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DOROTHY BENNETT

in her first book has already succeeded in breaking with the conventional formula of the mystery story and in giving us a novel and highly unique book which is definitely stamped with her own attractive personality.

Dennis Devore, himself an enigmatic figure, finds himself in a desperate position when on opening his hotel-room door at midnight he finds on the carpet the body of a young woman he has never before seen—the "White Flower" of San Francisco night life. A stranger in San Francisco, the cards seem stacked against him until Kennedy, the hard-bitten police reporter, obtains for him the aid of the young lawyer Peter Byrne and Peter's able assistant and sister, Blake. Eventually the triumvirate of Peter and Blake Byrne and Dennis, is able to penetrate the mystery of the missing Spanish shawl, the ten money-order receipts, the strange relationship between Victor Farnese and A. Fersen, and to place the connection between the murder of a woman totally unknown to Dennis and a year-old manslaughter charge.

Here is a mystery story possessing high literary qualities, splendid characterizations, rapid action and an intelligent and solution-defying plot. The book has emotion and suspense and Miss Bennett's characters live so convincingly that their fate is a matter of deep concern to the reader, and he reads breathlessly on to the final satisfactory climax.

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MURDER UNLEASHED

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MURDER UNLEASHED

BY DOROTHY BENNETT

Concerning a vanished priest . . . a dead farmer . . . and the curious murder of the "White Flower" of San Francisco's night life!

A. L. BURT COMPANY, *Publishers*
New York Chicago

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Chapter 1

BEGINNING OF WISDOM

IT BEGAN that foggy November night in San Francisco when Dennis Devore stuck his key in his hotel-room door, shoved it open onto blackness, and lit the light.

He stood on the threshold of the little snug, neat room. It might have been anyone's room, or no one's, so neat, so impersonal it was, with its bed neatly made, sheet turned down, reading light over the headboard, graceful walnut furniture, windows looking out onto the dark and the scattering lights below the hill, where Market Street and the downtown theater district still crawled along like great gold snakes through the night. Only a pocket-size radio standing on the table, a few packages of cigarettes thrown around on cloisonné ash-trays, and a pile of untidy books spilling over on the bureau made it his.

He preferred it that way. Light travel, long journey. He always felt nowadays as if he had to be free to get up and go in a second, if he wanted to. He carried his personal life in his dark and ruffled head.

So now he looked with satisfaction around at his snug and tidy den where he'd holed up for the winter. And as he looked, he saw something dark and untidy—like a solid sort of shadow—on the floor beyond the

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central table. He stepped around to see better, and then he stood staring down at the floor, eyes widening—widening . . .

He put his hand out automatically and clutched the edge of the table. His eyes still stared downward. They were wide with horror, as a moonless night is wide open to darkness.

There was a woman on the floor—a woman he'd never seen in his life before. She had red hair, loosened, coming down to her shoulders—a very white face—dark blue eyes that looked at him—and she was dead.

He knew that. He couldn't mistake it. She was dead, and those dark sapphire eyes stared at him incuriously. Her skin had the whiteness of milk, and her hair was like flame playing over her head. She was beautiful, and she was dead.

He didn't quite know what he did in the next few minutes. When he caught himself up again, he was still looking down at her, and his hand had clamped the table edge as if it had grown onto it. He couldn't have moved, then. But he'd gone through a very dark way in that short time.

But now he had hold of himself again. What had to be done would be done. He gave himself orders to move, to break that intolerable vise of stillness and horror that held him. And very slowly he went on over to the telephone on the wall, took up the receiver, and said, "Get me the Hall of Justice, will you?"

He listened a second, then, "Police department,

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please. Hello—will you . . . you'd better send someone over. There's a woman dead here."

It sounded for another second like a hoarse deep crackle of machine-gun barrage at the other end of the line. Dennis shrugged his shoulders wearily. He gave the name of the hotel.

"How do I know?" he said. "I found her."

He hung up. Then he passed one hand over his head, in a puzzled gesture. He couldn't think. He only knew that he had to keep that still figure within the edge of his sight. It couldn't hurt him, of course, but—he couldn't quite turn his back on it. He discovered that he was shivering, uncontrollable deep shivers like waves that tried to wrench his sanity from its moorings.

He had to hold onto himself. He did.

