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CHAPTER I

THEY were looking for Raymond Stuart. "Thirty-three years old," the first detective said. "Five feet seven and a half. One hundred and thirty-five pounds."

"A little guy."

"He looks bigger than he is." The detective's name was Krug and his partner, who had been sick with a cold for several days, was Jones. "This Stuart is a rather good looking little cuss," Krug went on. "Dark. Lean faced. A natty dresser. He walks with a slight limp. His left leg is bent a little between knee and ankle. Polio when he was a kid. But you won't notice it much. He notices it more than you do."

"What do you mean?" Jones asked.

"That bad leg has changed the man's whole outlook on life. Maybe it's the reason he went in for horses when he was young. He was small, with his weight in his shoulders and arms, and he made a good jockey. I remember when he was riding. He had a feel for horses. I think that because he himself couldn't run he identified himself with the racehorse. It did something to him to ride a winner."

Jones spat tobacco juice at a cuspidor, missed, and gave a snort of disgust. But it was not apparent whether his



RACE FOR THE MORGUE

by WYATT BLASSINGAME

For Ray Stuart, the Bayou Teche Handicap was literally a contest against death—his own death—in this fast-paced crime novelet!

The muzzle of the gun pointed at Stuart. "If you didn't kill him—who did?"

disgust was caused by missing the cuspidor or what Krug had said.

"When Ray Stuart got too heavy to ride," Krug said, "he bought a small string of horses, platers, and he's done pretty well with 'em, too. He's made a

business of buying up the horses that have been hurt, that other persons had given up on, and making something out of them.

"Even when he was riding he liked to do that—to take the horse that had

something wrong with him and work with him, and make something out of him. You see, it's because of that bad leg—associating himself with the horse. The psychologists—”

Jones snorted again. “You and psychologists. You been nuts ever since you read that book.”

“I read more'n one book,” Krug said with dignity. “Two, and part of a third one.”

“Any of them tell you why a fellow that's always been honest, as you say this Ray Stuart has been, should suddenly haul off and bash in a man's head with a poker?”

“No—unless it's the bum leg. Something like that could thwart a man's personality.” Krug stood up. “Anyway, Stuart did the killing. His prints are on the poker. He was caught with the body. The dead man had a button of Ray Stuart's coat in his hand, and I told you Stuart is a natty dresser. He wouldn't be going around with loose buttons. And he had a motive.”

“So all we got to do now,” Jones said, “is find Stuart. Where do we start looking?”

“At the track. I been haunting the place ever since he took a powder right after the killing. But that's where he'll be and where we'll find him sooner or later.” Krug opened the office door and they went along the corridor of the police station and out into the wind and sunshine of a March day in New Orleans. The police coupe was at the curb and Krug crowded his big body under the wheel.

“You know,” Krug said, “I won a lot of money on that lad when he was riding. You could trust him. When his horse lost it was just because the horse wasn't good enough to win. I'm kinda sorry he did that killing.”

Jones said, “They don't pay you to be sorry. Let's go find him.”

RAY STUART sat in the dark feed-room of his barn at the Fair Grounds. The place was warm with the smell of horses and hay and leather and sweat. He could hear the sound of

horses in their stalls. Voices came and went. The March wind made a whimpering at the eaves. In the gloom the dial of Stuart's watch had a greenish glow. Four-thirty, and the horses should be at the post for the sixth race.

Just twenty-four hours before the Bayou Teche Handicap, with Redtop running. Stuart wanted to see that race. It meant a lot to him because of the way he had worked to bring Redtop along and to have him ready. But if he stuck his nose outside in daylight, with the place swarming with cops—!

For the hundredth time his mind went back over what had happened. He went over it minute by minute, groping for some other answer than the one he always got—and didn't want to get. Remembering put a coldness in his chest that was more than fear. He was afraid, but the feeling went beyond that.

It was horror . . .

The house was on Moss Street, fronting the Bayou St. John. There was a high iron fence with a heavy gate, and when Stuart pushed on the gate his hand slipped and a button on the cuff of his coat made a clicking noise against the iron.

He felt, and found the button was now held by a single thread, and might fall off at any moment. What was the old phrase, he thought, about a man's life hanging by a single thread? Smiling at the idea he pulled off the dangling button, put it in his coat pocket.

The walk wound between banked azaleas and the odor of them was sweet upon the night. Stuart noticed and enjoyed perfumes. Somewhere in the garden there were roses blooming and he could smell them through the azaleas even though he couldn't see them.

There was a big brass knocker on the door. He knocked, and the door opened almost immediately, spilling light into his face.

“Hello, Mr. Stuart. Miss Crane isn't home.”

“I came to see Mr. Hepburn tonight, Ramsay.”

The butler was a short, plump man who seemed to have dedicated his life

to disproving the statement that fat men are jolly. The heavy folds of his face had a sagging, downward look, like those of a St. Bernard. That sad, sour expression was the only one that ever showed on his face.

"I'll tell Mr. Hepburn you are here," he said.

Stuart waited, wondering why Ward Hepburn had a white butler in New Orleans, where white servants are rare. And wondering too why Hepburn had asked him to come here tonight. He knew the man only slightly.

Ramsey came back. "Mr. Hepburn is in his study."

"Thanks, Ramsay." He pointed a thumb at the hat the butler was carrying. "You going out?"

"Yes, sir. To a movie."

"Good night, Ramsay."

"Good night, Mr. Stuart."

This house on the Bayou St. John was well over a hundred years old. There was the feel of time and wealth and slow decay upon it. Ward Hepburn's study might have been the study of his grandfather, with nothing changed except that the desk lamp burned electricity and not kerosene.

It was a shaded lamp throwing the light down onto the desk and leaving the dark, paneled walls in gloom. But a fire burned in the huge fireplace and the light of this touched in spots upon the walls, and wavered over the dark, massive furniture.

Ward Hepburn said, "Come in, Mr. Stuart. It's a bit chilly out tonight."

"It's the wind," Stuart said. "Off the lake, and damp."

"A drink?"

"Thanks."

The decanter was cut glass and as old as the house. The whiskey was good. Hepburn took his neat and moved over to stand in front of the fire, a slender man with a handsome, spoiled, sullen face. He seemed to be having some trouble finding words for what he wanted to say. Ray Stuart sipped his drink, watched him, and waited.

"You met Janis at some Canadian

racetrack this past summer, didn't you, Mr. Stuart?"

"Yes," Stuart said.

Hepburn came back to his desk and sat down. He rubbed his hands together. He said:

"Are you in love with Janis, Mr. Stuart?"

