconds, maybe three, allowed between the time the door was opened and the time the job was finished. It was such a small room that he could easily reach anyone in it who was not right up against the wall the door was in, and this was another chance to be taken. It would be better if he didn't have to knock at all, if the door were unlocked, but this was not to be anticipated because the Swede was a great one for locking doors as a justified precaution.

He reached Twelfth and drove down it and parked his car a block above the building in which Johnny and the Swede sat waiting for something they didn't expect. He walked the block in the shadow of buildings and turned into the entrance to the building and climbed narrow stairs to a narrow hall, and the air in the hall was hot and oppressive, and it stank. He walked down to the door to the Swede's old office and knocked and as he knocked with one hand the .45 was in the other.

Beyond the door, Johnny Derry's voice said, "Who is it?" and he answered, "Campan," in Campan's voice, which was a trick he'd perfected for practical purposes.

The lock clicked, and the door opened, and there was Johnny like a sitting pigeon, acquiring and losing in a terrible instant the knowledge that he had made a mistake that

would be his last one. The .45 coughed, and he was pushed back out of the way as if by the breath of it, and beyond him, behind an ancient desk which was another item of sentiment, the Swede moved with a jerk in the desperate exigency, but the Swede was getting old, the Swede was getting slow, and now he was too old and too slow to live, but not to die, and he fell back into the chair and slipped sidewise out of it and was swiftly dead before he reached the floor. Johnny, who had begun dying first, was not yet dead. He lifted his head from the floor and coughed blood and was dead then. Carey put the .45 away and went downstairs and rewalked the block to his waiting car.

It was then ten-o-five. When he reached the parking lot behind the Line Club, it was ten-thirty. About eleven, Campan had said. Carey left his own car by the lot exit and went across to Campan's reserved slot and got into the front seat of Campan's Caddy. He lit a cigarette with the dash lighter. A man and a woman came and got into a car and drove out of the lot. He sat and smoked and waited.

It must have been eleven when Campan came. Carey couldn't see the face of his wrist watch, and the clock on the dash had quit running. Campan opened the door on the left side and slipped in under the wheel. He was smoking a cigar and had been drinking. He was heavy with the smell of rich Havana to-

bacco and rich Kentucky bourbon. "How did it go?" he said.

"Fine. Everything went fine."

Campan laughed. There was no other sound in the lot. There was no one else in the lot to make a sound. Just Campan, drop the Joseph, and Carey, his right arm.

"You're a good boy, Carey," Campan said. "Campan won't forget it."

"Thanks," Carey said.

He took the .45 out of its holster and shot Campan twice. Campan's body struck the door and arched upward in a violent reaction that drove the belly against the wheel, and then it collapsed with a great sigh and the head dropped back against the seat, and it looked for all the world as if Campan were catching forty winks, and that's exactly what they thought at first when they found him later. Carey got out on his side and went back to his own car and drove to Campan's apartment.

Phyl opened the door, just as she had opened it earlier, and this had the effect of completing the cycle nicely. She had been drinking alone and listening to tangos, and the last of the drinks was still in her hand, and the last of the tangos was still on the machine. Her eyes flared with pleasure that he had come and fear that he would be caught at it.

"Are you crazy?" she said. "Campan may be here any minute."

He stepped into the room and closed the door.



“Campan won’t come,” he said.

“How do you know? Have you seen him?”

“I have. He’s dead.”

She stood looking at him, the blood draining from her face and returning slowly in two feverish spots high on the bones of her cheeks. She breathed deeply and very slowly, as if breathing were a great pain to her.

“Dead?” she said. “Campan dead?”

“Campan dead, the Swede dead. The Swede died first and left an empty place, and Campan was going to fill it, but now Campan’s dead too, and that still leaves the empty place for someone to fill. Guess who.”

“You? Carey Regan?”

“Campan said he had connections. He said he had strategy. Work and

deals and waiting, he said. Was he the only one? Did he really think he was the only one? Working and dealing and waiting are things that anyone can do, even an odd-times guy, and it was his mistake if he never knew it.”

“Can you do it, Carey? Can you fill the place?”

“I can fill it. It’s fixed. Once it’s fixed, you move hard and fast, and that’s all of it.”

The spots were spreading and brightening in her cheeks. In her eyes was a gathering intensity of light. She seemed to be burning with a fever of excitement that would surely consume her and leave her a cinder.

“Carey,” she said. “Carey.”

He smiled at her thinly.

“Just call me Regan,” he said.