There was something he'd forgotten to do. Notify the hotel people. That was it. They'd have the police busting down doors in a minute if he didn't.

He went to the phone again. Suddenly, desperately, he needed communication with some outside help, the sound of a human voice. He felt like a diver abandoned on the ocean floor.

He raised the reassuring voice of the desk clerk downstairs.

"Listen," he said, "send the manager up here right away, will you?"

"He's just gone up in the elevator," the clerk said. "Told me he was going up to your room. The telephone girl gave him some message. Anything wrong?"

Dennis said, "Thanks. I'll let you know later."

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The still figure on the floor was always within range of his vision. He mustn't lose sight of it. He'd go crazy with a primitive, superstitious fear if he did. The powers of darkness . . .

You had to face them boldly. Then they couldn't get you.

He knew that. He'd faced them.

There was a knock on the door. Life thundering out its command to open and face things. A quiet, sharp knock that meant to be obeyed.

Just as Dennis said, "Come," hoarsely, the door opened anyway and the hotel manager came in. He stopped inside the room and looked at Dennis, before he let his glance go around. His face was rigid, pitiless, hard with distaste that anything had happened in his hotel. His eyes were keen as lights shining in darkness.

"What's happened—— Ah!" he interrupted himself, as those keen hard eyes came to the woman.

"Someone—killed." Dennis found his voice dry. He forced it out of his throat and found that it dried up on him like one of the little California rivers sinking into a sandy bed in summertime.

"Killed?" The manager took him up sharply. "You said over the phone just now . . . dead."

"Look," Dennis croaked.

His hand pointed. There wasn't any need to say anything else. They both saw it—a little dark river drying on the taupe plush carpet. A little river of blood, whose source had been the back of that silent, black-clad figure. It had crawled a few inches and then sunk

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into the carpet. Or else—she had been killed at its farther end and had moved, before she died, in a convulsive gesture of escape. Not a pleasant little stream.

Dennis thought wildly for a brief moment of escape, of cottonwoods waving along a wide, sunny river, of water so shallow you could wade across, seeing the sun on the sandy bottom—of the wind in his face, the same wind that waved the trees.

That was far away—months and sunny afternoons away. It was a foggy November night, and he was in a close little hotel room, and that beautiful, white-skinned figure in the filmy black evening gown was lying at their feet. The grave blue eyes questioned them, swept them aside as unimportant. She looked as if she mustn't be disturbed—as if she were listening to, were looking at, something really important. Her whole attention elsewhere, beyond them.

And slowly, beyond the horror and the superstitious dread of death, Dennis began to feel stirring in his heart an ache of resentment that something so beautiful should die—should die before its time. The waste of beauty—the pity, the pity!

What had she done? Did it matter? She didn't deserve to die. No one so beautiful did. Not, his heart said fiercely, even if she'd done things terrible or treacherous. She'd given the world something in return, anyway. She'd been—her own excuse for being.

"Who is she?" asked the hotel manager, still staring at her.

Dennis's dark head came up on that with a jerk.

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"How do I know?" he retorted. "I never saw her before in my life!"

"H'm," said the manager.

On that exchange they ended, until the police arrived about a minute later. The room seemed suddenly full of very substantial men in overcoats and felt hats, of deep voices questioning, commanding—of wide shoulders, hard eyes, straight glances.

The passage with the hotel manager had been just a preliminary. This was the main event.

There were two of them—Inspectors Sullivan and Cassidy. Dennis didn't have a chance.

The hardly veiled doubt of the hotel manager was nothing to the unbelief expressed by Inspectors Sullivan and Cassidy. Cassidy was a sharp-voiced man with a driving manner. He asked questions and expected answers. But Sullivan was like a smothering mountain in bulk and in manner. He sort of loomed. His comparative quietness was all the more impressive. Dennis felt smothered by that watchful silence and that ominous reticence.

They asked questions.

"Who is she?" Cassidy demanded, jerking his head first at the woman and then at Dennis.

Dennis said wearily and a bit automatically, "I never saw her before—in my life."

"Huh," said Cassidy, dropping this for the minute.

They crossed over to her, after warning the two men watching them not to move or touch anything in the room. They dropped to their knees and touched the

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corpse gently. Dennis and the hotel manager, who looked like a sharp black-and-white glossy raven in his dinner clothes, looked on silently.