It was a question Ray Stuart had asked himself more than once—and he wasn't sure of the answer. He knew that Janis Crane fascinated him more than any woman he had ever met. It stirred him, excited him to be with her. And yet he had never felt any great tenderness toward her. Perhaps, he thought, it was because she did not need tenderness. She was too beautiful, too wealthy, too self-sufficient.

HE TOOK the button from his coat pocket and began to flip it. "I am very fond of her," he said after a while.

Hepburn cleared his throat. "I am responsible for Janis, you know. Don't smile. Of course, I'm not a great deal older than she is, but I am her uncle. The family money was left to me, and I'm to look after her."

Stuart said nothing. The fire crackled softly in the grate. And it was then that Stuart heard a noise in the hallway. He turned to look at the door, but saw nothing.

"It's the hall closet," Hepburn said. "This house is old and the wind blows right through it."

"It sounded like a step," Stuart said. But this was only a casual remark, forgotten as soon as it was made.

Hepburn reached for the decanter, poured himself another drink. He drank it, said, "How much would you take to get out of town, Mr. Stuart, and leave Janis alone?"

The button Stuart had been flipping struck the desk and bounced and lay there, shining under the light. Ray Stuart stood up. His hands were flat on the desk and his shoulders forward over them.

"Wait!" Hepburn cried. "Now wait! Don't misunderstand me!"

"Perhaps I did."

"I—I didn't mean that as an insult." Hepburn's face twitched and grew still. He said, "I don't want you to get angry, Mr. Stuart, but there's something I've got to say. You're a racetrack man. You've a reputation for being honest—I've asked questions about you—but I don't think you're the man for Janis. For one thing, you're ten to fifteen years older than she is."

"Ten," Stuart said.

"Janis comes from one of New Orleans' oldest families. She's wealthy—not in her own name, of course. The money's mine, Mr. Stuart, but she's my only relative. She's spoiled and impulsive. And she thinks she's in love with you."

Ray Stuart did not move. But the anger had gone out of his face. It was blank now.

"Janis and I have talked about it," Hepburn said. "I've asked her to stop seeing you for a while, to give herself a chance to think straight. She refused. So I want you to leave town for a month. Stay away and not let Janis know where you are. If she's still in love with you after that, I won't object. Is that too much to ask, Mr. Stuart?"

"I can't leave town. I have horses at the track. I have one running in the Bayou Teche Handicap on Saturday."

"And if it won, how much would you get?"

"About ten thousand. It would be the biggest purse I ever pulled down as an owner."

"What chance do you have of winning?"

"About one out of five."

"I'll give you ten thousand to leave town tonight, tomorrow at the latest, without any word to Janis, and stay away for a month."

Stuart turned from the desk. He wasn't thinking about that offer, because he couldn't take it. But he didn't blame Ward Hepburn for making it, either. He went over and lifted the big iron poker at the fireplace and punched absently at the fire. Then he put the poker down and turned back to Hepburn.

"I can't leave town," he said. "I've got my horses and I'm not—"

Hepburn interrupted. "You've a man that can look after them. That old Negro of yours. And the jockey that rides for you."

"I see you've been checking on me," Stuart said, and the smile was faint and bitter on his dark face. "But I'm not leaving my horses, Mr. Hepburn. However, I'll promise you not to call Janis in the next month, to stay away from this house, to avoid her as much as possible. Will that do you?"

"Certainly not! You know how Janis is. She won't leave you alone. You'll have to go where she can't find you."

"When the Fair Grounds closes I'm leaving. Not before."

"But—" Hepburn looked at Stuart's face, and stopped. "All right then. You don't hold any grudges, I hope?"

There was a sound from the hallway again, the sound Hepburn had said was a windblown door.

"No grudge," Stuart said. "Good-night, Mr. Hepburn."

CHAPTER II



IT WAS, as nearly as he could remember, nine-thirty when he left the house. Within a few minutes of that, anyway. He went down the walk where the odor of azaleas and roses mingled on the March wind. He pushed open the iron gate and went out. Moss Street was dark and here the wind had the damp smell of the lake and of the Bayou St. John. It was quiet, except for the wind, and he heard a fish jump in the bayou.

He walked toward Esplanade, going slowly, his shoulders bent a little, the limp scarcely noticeable.

There was no warning. As he stepped off the curb, about to cross the street, he saw the car. Evidently it had been parked there and was just beginning to move. It showed no light—that was the

first thing he noticed—but he thought that it was because the driver had simply not yet turned them on. There was a street light on the far corner and against its glow Stuart felt sure he was visible.

Then he noticed the sound of the engine, the swiftness with which it accelerated. And at the same moment he recognized the car. It was his own car which he had left parked in front of his apartment building a few blocks away! A second later he realized that whoever drove this car intended to kill him.

He whirled to leap back for the curb. His bad leg gave slightly. It seemed to him that he was motionless. He was like a man falling through space and struggling to climb on empty air. He was off balance and turned so that he could see the car roaring down upon him.

He saw the dim glow of the street light waver over hood and windshield. He could see the blur of the face at the wheel, and he felt a shock as though the car had already struck him, knowing that he had seen that face before but not in the instant remembering, not recognizing it. And he saw the glow of something like a green light above the blurred face.

Then the car struck him. He was already in the air, diving for the curb. His left hand hit the car's fender. It was like a broken field runner trying to stiffarm a tackler. Then his arm smashed back against his side and he was spinning through space. The street light was a moon gone crazy. The night revolved in roaring darkness.

He was never completely unconscious but it was like a dream, like the memory of some ether-caused nightmare—the scream of tires as the car made the turn into Moss Street—the blur of it beyond the light and backing into the light again—and he knew that the driver was coming back to finish the kill, while he lay there in a bed of soft, whirling darkness and could not move.

The car backed toward him, backed through the light, huge and hideous-looking. From where he lay he could

not see the driver and it seemed as though the car were some monster animated by its own will and creeping toward him. The car came into the darkness near him, and stopped.

Then the car moved away again. It glowed under the light, and was gone into darkness. And Ray Stuart lay there for a small eternity before he heard the voices, men and women, laughter. Two couples passed along the sidewalk, passed within a few feet of where he lay. He realized dimly that the driver must have seen these people coming and been afraid to stop.

The couples passed on. Stuart got to his feet, reeling a little. His legs held him. His vision was clearing and he realized he was in a flowerbed close to the sidewalk. The soft earth had cushioned his fall.

He found he could walk and he headed for a drugstore just off Esplanade. His thinking was still as shaky as his legs.

"He meant to kill me!" he said half aloud. And the words ran like a refrain over and over through his mind. He meant to kill me! He meant to kill me!