Cassidy's head went up like an alarm signal. His hard blue eyes sought them.

"She's still warm!" he rasped. His sandy face flushed a bit with excitement. "She's still warm, I tell you. And the blood hasn't dried yet. This was done recently."

Sullivan nodded. The massive head went up and down once.

Cassidy jumped to his feet, turned on the other two.

"Who did it?" he demanded. "Who did it?"

He was like a fierce little hunting terrier now, sharp in excitement, merciless. He turned to both of them in turn.

"I don't know," Dennis said. That brought the gaze of those pitiless blue eyes on him then. He braced himself to meet them, and Sullivan's appraising deeper ones in the background.

"Who are you, anyway?" Cassidy snapped.

"I phoned you," Dennis said dully. "I—I'm in this room. When I came home tonight—just now—I found —that. I found her there."

"Yeah?" Sullivan came into it now. "What's your name?"

"Devore," he told them. "Dennis Devore."

It sounded like a silly sort of name now. He wished he'd picked a better one while he'd been at it. At the time, it had sounded good enough for what he wanted to do.

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"What time'd you come here?" Cassidy asked.

"I don't know exactly," Dennis said. "I was on at the studio—broadcasting studio, you know—at eleven forty-five, for fifteen minutes——"

"Broadcasting studio?" Cassidy picked him up.

"I'm a radio tenor," Dennis said. "I sing over it every night, at the same time."

"Eleven forty-five to twelve, eh?" Sullivan said, expressionless. "That brings you to twelve o'clock. Go on."

"I guess I left the studio just after twelve," Dennis thought back. "The next number was on when I left. It was a one-o'clock program tonight. It took me, say, fifteen minutes to walk home—I climbed the hill—and came right in here."

"Clerk might remember," Cassidy said briefly.

"It was about twelve fifteen, I guess." Dennis set his guess at that. "Then I came in——" He set his teeth on that.

"Lights on?" Cassidy said, glancing around the room.

"No, out," Dennis went on, grateful for the shove over that hard place. "It was all dark in here. I had to open the door with my key and then turn on the lights at the door."

"The door was locked, eh?" Sullivan boomed in.

"Locked," Dennis nodded. "But anyone could have opened it—with a passkey. *He* did, just now." He jerked his head at the hotel manager, that unfriendly black-and-white raven in smart glossiness.

"Did, eh? What for?" Cassidy asked.

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The gentleman he indicated shrugged.

"The telephone girl passed on Mr. Devore's message to the police to me," he said. "The policy of the hotel —well, there are some things we like to handle ourselves. Unfortunate publicity, you know——"

"Some things you like to handle for yourselves!" Cassidy took him up, snarling. "To *keep* to yourselves, you mean! But not murder!"

The manager shrugged again and lapsed into silence.

"Go on. What about this passkey business?" Cassidy was on Dennis's trail again, yapping at his heels, as it were. "Why was it necessary?"

"It wasn't," Dennis retorted. "He knocked on the door, and before I could open it he'd shoved right in on his key."

"Before you could open it?" Sullivan said. "What were you doing that took up your time, anyway?"

At that Dennis looked at him with the first faint shine of a smile in his dark eyes, like a rather rueful sunrise coming in on a cold and wintry day. A smile at his own expense.

"Just—looking," he said softly and huskily.

"I was afraid that Mr. Devore might have stepped out, after—er—doing his duty by the police," the hotel manager struck in smoothly and nastily.

An unfriendly bird, Dennis decided dispassionately.

"Stepped out a second? Did you?" That was Cassidy.

"No, I tell you! I was in the room when *he* came in. I told you—I was—just looking."

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Dennis had too much to do to hold his own with these two men to think about the hotel manager just now.

"Touch anything?" Sullivan asked now.

"Only the phone—and the table, I guess. And the door, of course."

"Fingerprints?" the hotel manager said.

"We'll see," grunted Sullivan, turning from them. "Coroner's men'll be here in a minute. Get the doctor's opinion. Not much doubt, though. Someone stuck a knife in her—and it's still there. Accounts for not much blood shed."

He turned softly, prowling lightly for all his bulk, to the windows, staring down at the sills a minute, at the latches still on the catch, at the dark fire escape beyond going down into the night. He didn't touch anything there, though.

Cassidy turned briskly to the hotel manager.

"Have to get list of people on this floor," he said to him. "Who're in these rooms along this hall, anyway? Did they see anyone or hear anything? What were they doing when she was killed here?"

The manager shrugged again, as one who gives up riddles.

"If it comes to that," he said, slowly, "I should be glad to have an explanation of some things myself. Why, for instance, should anyone select Mr. Devore's room in which to do such a terrible deed—a murder?"

The implication wasn't pleasant. No one pretended that it was. You couldn't gloss such a thing over. They

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all stared at Dennis for a second like, he decided swiftly and irrelevantly, hungry tigers picking out their special steaks.

There was now a confused noise beginning in the usually noiseless, plush-padded corridor outside.

"Doctor—coroner's men—likewise police reporters," diagnosed Cassidy quickly. "Let's get going."

Sullivan moved into action, slow, massive, somehow like the fabled irresistible force joined to the immovable body.

"We'll have to take your fingerprints," he said to Dennis, "if that's agreeable."

"Why not?" Dennis said. "Of course."

Cassidy was letting in something that resembled a pack of hunting hounds, eyes bright with excitement of the chase, giving tongue impartially to any trail that looked good. A blue-coat was helping him sort out visitors at the door. Cassidy had underestimated the population waiting outside. There were elevator boys in trim blue uniform, plainclothes clerk, and a few negligee guests from the same floor joining in the chorus.

The officially approved ones came in. Sullivan nodded to one unobtrusive little man with a case.

"Prints," he said briefly. The little man nodded and set out things on the walnut center table. There was something black and smudgy, like the sort of thing you press an election rubber cross against to ink it. Dennis reached out one hand. The little man seized it suddenly, firmly pressed down his fingers one by one in a quick rolling motion over the black stuff, transferring each

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print to paper before he took another finger. Then he dropped that hand, took the other one, and went through the same procedure. Dennis was left with two black-fingered hands. He was a bit ashamed and angry with himself because his hand shook a little. There'd been something so impersonal and ruthless in the procedure of taking his fingerprints that there was a sort of degradation about it—about him, he felt.

It was sort of frightening. Was this the way they treated prisoners—real prisoners? It was like being a wild animal in a cage. No regard for your personal will or spirit.

Someone came up to Sullivan, leaving the group gathered at the woman's body in a buzzing circle. A little man, with eyes like birds', bright and inquisitive and not unfriendly, in a thin brown face. A black overcoat almost too big for him draped him grandly. A black felt hat tilted jauntily over the lean little face.

"Kennedy—from the *Star*," he introduced himself in a hoarse chirp. "Took me off a losing poker game—— Can we smoke, chief?" he interrupted himself and lit a cigarette without waiting for Sullivan's approval or disapproval. That huge detective glared at him, but the undaunted intruder was conveniently blind and deaf to certain rumbles from the big throat.

"Murder, eh?" he went on.

"And what else would it be, with a knife sticking in her back?" broke in Cassidy with a certain bitter sarcasm.

"Trace the knife?" Kennedy thrust at him.

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"Sure—if you want to trace every breadknife the chain stores have ever sold here," Cassidy thrust back. "You saw it—you can buy one like it for fifty cents. We could indict anyone in San Francisco who ever cut a loaf of bread, nearly, for having one in their possession."

"Yeah—and you could find out where it was last sharpened," the police reporter cut in. "I've got one of those things myself—I'm baching it—and I'm here to tell you they couldn't cut putty unless they'd been darn near a grindstone, a good grindstone, for an hour or two."

Sullivan turned to Dennis.

"You can go in the bathroom and wash your hands of that ink," he said.

Dennis went through the crowd. He caught Kennedy's half-whisper to Sullivan as he went. He tried not to see what was on the floor or what they were doing.

"Who's that guy?"

Sullivan rumbled an answer. Dennis knew what it was.

When he came back, Sullivan was waiting to meet him.

"We're going over to the Hall of Justice to report," he said. "You'll have to come with us, Devore, and explain why someone used your room for a murder party. I'm curious myself."

Dennis caught Kennedy's bright eye as Sullivan tried to hustle a way for the two of them out of the crowded

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room, without answering any of the questions that blocked his way.