It was hard for him to believe. The average person, walking quietly along a city street, cannot expect deliberate and planned murder. There was no reason for anyone to want to kill Ray Stuart. And yet—it was the second attempt in twenty-four hours! The other attempt had been almost identical, except that the car had not actually struck him. He had jumped back to the curb in time, decided it was some drunk who had not seen him, and forgotten the incident. But now tonight—

HE COULD remember the blur of the face behind the windshield. And the other thing he had seen, what was it? For a moment he could not remember. He tried to picture the thing all over again—and then, as if he could actually see it, he remembered: a green shimmer of light above the face. A green, glowing eye that looked at him and winked light as the car roared down upon him.

In the washroom at the drugstore he

found that the back of his left hand was cut, his face scratched. There was a massive bruise on his left hip and other bruises on elbows and shoulders. He ached all over, but he could walk.

The druggist put iodine on the cuts. "You ought to call the cops," he told Stuart. "Too many drunks driving like crazy around this city."

"Only I don't know who it was. I got a glimpse but I—" He stopped. For the first time he remembered that he had recognized the car. It had been his own car. At least he had thought it was. But could he be sure? He had left it parked in front of his apartment, and that was only two blocks from here.

He left the drugstore, walking fast now, the limp more noticeable. His suit, so neatly pressed and clean a short while before, had mud and grass stains, and somehow the soiled suit seemed to accentuate the limp, to make him look smaller and older than he had looked before.

His car was where he had left it that afternoon. But the keys were in the ignition, and he was fairly sure he had left them on the table in his living room. Anyone could have gone in and got them. He rarely locked the door.

He sat there on the front seat of the car and tried to figure it out. Twice in two days someone had tried to kill him. And without any reason that he could imagine. He was not wealthy. He had a half dozen horses and together they were worth somewhere between twenty and forty thousand dollars. But his will left everything he had, or might have, to the infantile paralysis fund.

Redtop was developing into a good horse, and he would have a chance at the Bayou Teche Handicap. But it was no better than a five-to-one chance, and the favorite, Blue Bonnet, was owned by a millionaire breeder who didn't even bother to come to the Fair Grounds or to send his really top horses here, and who probably wouldn't know about this race until he saw it in the papers.

Stuart looked at the clock on the dashboard and was surprised to see that it was only nine fifty-five. Only about

twenty-five minutes since he had left Ward Hepburn's house. Somehow, it seemed to him that hours must have passed.

Could Ward Hepburn have been behind these attempts on his life? Could Hepburn want him killed because he had refused to go away and not see Janis? But Stuart couldn't believe that. Anyway, the first attempt had been made before Hepburn even spoke to him about Janis.

He glanced at the clock again. The figures on the clock were in green and glowed in the light. Like that green glow above the blurred face in the car!

And then he remembered. A man named Tom Bosard at the track always wore a cap with a long green celluloid visor. That visor, caught in the dim glow of the street light, might have been what he saw! And the face might have been Tom Bosard's! He couldn't be sure, of course. But he had thought he recognized the face. It might have been Bosard.

And why should Tom Bosard want to kill him? For that he had no answer. Bosard worked as a sort of assistant trainer, swipec, general helper for a man named Bill Graves, who owned a string of horses about like Stuart's. Graves had a horse named Dangerous, a rank outsider, running in the Bayou Teche Handicap on Saturday. Stuart had owned this horse once and sold it to Graves. But there were a lot of horses in the race, and it wouldn't do an owner any good to eliminate one other owner.

He realized that in trying to find some possible reason for what had happened he was groping among absurdities. But there was still a chance that it might have been Bosard who drove the car. Certainly it had looked like him.

"I'll talk to him anyway," Stuart said aloud, and turned the keys in the ignition.

THE tackroom in Bill Graves' barn was lighted, the door open. Graves sat there with his feet on a table beside a liquor bottle, a glass in his hand. He looked up, saw Stuart standing in the

doorway, said:

"Hello, Ray. Come in. How are you tonight?"

"Where's Tom Bosard?"

"In Dangerous' stall. He's afraid the hoss is catching cold. That's why he called me over. I don't think it's bad, though. Why?"

"Has Tom been here all evening?"

Graves took a sip of his drink, looking over the glass at Ray Stuart. Graves was a big man with a bald head and a brow that bulged into a ridge above his eyes. His nose was big, his mouth almost colorless.

"As far as I know, he's been here," he said. "He phoned me about fifteen minutes ago to come over. What's wrong?"

Stuart heard steps and turned. He could see the figure, dark against the dark barn. The man came toward him, said, "Hello, Ray," and went past him into the lighted tackroom. It was Tom Bosard, wearing the cap with the long green visor. To Graves he said:

"That hoss has got a cold all right. He ain't going to run Saturday."

"We'll have to wait and see," Graves said. "I don't think it's that bad." Under his ridged brow his eyes moved from Tom Bosard to Stuart. He said, "Ray wants to know if you've been here all night."

For just an instant Bosard hesitated. He was a thin man with a furtive, almost animal air. But his mouth fit tight against his teeth and there was cruelty in the shape of it. He had been known to tie a horse and lash it with a rubber hose before a race in order to excite and stimulate it. He worked any and all angles, and there are a lot of them around a race track.

After a bare moment he said, "Sure I've been here. Why?"

"Did anybody drop by? Anybody who could prove you were here a half hour ago?" Stuart asked.

"I don't have to prove where I was," Bosard said angrily. "Why should I?"

"Somebody tried to run over me. I didn't get much of a look at the person, but it looked like you."

"Why the hell should I want to run

over you?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out," Ray Stuart said. "Good night."

CHAPTER III



HE WASN'T sure why he went back to Ward Hepburn's house. Even now he couldn't be sure of that. Because he couldn't actually believe that Hepburn had wanted him murdered. It was just that he didn't know where else to go. And he was afraid.

You realize suddenly that somebody is trying to murder you. And you don't know who it is, or why. But they have tried twice, so there is reason to believe they will try again, will keep on trying until successful. And there is no way to stop them because you don't know which way to turn.

It could be someone waiting for you in the darkness, or the man standing under the street light at the next corner and whistling softly. It could be the person you consider a friend. Or it could be someone you have never seen, a madman whose motive is known only to his own insane mind. You can be sure of only one thing—that someone is hunting you like an animal, to kill.

Stuart rapped the knocker against the great oaken door of Ward Hepburn's house, and waited. There was no answer. Perhaps, he thought, the knocker was not audible in Hepburn's study, and Ramsay, the butler, was gone. So Stuart tried the door. It was unlocked and he went in.

The big hallway was dimly lighted. A spiral staircase coiled upward and he went past this, along the hall. Light showed under the door of Hepburn's study. Stuart knocked, and at the same instant his nostrils wrinkled slightly. There was the faint odor of perfume and he thought, Janis is here. He pushed open the door and went in.