"Listen," said that bright, keen little man intently, not unfriendly, "you're in a bad way, kid. Anyone you want me to call up?"

Then Dennis remembered someone.

"There's a man I know," he said, "a bird named Peter Byrne. If you'd call him up—I'd be glad. Thanks."

"Don't thank me. It's a swell story," Kennedy retorted. "A bird named Peter Byrne, eh? Right! What is he—a friend?"

"He's a lawyer," Dennis said hurriedly, as Sullivan grasped his arm and made a way for them impatiently.

Kennedy whistled, keeping pace with them.

"They find a beautiful dame dead in your room, and they haul you off to the coop," he remarked appreciatively. "You sure are in a tight place, kid. My boy, you don't want a lawyer—you need a can opener, to get you out of this."

"Will you shut up?" growled Sullivan and swept Dennis with him past the half-opened mouths and wide-open eyes of elevator boys, half-dressed guests, and other onlookers, down to the elevator, and so out to the street.

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Chapter 2

A BIRD NAMED PETER

PETER BYRNE, awakened by a c[all] a wild ringing sometime well after midnight, wonder[ed] why there were such things as telephones in thi[s] very imperfect world. He was a wide-awake young m[an] when he was awake, and he went in for sleeping jus[t] as whole-heartedly.

After a few seconds h[e] decided to answer the call.

He collided first with [the] bureau, whose location he knew as well as he kn[ew] that of the nose on his face, and then with the te[le]phone chair. After that he was ready for anything, [the] sleep shaken out of him.

"Huh?" he said [in]to the crisp voice over the line. "What's that? D[e]nnis Devore?"

"He's a tenor ni[ght] over the radio—one of these midnight canaries," chirp[ed] the shrewd, not-to-be-denied voice. "Come clean, [Mr.] Byrne—he says you're his lawyer—*a* lawyer, anyway[s]. And he's in a jam, all right."

Peter forgot [the] the midnight cold waves coming through his pajamas, [a]ttacking his bare feet. He clamored for details.

The voice [t]hen identified itself more explicitly.

"I'm Ken[n]edy, doing police for the *Star*," it said. "Devore as[k]ed me to call you. He's on the carpet at the Hall of J[u]stice now."

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"Not," thought Peter grimly and a bit wistfully, "such a bad place to be, at that."

He couldn't think of any Dennis Devore he knew who was a [illegible] over the radio. However, he was willing to learn more, as long as he didn't have to turn on the radio and listen to this Devore canary at this time of night.

"What's he in for?" he asked.

"Not what you think," the shrewd voice sort of grinned at him over the phone. "There ought to be a law, I admit—but we haven't got around to it yet. We will, we will. Just give us time——"

"Say," said an indignant and now thoroughly roused Peter Byrne, "what is this, anyway? A debate? Go——"

"Whoa!" said Kennedy calmly. "I'm coming to it. There's no law against tenors, as I said—but there certainly is against murder. Your friend Dennis is up for entertaining a lady corpse unbeknownst to him in his room tonight. He claims it was there when he got home from the studio. The police just said 'Yeah?' and hauled him off to the Hall of Justice—about 1:30 a. m. Pacific Standard Time. Are you standing by? The gong will indicate the police patrol, this time."

"Wh-what?" said Peter, inadequately.

"And so, friends of radioland, we come to the end of another swell pogrom—I mean program—and the beginning of the next. It's probably going on at the Hall of Justice now, where they're socking the truth out of your client."

About to say, stunned, "He's not my client!" Peter Byrne paused, on the very words.

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The picture this shrewd chirper indicated wasn't a pretty one. Murder? Maybe so. A woman killed in this Dennis Devore's room. And no one to stand up for Dennis, whoever he was—and what a rotten name he wore! thought a fastidious Peter—except a casual pick-up acquaintance of a police reporter. And this Devore had given him Peter Byrne's name. Sort of last resort, maybe, because Peter couldn't place him at that. Not even with all the details he'd just listened to, that surely should excite any faint memory of this Dennis whatsoever. It was, when you came to think of it, sort of like an S O S coming out of the night to him.

And, as though accurately guessing the state of Peter Byrne's mind about that time, Kennedy's cool bird chirp changed to something colder and harsher, more like a challenge.

"Well?" it said, slowly, deliberately, a bit contemptuously, into the continued silence.

"Well what?" Byrne growled back at him.

"Are you in this or aren't you?" the police reporter wanted to know, still in that deliberate, rather deadly voice. "That is the layout. Either pick up your cards and play 'em or pass. I've told you all I know, Byrne. Just that Devore handed me out your name. I told him I'd get the situation before you. Are you in or not?"

A muffled roar answered him. To anyone who had ever spent an afternoon at the zoo it would be reminiscent of an aroused bear, shaking a shaggy head from side to side, coming out to battle. Peter was getting mad.

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His friends simply didn't go around bumping people off and then getting insolent, cold-voiced police reporters to call him up at an ungodly hour at night to bait him like this.

"Okay," said Kennedy, perversely mistranslating this roar. "I'll slip word to the boys his lawyer is coming around. You probably won't be able to get your client out of hock before morning, though. Might use a habeas-corpus grip on 'em to make them give him up if they're holding him too hard."

Peter had quieted down to deadliness himself.

"I'll get him out," he promised simply and grimly. "I want to talk to him myself."

He hung up with a bang.

The light went on in the hall then and revealed Peter sitting there in blue-and-white pajamas, shaggy brown head at one end of his attire, large brown bare feet at the other. He blinked a startled pair of deep blue eyes from under strongly accented eyebrow ledges. He was impressive; built on the battering-ram principle.

His sister Blake was coming down the stairway. She wore a striped flannel dressing gown of blue and orange and brown, and a pair of blue bedroom slippers with orange pompons. She had a bright head of boy's golden brown hair weirdly ruffled up now, and a sleepy red mouth. Even when she was walking half asleep she carried her head with a sort of pride that straightened her slim body into a rushing grace.

"Blake," Peter said, puzzled, "do you know a guy named Dennis—Dennis Devore?"

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"Heavens, no," Blake said. "Who is he, and why?"

She dropped into the big chair by the hall table and managed to wind herself up in its seat like a cat.

"I *thought* I'd brought you up better'n that," Peter grunted in great satisfaction. "I bet he's someone I knew at Stanford. There's always a lot of fellows you never remembered seeing in your life before, calling you up and saying they were at Stanford with you, when they want something."

"What does *he* want?" Blake asked, to be agreeable, seeing that her adored Peter was ready for a bit of midnight conversation.

Peter gave her the conversation, briefly.

"Guy's in jail. On a murder charge. Lady friend of his killed. He says he never saw her before, stranger to him. He gave a reporter my name to call up. Oh, yes—and he's a radio tenor—sings over the radio."

"Pete!" said Blake. She sat up. Her eyes were shining. Her bright boy's head lifted swiftly. "Go in and get him!"

"With what?" said Peter. "My bare hands?"

"He gave your name," Blake said softly.

Her brother grunted again.

"What are you doing down here in those clothes?" he demanded. He rose slowly, impressive in his scantier ones. "You'd better go to bed again."

"Where are you going?" his sister asked, preparing to go.

"I'm going to dress," he said briefly. "They don't allow pajamas down at the Hall of Justice when you're

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calling there just for a short visit—not a week-end stay."

"You lamb!" said Blake very softly and surely, pausing on the turn of the stairway to smile down at him before she disappeared.

That was about three o'clock in the morning. Peter was patient, he was forceful, he pulled wires. But it was around eight o'clock in the morning when the police decided to release his involuntary client from further questioning—for the moment.

They met in a small gray anteroom. Peter surveyed the wilted figure with frank interest. Dennis gazed up at Peter's more respectable and imposing heights.

"Hullo!" Peter said. "You Devore?"

Dennis nodded. "You're Byrne, aren't you?" He hesitated a second. He gave the impression, to Peter, as if he'd just held out his hand and then decided to snatch it back swiftly. A gesture of the mind rather than of the body.

He grinned faintly, instead.

"'Dr. Livingstone, I presume,'" he murmured.

Peter couldn't help grinning back before he thought about the seemliness of it.

"How'd you know me—of me?" he asked. He dropped onto the strongest-looking chair and motioned his client toward another. They settled down more at ease. Peter produced smokes, with a guilty glance of defiance toward the door. The dark head opposite him bent down swiftly over a match held out, inhaled luxuriously, exhaled a long wreath before it straightened up again.