He went two steps over the threshold, the second step taken slowly, as though

he had waded into liquid air and frozen, his legs still spread. His nostrils were wide as though he were still enjoying the odor of the perfume. His lips were parted and the firelight made the lines of his cheek and jaw look hard and tight.

Ward Hepburn sat in the chair at his desk. But his body leaned forward so that shoulders and face touched the desk itself. His head was in the white glow of the downward sloping light of the desk lamp and the blood that had oozed from the two great dents across his skull looked black with purple edges. His arms spread out across the desk, the right hand open and flat, the left hand clenched. On the floor was the iron poker which had stood beside the fireplace.

There was no one else in the room. Nothing but the faint crackle of the fire, the sweet, soft odor of perfume.

"Janis!" he called softly. "Janis!" The sound of his voice faded out and there was no answer. And then he heard the front door open. There were voices, steps along the hallway. Stuart moved backward so that he could watch the door of the study.

The butler came through the door. He saw Stuart, nodded, and then turning his face toward the corpse at the desk, said:

"Mr. Wilson Massey is here to—" His voice thinned out like smoke and disappeared. The color went out of his face. His mouth worked. His eyes bulged toward the dead man.

Then his face moved, came around slowly so that he was looking at Stuart again. From his working mouth there came a sound, half scream, half howl like a dog in pain. He swayed back, his shoulders hit the wall and he slid down it and lay stretched out upon the floor.

There was another man in the doorway now, a man Stuart had never seen before. He was a big man, about forty, with hair gray at the temples, and a face that might have been carved out of Stone Mountain. His eyes swept the room and for just an instant they paused, staring at the dead man behind

the desk. The muscles of his face stiffened, that was all. Then he was looking at Stuart. His eyes, Stuart saw, were icy blue.

The man reached into his pocket and took out a gun. "Well," he said, "we surprised you."

"I didn't kill him."

THE man held the gun as though it were a toy, as though he had forgotten he held it. But the muzzle pointed straight at Stuart.

"No?" the man said. "Who did?"

"I don't know. I found him. I came in just a moment before you and Ramsay."

"Ramsay," the man said. He stepped backward so that the butler lay between him and Stuart and he prodded the plump man with his toe. The butler made a moaning sound, nothing else.

Stuart said, "You are Wilson Massey, aren't you? I've heard Janis speak of you."

"That was nice of her. You are the horse trainer, Stuart, I imagine." His eyes surveyed the room again. Stuart thought he saw a slight wrinkle of his nose. "Where is Janis now?"

"I haven't seen her tonight."

Massey said nothing, and Stuart couldn't be sure whether or not he smelled the perfume. It had been a faint odor at best and was fading.

Massey was prodding the butler again, and Ramsay sat up, looking dazed. Massey said, "Didn't you tell me Mr. Stuart was here when you left an hour or so ago?"

"Y-yes, sir."

The cold eyes looked at Stuart, and Stuart said, "I left and came back." And, to Ramsay, "I thought you were going to a movie. You haven't had time for that."

"I—I found I had seen it. I went walking. I—" He couldn't keep from looking toward the corpse. His eyes, his whole head moved until he faced it, then jerked away again.

"So he got back before you expected," Massey said. "Go phone the police, Ramsay."

The butler got to his feet, wavering. He put one hand on the doorsill and gripping it moved forward into the hall and out of sight. Stuart and Wilson Massey and the corpse were left alone.

There had been a kind of numbness on Stuart but it was wearing off now. And as his mind began to work he understood more and more the spot in which he found himself.

He had been alone with Ward Hepburn when Ramsay left. He was alone with him when the butler returned, and Hepburn was dead. Ramsay might have known, might not, what his talk with Hepburn was about. But a lot of persons knew that Stuart had been going about with Janis lately, and probably knew that Hepburn didn't like it. And Stuart's fingerprints would be on the poker, unless the murderer had wiped off all prints.

From the hallway came the sound of Ramsay's voice, stammering over the phone to the police. It and the soft crackle of the fire were the only sound.

Then Wilson Massey said, "What's this?" and stepped close to the desk and leaned to look at Hepburn's clenched fist. That was when Stuart saw the button between Hepburn's fingers—the button which he, Stuart, had been flipping in the air as he sat here an hour ago. The button from his coat which he had left on the desk top.

And he knew then that whoever had murdered Ward Hepburn had put the button there after Hepburn was dead. Whoever had killed Hepburn had deliberately framed Stuart for the murder!

Massey looked from the button to Stuart's suit. "So you didn't do it!" he said.

"No."

There was very little of the button visible between Hepburn's fingers and it occurred to Stuart that most persons, standing where Massey had stood, would never have seen it. Nor would most persons be going around with guns in their pockets.

He tried to remember what little he had heard of this man with the square,

hard face. He was a chemist, and had gone with Janis before she met Stuart. How serious that affair had been Stuart didn't know. Janis had talked of it very lightly. Janis had interested her uncle in putting up the money to start some kind of a drug packaging business with Massey leading it. When Janis lost interest in Massey her uncle had lost interest in the business. That much Stuart had heard from Janis, and that was all he knew.

RAMSEY came back into the room. He looked at the floor, the ceiling, anywhere except the corpse. And still his eyes kept going toward it as though drawn by a magnet.

"The police will be here soon," he said.

The front door opened. It was not a sound really, just a movement of the air. Yet all three of them were aware of it and they all turned. There was still no sound. Whoever had opened the door must be standing there, hand on the knob, waiting. Then they heard the door close and there was the light, sharp click of heels, and Stuart knew that Janis Crane was in the hallway.

A moment later she stood in the door to the study—a tall girl, as tall as Ray Stuart. And very beautiful. Slender and high-breasted, with a face that was proud and sharply cut, and a little spoiled and very confident, because since childhood she had had everything she ever wanted. Her hair was honey-blond, shoulder length. Her eyes were gray-green with gold flecks in them.

She said, "Hello, everybody. I didn't know—" And then she screamed.

It was a good act, Stuart thought. He wondered if it fooled Ramsay and Wilson Massey. He was sure it would have fooled him if it had not been for the perfume. But he knew that she had been here only a few minutes before he returned and found Hepburn dead.

The police arrived. They swarmed over the place with a big man named Krug seeming to be in charge. He talked to Stuart and Ramsay and Wilson Massey and the girl as a group.

He talked to each of them separately. And little by little Stuart could feel the net tightening around him. He could tell it by the way the police began to look at him. He could tell it by the questions Krug asked.

"Mr. Hepburn had you here tonight to talk about your relations with his niece?"

"He didn't like you going around with her, huh?"

"What did he threaten to do if you didn't get out of town?"

The questions went on like that. Stuart tried to tell him about the two attempts on his own life, showed the cuts and bruises. "You could have got those fighting with Hepburn," Krug said.

"I didn't."

"Maybe."

Stuart tried to tell about the sounds he'd heard in the hallway, noises which Hepburn had said were made by a wind-blown door. "But I don't hear that door any more," Stuart said.

"If it was somebody in the hall, who was it?"

"I don't know. It must have been somebody that Hepburn knew was there, but didn't want to mention."

"Who could that be?"

"I don't know. I don't have any idea."

And so it went, and he could feel the suspicion tightening into certainty. Twice somebody had tried to murder him, he thought, and now this person had succeeded. For he was as good as dead. Framed for the murder of Ward Hepburn.

While Krug talked to Ramsay, the butler, Ray Stuart, had a chance to get the girl off to one side. They were in a big room where French windows opened onto a porch. Across the room from them stood a uniformed cop watching Stuart.

But the cop could not hear them if they spoke softly.

"What happened, Janis?" Stuart asked. He started to say, "Did you kill him?" And he couldn't say it. The words stuck in his throat. After a mo-

ment he asked, "Where were you earlier tonight?"

"I went to a cocktail party and had dinner with some people, at Arnaud's. Then I went up to your apartment. I—I waited, and then I just drove around for awhile. I went back to your place and had a drink or two. When you still didn't come, I came back here—and found you."

He wet his lips. "Was my car at my apartment when you went there?"

"I didn't notice it. I—I guess I was a little tight, after the cocktail party and dinner. I still am, I think. I can't seem to believe—" She reached out and put both hands on Ray Stuart's arms. She moved until her body was almost against his, her gold-flecked eyes only inches away. Her lips moved but made almost no sound. "Did you kill him, Ray?"

"No."

"I heard one of the policemen—the big man who asks all the questions—say that you did. He said they were just getting everything straight before they—" Her fingers dug into his arms. "You've got to get away, darling! You've got to!"

HER perfume was thick in his nostrils. But there were other persons who could use the same perfume, he thought. Even so, he couldn't tell the police about the perfume. They wouldn't believe him, and anyway he couldn't tell. But there wasn't much time for thought. They were going to arrest him! And with the police, and whoever had framed him, working to prove he was guilty—and they already had proof enough—

"You've got to get away!" the girl whispered. "Through the window, darling!"

She turned away from him. She went across the room toward the cop, her hips swaying as she moved. The cop stared at her, and Stuart could see the thoughts behind his eyes.

"You got a cigarette?" the girl asked.

The cop said, "Sure."

"A match?"

The cop struck it for her. She was standing between him and the window. Stuart opened the window and stepped out onto the porch. He went swiftly across it and there was an iron rail and he had his hands on this when he heard the cop shout. Then he was vaulting the rail, falling through darkness. His bad leg gave as he hit and he went down on all fours, stumbled up and was running.

Behind him the cop bellowed. There was the crack of a gun. A bullet whipped the branches of an oleander near his head. Then he was past the oleander, hidden by it. A moment later he was out of the gate and in his car.

CHAPTER IV



THAT HAD been about forty hours ago. Now he sat in the dark feedroom with the smell of hay and horses and old leather around him and he could remember the faint odor of perfume in the room where

Ward Hepburn sat dead. And he could remember that Hepburn had said:

"The money is mine, Mr. Stuart, but Janis is my only relative."

But it didn't make sense, he told himself. If the murder of Hepburn was connected with the attempts on his own life—and it was stretching coincidence a long way to believe otherwise—what possible reason could Janis have for trying to kill him?

And it had been a man who drove the murder car. He was sure of that—at least, he was almost sure. And that green light over the man's face. The more he thought of it the more he kept coming back to Tom Bosard. But what possible connection would Bosard have with Ward Hepburn? As far as he knew, the two had never even met.

The door of the feedroom opened, forming a golden rectangle in which dust motes swirled crazily. The figure of an old Negro moved into the rectangle.

"Mr. Ray?"

"What is it, Cornbread?"

"I found out what you asked me to about Mr. Tom Bosard. He wasn't here all the time Wednesday night—the night you got in all this trouble."

"Where was he? Where did he go?"

"I don't know that. But old Sam, over to the Crescent barn, he said he come past Mr. Graves' barn twice early that night and Mr. Tom Bosard wasn't theré neither time."

"Thanks, Cornbread. Thanks a lot. I'll have a talk with Tom tonight."

"And I got a note from Mr. Jim."

Stuart took the folded paper, held it in the dust-moted light to read. It was from Jim Tanner, the boy who rode for him, an orphan that Ray Stuart had picked up and practically adopted and was making into a topflight jockey. The note said:

Have learned that Wilson Massey has been playing the horses, and trying to do it the sure way. And Bosard and Bill Graves are the guys who tout for him. What do you think of that?

"Mr. Ray?"

The note shook in Stuart's hand as he looked up. "What is it, Cornbread?"

"That Miss Janis Crane, she keep hanging around here. She say she got to see you."

"What did you tell her?"

"That I ain't got an idea where you at."

"Keep telling her that."

"Yessur."

AT FIFTEEN minutes after eight that night Ray Stuart opened the feedroom door and went out. The old Negro was beside him before he had gone a step. "You got to be careful, Mr. Ray. There's cops all over the place. That Mr. Krug and some fellow named Jones been around all day."

"I'll be careful. How's Redtop?"

"He's in shape, Mr. Ray. He'll give 'em a run for it."

"I'm going to give them a run for it, too," Ray Stuart said. "I'm not going to the electric chair without trying."

He moved away. Most of the persons

hereabouts were his friends. They could see him and say nothing. But somewhere there was the person who wanted to kill him, wanted him convicted of murder. And he didn't know who that person was.

"Ray!" He spun, surprise leaping like a pain in his chest. The girl had come out of the shadows. She was close to him, her hands on his arms. "Ray, I've got to see you. I've been trying all day. I knew you would be somewhere close around."

"What is it?"

"I've got to talk to you, Ray."

He could see the pale shadow of her hair, the oval of her face. And he could feel the heavy beating of his heart, as though the surprise was still on him.

"Come on," she said, pulling at his arm. "My car is just outside."

They moved through the shadows. There were the sounds of horses and voices. From tackroom doorways golden bits of light spilled into the night. The next barn was where Bill Graves kept his horses, where Tom Bosard worked. This was where Stuart had been going, but now—

Janis said, "Did you know Ward drew forty thousand dollars out of the bank Wednesday morning? And that the money has disappeared?"

"What did he draw it for?"