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"Missed those," he said simply. "You? Oh, I'd seen you at the studio—you came in with a party one night, remember?—and last night, when I couldn't raise any other name to save my life, you for some unknown reason stuck out in my mind. Favorably," he added hurriedly and respectfully, looking at Peter's two hundred pounds. "Perhaps it was because I'd remembered what a devil of a good guard you were and I knew I'd need a good fighter with me in this mess."

Peter grinned again. Then he made his face sober.

"Well, what happened in there?" he nodded toward the closed door.

"Plenty," said Dennis.

His eyes were dull and impenetrable all of a sudden.

"You didn't get fresh with them, did you?" Peter asked.

The wilted figure faced him indignantly.

"Fresh!" he echoed. "Do I look as if I was fresh?"

"You look as if you needed a shower and a shave," Peter commented frankly on his appearance. "And breakfast."

"Breakfast?" said Dennis wistfully. "What's that?"

"An old American custom," Peter explained. "We have it at our house every morning."

"I'd sort of lost track of it," Dennis apologized.

He got to his feet rather quickly, as if something had just got into his mind.

"Well," he said, "thanks very much—for all you've done. Sorry to have bothered you, but—thanks."

"What for?" Peter asked.

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"Thanks for the lift," Dennis said. "I—I suppose this is where I get off. Good-bye." He did hold out his hand this time.

He couldn't very well make a graceful exit with two hundred pounds of solid Peter at the other end of his hand. He wanted to make a swell exit, too. He thought he had just about that much left in him.

"I said we had breakfast at our house—every morning," Peter repeated. "An old American custom."

"Oh!" Dennis said. "As I said, I'd sort of lost track of it."

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Chapter 3

TRICKS

AFTER Peter had taken care of the necessary formalities they left the Hall of Justice and returned to Peter's house, where Dennis was now being introduced to that good old American custom, breakfast, at the Byrnes'.

"Tell us about it," Blake said, leaning brown elbows on the white cloth.

So Dennis told them about it.

At the end Blake's eyes were wide and almost as dark as Dennis's own, and Peter's eyes had narrowed like an armed force behind strong walls, ready, watchful, wary.

Dennis watched Peter like a man at the end of a long dangerous journey, beneath the walls of a strong and safe refuge, wondering if those walls would take him in.

Peter came out of his fortress then, having surveyed the countryside.

"What a beautiful jam!" he said with professional joy.

Dennis grinned, a bit crookedly this time.

"That's what Kennedy said," he reported. "'My boy, you don't need a lawyer—you need a can opener!'"

"Well, Devore—where did you get that name, anyway?" Peter paused to inquire en route.

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"Pulled it out of a hat," said Dennis.

"Never do," grunted Peter.

"Oh, well—most people never get past the Dennis part." Their guest was still engrossed in pancakes and coffee, but willing to do his part in polite conversation at that.

"Well, Dennis," Peter gave in, "what happened down at the Hall, after that?"

"It was a great deal like being X-rayed," he replied. "Any little secret I'd ever had couldn't have stood a chance with those birds."

"But they do think you are holding something out on them?"

"Well, I must be cleverer than I give myself credit for being, then," Dennis said cheerfully. "They even shared my baby days with me."

"Well,"—Peter was being ponderous, but walking softly—"they did find the body in your hotel room, you know. And people don't——"

"Don't they?" Dennis asked grimly and surveyed the abashed faces about him. "I'm here to tell you they did!"

Something old and cold and wise had entered that bright and gay little sun room in that minute. They felt it.

Things did happen that way. People were murdered. Innocent men were accused. Innocent men had been hung.

"We've got to get Dennis out," Blake announced firmly. "First, who was she? We must find out every-

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thing—everything the police find out, and more. The whole truth. Then, was she killed outside somewhere and then brought into the room, or was she killed in your room?" Blake went on keenly.

"The police think so," said Dennis. "In the room. They hardly suspect me of lugging her along under my arm from the broadcasting studio."

"Yes, but we have this advantage," Blake pointed out. "We aren't narrow, like they are. We are free to suspect anyone, and we aren't trying to pin it onto Dennis, especially."

"Thank you," said Dennis, with that faint grin flashing out. "Only I plop for the room, too. Because why? First place, it's too darn risky doing it outside and bringing her in. Second, I saw her. And I don't think she'd moved—much."