"I don't know. They don't know at the bank. But Ward was always—"

He didn't hear the rest of it. He had seen two men move into the light of a doorway at the end of the barn—the detective Krug and another detective he hadn't seen before. They stopped there, talking to someone. Perhaps the girl hadn't noticed, for she was still talking, her hand on Stuart's arm, pulling him on toward the detectives.

He stopped. He shook her arm off and started to go back the way he had come. And directly before him a doorway opened, pouring light outside. Bill Graves stood there in the light.

There was no time for thought. Stuart ducked through the door, pushing Graves ahead of him. And the girl, clinging to his arm, followed him inside.

Stuart whirled, pulled the door shut behind him. Graves stared at him, eyes hard under his brows and ridged forehead.

"What's the idea, Ray?"

"Cops." He moved over, so that his back was against the wall. A saddle and blanket hanging there would hide him if the door opened. He said, "If you want to turn me in, Bill, all you've got to do is open that door and call."

The big man's frown changed into a slow smile. "Why should I turn you in? There's no reward for you, is there?"

Janis still held to Stuart's arm, standing close beside him against the wall. But she was looking at Graves, and the bald-headed man looked back at her, blankly for a moment before recognition showed in his eyes and he said:

"Hello, Miss Hepburn. I believe that's your name, isn't it?"

"Crane," the girl said. "I'm—Ward Hepburn's niece."

"I was sure that's where I saw you."

"You knew Hepburn?" Stuart asked.

"Not well. He asked me to come to his house once. It was, by the way, about you."

"What—?" His voice cut off. Outside there was the sound of voices, steps. Knuckles rapped on the tackroom door.

"One moment," Graves called. He moved with surprising quietness for a big man. One step took him to the table where there was a whiskey bottle and glasses. He moved the bottle, put it on the floor out of sight. Then he crossed back to the door and opened it. "Hello?" he said.

KRUG'S voice said, "I'm looking for Ray Stuart. Have you seen him around tonight?"

"Not for a couple of days."

"You know him?"

"Sure I know him."

Another voice said, "All these bums are covering up for him." The steps moved away. Graves shut the door and turned back toward Stuart and the girl.

Stuart let the long-held breath out of his lungs. "Thanks," he said.

"Don't mention it. They never did

me any favors." He went back and got the bottle from the floor. "If they'd seen this they'd have come in. Never saw a cop didn't go where he thought there was a free drink." He poured two drinks, then paused, looking at the girl. "Would you have one straight? There's nothing else here at the moment."

"I could use one," she said.

They drank and Stuart said, "You say Hepburn talked to you about me?"

"He wanted to know about your financial standing—if you were honest—that sort of thing. I told him you were as honest as a horse player could be."

"Why did he ask you?"

"He said he didn't know anybody around the track and Wilson Massey

Esplanade where huge trees shaded the street and the street lights were like pools of white water. The night was warm and good and from hidden gardens came the odor of New Orleans in early spring, which is like no other odor in the world. The lights of a passing car washed over the girl's face, proud and beautiful.

"Janis," Stuart said.

"Yes?"

"Was Ward Hepburn dead when you came home the first time Wednesday night—before you came back to find me there?"

He saw her stiffen. Her head moved a little, so that she was looking toward him for an instant. Then she watched

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had told him I could furnish what information he needed."

"How is Wilson Massey doing with his gambling?"

Graves' fleshy face held an expression of amusement. "That jockey and swipe of yours have been doing a lot of detective work, haven't they? Well, I've seen Massey lose more than he won, but to hear him talk—" He shrugged. "Which doesn't mean anything, because all gamblers would rather talk about the times they win than the times they lose."

"Did Hepburn know Tom Bosard?" Stuart asked.

"Not that I know of."

"Where is Tom now?"

"He wanted the night off. He said he had a date with some very swanky broad. Some society dame. He didn't say who she was, but he was certainly impressed with himself."

"Any idea where I could find him?"

Bill Graves hesitated. His colorless mouth bent upward in a smile before he said, "He's got a one-room place on St. Peter's. But I don't think he would like it if you interrupted."

"I don't like it, being marked for the morgue," Stuart said.

The girl drove. They went down

the street again. "Why do you think I had been there—before?"

"In his study there was the odor of the perfume you wear. Either you or some other woman, wearing the same perfume, had been there only a few minutes before I came."

"I had been there. I came in and found him—like that. And I was afraid. I—I told you I had been drinking. I couldn't think clearly. I had quarreled with him that very afternoon, about money, and all I could think of was that quarrel and that Ramsay had heard us. When someone knocked I—I just ran out the back. After awhile I came in the front door again and found you and Ramsay and Wilson there."

"Did Wilson Massey tell you why he was there?"

"He said it was to see me." She let her right hand rest for a moment on Stuart's knee. "He said he was still in love with me, and—"

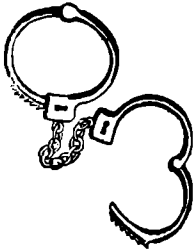
"Is that why he brought a pistol?"

Her laughter was a little ragged. "Wilson always liked to carry a pistol. You've known persons like that. It gives them a feeling of importance."

"He sounds like a case for a psychiatrist."

The girl did not answer.

CHAPTER V



THEY found Tom Bosard's address in the heart of the French Quarter. It was an ancient place. A solid wall fronted the sidewalk, and through the wall a narrow doorway opened into a court-

yard.

"You wait here," Stuart told the girl.

"I'm going with you."

"No. There might—" But she had gone past him, through the narrow door. Her heels made soft noises on the old, molding brick.

It was a small courtyard. A fountain in the center no longer played water, but there was the smell of wisteria and the rustle of banana fronds from a dark corner. They went across the courtyard, found a door where a dim light burned. The mail boxes showed Tom Bosard as living in room 2E.

The stairway was old, dust-coated. They went up, along a hallway where only a single naked light burned. From somewhere there was the sound of a radio. When they found 2E they saw there was a light under the door. The radio was in this room, but through the heavy, ancient timbers of the house the sound came only faintly.

Stuart knocked. There was no answer, and he knocked again. "It's taking him awhile," Janis said, and giggled. It had a slightly hysterical sound. "I wonder who's the 'society broad' he's dating."

"We'll see." He turned the knob and the door swung open. Radio music, surprisingly loud, washed over them, beat at their ears. The radio was on a table, under a floor lamp, but so far as he could see there was no one here. He closed the door, went over and turned down the radio. The clanging, brassy noise of it made him jumpy.

"Not a very high class love nest," Janis said.

There was just the single room. The one floor lamp and the table with the

radio. A day bed. A fireplace which burned gas logs instead of wood. A pair of French windows opening onto a tiny balcony.

The furniture was shabby. The pictures on the walls had been clipped from calendars and showed women with impossibly long legs and incredibly high, large bosoms. Such women had never existed, but it was a nice idea.

And then, on the floor beside the day bed, Stuart saw a pale gold shimmer, and bent, and picked up a fountain pen. On the gold clip of the pen was engraved the name, *Raymond Stuart*.

He looked at it, staring at it as if he could not tell what it was. The muscles felt tight in his throat and his hand began to shake slightly. Because it was his pen, all right. The last time he remembered seeing it, it had been on the dresser in his bedroom.

Then the girl screamed. It wasn't a loud sound—it was choked and awful. She was standing at the foot of the day bed, near the French windows, and slowly she moved backward until her shoulders were against the wall.

Stuart did not remember moving. But he was standing at the foot of the day bed, staring down at the body of Tom Bosard. Bosard lay on his back, curled between bed and wall. His forehead looked pulpy and his face was a mask of blood.

Then the door of the apartment opened and Detective Krug stood there with a gun in his hand and Jones behind him, looking over his shoulder.

"Well," Krug said, "I was beginning to wonder if we was ever going to catch up with you."

It was like the curtain on the second act of a play, Stuart thought with some back corner of his mind. The four of them, motionless, looking at one another, and the corpse staring up at him with blood-encrusted eyes. And in a moment the curtain would come down.

Only there wouldn't be any curtain. The police would come into the room, and he would be taken away, with handcuffs on his wrists. And he would sit in a cell for awhile, and there would be

that last brief walk, and he would die. He would never know why he had been framed, or who had done it.

He would never know, he thought—and it seemed curious even in that moment that he should think this—who the “society broad” had been who dated Tom Bosard.

The thought was still in his mind when Janis screamed. She raised her arm, one finger stabbing at Ray Stuart's face.

“He tried to kill me!” she screamed. “He killed this man, and tried to kill me.” She ran, stumbling, and threw herself against Krug. “He tried to kill me!” she shrieked.

It seemed to Stuart that he stood there for hours, frozen, immobile, not able to believe what he heard. It was only seconds, actually. The girl was clinging to Krug, screaming. Over Krug's shoulder the face of the other detective looked startled and dazed. And and the girl clung to Krug so that his gun was pushed down toward the floor.

To Stuart it didn't seem that he really hurried. He pushed open the French windows, stepped through. Behind him the only sound was the girl's crying. He swung himself over the balcony rail, hung, dropped and caught the balcony floor with his fingers. For just a moment he hung there, then dropped.

Pain ran like fire through his bad leg. He had broken it, he thought. But then he was erect and moving. He was outside the courtyard door before Krug began to bellow from the balcony.

STUART heard the coded tapping on the feedroom door and he pushed a bale of hay, a feed sack aside, and came out from his hiding place as the door opened. The old Negro stepped quickly through the rectangle of golden-moted light, then closed the door behind him.

“It's time to take Redtop over, Mr. Ray.”

“He's all ready?”

“Anything that beats him today will have to be a lot of horse.”

“Okay. Tell Jim to use his own judgment. He's ridden him enough to know.”

“Yessur. And, Mr. Ray—”

“What?”

“Don't you try to go out and watch this race. You know they done searched the barn twice today for you. This track is creeping with cops today.”

“I'll be careful.”

But after the old Negro was gone he sat in the dark feedroom and thought of how it would be outside—the bright sun and the wind moving the flags, and the green infield and the banked flowers, and the milling crowd. There would be ten thousand persons swarming around out there.

He told himself a man would be safe in a crowd that size—and didn't really believe it. But he wanted to see this race. He'd never had a horse that meant as much to him as Redtop, and this was Redtop's big chance. Stuart had bought him when he had a bowed tendon and was never expected to run again. Stuart wanted to see him run today.

Besides, he told himself, he would never learn the cause of what had happened if he just sat here in the dark. The motive for two murders and the attempts on his own life might be out there at the track today. There was the forty thousand dollars that had disappeared after Hepburn drew it from the bank. And Wilson Massey had been playing the races, with Graves and Tom Bosard to tout for him. It might all tie in with today's race.

He was never sure whether it was chiefly because he believed this, or because he wanted to watch Redtop run, but he pushed open the freedom door and went out into the sunlight. His leg hurt from the fall last night and his limp was bad.

The area around the barns was almost deserted because everyone who could had gone to watch the race. Stuart decided against going to the stands. There would be too many cops there. But there were a couple of mutuel windows on this side of the track where the men who worked around the barns could bet,

and he made his way to them.

He had never run a horse yet without betting on it, and he was going to bet on Redtop. He was not a heavy better, for he lived on his purses, not betting. But he wouldn't send a horse to the post without something on it.

There was no tote board on this side of the track, just a blackboard where a man, wearing earphones, constantly changed the figures. A crowd milled around and Stuart pushed his way into it.

Redtop was five to one, just as he had figured. Blue Bonnet three to two. Arrowhead six to one. Dangerous fifteen to one, and, as he watched, the figure dropped to twelve to one. Stuart frowned. Thirty to one would have been a more likely price, because Dangerous was out of his class in this field. Besides, the horse had been sick with a cold only a few days before.

A man standing beside Stuart said, "I wonder where all the money on Dangerous is coming from? I wouldn't take him at a hundred—unless I knew something."

"What was he on the morning line?"

"Opened at thirty-five, and dropped to ten. Somebody is putting up heavy dough."

"Who?"

"I don't know," the man said. "Nobody knows."

It was a mile and an eighth race and the horses broke from the starting gate on the far side of the track just as Stuart pushed his way to the fence. By the time he had his glasses focused they were going past the grandstand for the first time.

Arrowhead was on top, Time Bomb and Fisherman a half length back. Then there was Blue Bonnet, the favorite, with Redtop at his shoulders, and another half length back came Dangerous. They went into the first turn that way and came out of it with Fisherman already fading back.

WATCHING, the horses filling the circle of his glasses, storming toward him, Ray Stuart felt the old, chok-

ing up-surge of his heart that he always felt at a race. He could see Jim Tanner lying forward over Redtop's neck, holding him in, talking to him. And the big horse wanting his head, wanting to run, power in every movement of his beautiful body.

The horses thundered past him toward the far turn. Jim Tanner let Redtop out a notch. And at the same time Blue Bonnet began to move. He kept Redtop at his shoulder. They had already passed Fisherman. They swept past Time Bomb. They moved up on Arrowhead, and Arrowhead's jockey took to the whip.

So they went around the turn and came out into the stretch. Arrowhead faded. He went back. Blue Bonnet went out front with Redtop still at his shoulder.

Stuart had forgotten Dangerous. It was the roar of the crowd that reminded him. And at the same time the black head of the horse crept into the circle of his glasses, crept up to Redtop's flank. Kept moving. He saw Jim Tanner look back, saw him let Redtop all the way out and take to the whip. Blue Bonnet's jockey was already using his bat and the three horses were locked in a solid mass now, roaring down that last, long, uphill sixteenth.

And Dangerous moved out in front. He went with the ease of a truly great horse, a half length, a length, daylight between him and Redtop, and Blue Bonnet's nose at Redtop's neck now.

It wasn't anything about the look of the horse, the color or formation. It was the way he ran. Ray Stuart had owned Dangerous, worked with him, ridden him. And he knew that the horse on the far side of the track, sailing under the wire a length and a half to the good, was not Dangerous.

He never remembered climbing the fence. He was over it and running, the limp bad, crossing the infield, heading toward the grandstand. And it was all clear in his mind now. He knew why the attempts on his life had been made, and who had made them.

He ran past the tote board onto the

track. Dangerous was back in the winners' circle now. His jockey grinned from ear to ear. Bill Graves stood at the horse's head, while flashbulbs cracked. And beyond Graves, leaning against the fence, was Wilson Massey. Limping, Stuart headed toward the group.

And then he saw the cops. They were coming over the fence, Krug with Jones behind him. They closed in on Stuart before he could reach the group in front of the judges' stand.

"Wait!" Stuart said. "I can tell you—"

The handcuffs close around his wrist, fastening his wrist to Krug. Jones had him by the other arm.

"Now," Krug said, "what is it you can tell us, Bud?"

"I can tell you who those cuffs ought to be on," Stuart said. "I can tell you who killed Ward Hepburn and hired Bosard to kill me, and who killed Bosard. And I can tell you why."

"Yes. Who?"

They were standing in the center of the track, the whole crowd watching. The group in the winner's circle was watching, too, and Bill Graves left the horse and walked over to them.

"What's happened, Ray?" he asked.

"I got to watch the race," Stuart said. "And I tell you what I'll do. I'll bet my whole string of horses against yours that a careful check will show that the horse you ran today isn't Dangerous. It's a horse that I thought was dead, had died as a two-year-old. He was registered as War Talk, a grandson of Man O'War, and no wonder he could take down a ten-thousand-dollar stake."

"I expect you're right," Graves said. "Only I can't take your bet because you won't be around when the check is made. Because I'm going to get some satisfaction out of this. You see, I've been two years building up for this race and everything I ever hope to have was sunk on it. And they can't hang a man but once. So—" his pale mouth curved in a smile—"I'll have the pleasure of putting you out of the way."

His hand came out of his pocket. He

didn't seem to hurry. The blackjack swung in the sunlight. The thought flashed in Stuart's mind: *It's what he killed Bosard with!* Graves smashed the blackjack at Stuart's head.

Stuart tried to jump. At the same instant Krug swung for Graves, forgetting he was handcuffed to Ray Stuart, and his swing jerked Stuart backward, held him for the down-whirling blackjack. He jerked his head to one side.

He thought the blow had ripped his ear off. Crazy lights spun before his eyes. But they cleared in a moment and he saw Graves stretched on the track, Jones standing over him holding another blackjack. And Krug was saying to Stuart:

"He just grazed you, Bud. You'll be all right in a few minutes."

RAY STUART and the girl were in the garden of the house on the Bayou St. John. The odor of azaleas and roses mingled on the wind from the lake. To the west a new moon made a silver crescent in a blue sky.

"It's one of the oldest tricks in the business," Stuart was explaining. "Graves had planned it for a couple of years, ever since he bought War Talk as a two-year-old. The horse had a split hoof and it was obvious that he couldn't be raced often, but he had good blood. He gave no promise of being a Kentucky Derby winner. He wasn't a Count Fleet, or anything like that. But he was a mighty good horse. I had worked with it—I worked for the millionaire who owned it. I tried to buy it but couldn't afford the price. And Bill Graves got it."

"And kept it without racing for two years?" she asked.

"Yes. It was a good horse, and might have made thirty or forty thousand a year for him, possibly a little more. But Bill Graves wanted to make a killing. He hid the horse away on a farm, said he had died, and waited his chance.

"He saw that chance when he saw Dangerous. I had Dangerous then and Graves bought him from me. Because Dangerous and this War Talk looked

like twins. With just a little touching up they could be made so nearly identical that it would take a detailed examination to tell them apart.

"And, you see, I was the only person who had ever owned, worked with, really knew both horses. I was the one person who would *know* that War Talk wasn't Dangerous, and more than that, I'd know which horse it really was."

"That's why he tried to—have you killed?"

"Yes. He admitted it all to the police, said he knew he had to have me out of the way before he made the swap. And to him the easiest way looked like an accident—killed by a hit-and-run driver. But your uncle didn't like the idea of murder."

"Ward had gone in with Graves on this scheme?"

"You said Ward always wanted to make money in some racket. Graves got him to put up money for some of the betting, but when Ward heard that I was to be killed he balked. He said he could get me out of town on another excuse. That's why he offered to pay me ten thousand dollars to leave. It wasn't to keep me away from you, but just to get me away."

"I wondered why he was so solicitous over my welfare. He never had been in the past."

"When I refused, Ward wanted to back down on the whole idea. But Graves was too far gone. He was in the hallway listening to my talk with Ward. Ward knew that, of course, but he didn't know that after I refused to leave, Graves went ahead and gave the

signal to Tom Bosard to knock me off.

"They had planned it all, afraid that I would refuse. When he told Ward what he had done, Ward got frightened. He had drawn the forty thousand out of the bank to bet, but he refused to come across with it. He said he would go to the police. And so Graves killed him, took the money."

The girl shuddered. "And Tom Bosard?"

"The usual falling out between thieves. When they failed to get me out of the way Bosard got frightened. He was was for giving the whole thing up. But Graves already had too much money down. They fought, and Graves hit him with a blackjack—and kept hitting."

"Then his talk about Bosard's date—"

"Just a stall for us. He knew that if he gave me away to the police everybody around the track would be down on him. And he didn't want that. So he waited until we were gone, then slipped out and where nobody could see him he told the detectives that I had been in his tackroom, holding a gun on him, while they were there, told them I asked for Bosard's address and went there. They followed."

He turned to look at the girl then. Her face was pale in the gloom. "For just a moment that night," he said, "when you shouted that I had tried to kill you, I had some crazy ideas. And then I saw the way you were holding Krug's gun-arm. And I knew."

"You knew?" she said.

"I knew I had found the girl I was looking for, and had been for years."