Peter asked the same question the hotel manager asked. But he asked it in a very different sort of way.

"But why," he wanted to know, "*your* room?"

Dennis looked at him steadily with dark eyes staring through him and far away beyond him.

"'An enemy hath done this,'" he said, under his breath. "That's one answer. To put me in bad, maybe. Whoever had a grudge against her may have known me."

"There's a link there," Peter pointed out cautiously.

Dennis nodded, as though the interruption had been hardly registered on his mind.

"And then—why *not* my room?" he went on. "No one who's actually committed a murder can afford to

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have a body around. Put it on someone else. Say it was someone staying in the hotel—must have been—and they knew I was singing every night except Sunday from eleven forty-five to twelve at the studio. Room would be absolutely free then. Smallest risk of any in the hotel, probably. They arrange then for a murder party between those fifteen minutes. Easy, if it's been planned out. Wrong room. Lady enters it—it's in darkness, you know. Killed before she realizes it's a trap. Murderer goes out. Back to own room. Waits for alarm."

"Clever!" said Blake, shuddering a bit.

Dennis cocked an appreciative eyebrow at her.

"Oh, yes—if you like cleverness," he agreed. "Personally, I think it's a very overrated quality. I prefer depth."

"Quit sparring," ordered Peter. "This brings up a new line. Do you realize that it needn't have been anyone you know, any enemy of yours? It might be an absolute stranger!"

"Ye-es," said Blake. "But—let's combine both theories. Keep the best qualities of each. She was killed by someone who knew and hated Dennis, too, and she was killed in Dennis's room because he was away singing over the radio at the time. That clear?"

"Perfectly," said Peter. "Only—who did it?"

Dennis withdrew his gaze from the tablecloth that he'd been staring at.

"Look here," he began, "you're taking an awful lot on faith. Me, I mean. Isn't there—isn't there anything you'd like to ask—about me?"

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"Well, but—I've seen you before," said Peter. "Were you at Stanford?"

He waited suspiciously for those familiar words of a claim on him to come.

Dennis laughed.

"No, I went to your dearest enemy and rival," he retorted. "At Cal we look upon Stanford as a training place for a good practice team for us."

"Got it!" said Peter suddenly in great satisfaction. "Last time I saw you, you were pushing your hand in my face. It was two years ago, at the Big Game. I was playing in the line, and you were a back trying to come through with the ball. You straight-armed me, and when I got up you'd wriggled past the second defense and were about thirty-three yards to the good. I remember that play, all right."

"I never did like guards," said Dennis airily. "They are apt to get in your way when you're in a hurry. You did, even when you weren't supposed to."

"Only I don't remember anyone on that team named Devore." Peter's relentless memory was still tracking.

"There wasn't any," Dennis said softly.

"Oh?" said Peter as softly.

"No. But it would be easy, of course, to look up the names of the team and find out who played in the backfield," Dennis said.

"Got no time," said Peter. "I'm a busy man. Don't play kid games any more and get my face shoved in."

"Well——" said Dennis softly but more huskily.

They heard a faint ring at the front door. Blake

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opened one of the casement windows and leaned out in the morning sunshine, peering down, trying to see who stood below.

"It's your police-reporter friend Kennedy, Peter," she reported. "He's on our doorstep."

She called down, and a minute later Kennedy came in and nodded to them.

"How's tricks?" he asked. "Mind if I smoke?"

"Do," said Blake. "Tricks are rather slow, at first," she told him. "You see, we don't know what's trumps. Would you say—clubs?"

"I'd say spades," Kennedy said. "For day after tomorrow, anyway. Coroner's inquest. If the verdict is death by someone unknown, you've still got a chance on the outside, kid. But if it's death by the hands of one Dennis Devore, the police'll take charge of your case for you and your client."

"A labor-saving device," said Dennis, "the police force."

He tried to smile.

"Go in with us," said Blake suddenly to Kennedy.

That hard-bitten gentleman eyed her suspiciously. "Oh, yeah? How?"

"We want to keep Dennis out of jail and get the right person who did the murder."

"I'll accept the invitation," Kennedy decided, after a second, grinning. "And it's not for your *beaux yeux* either, guy," he informed Dennis. "It's simply because I believe that a radio tenor is a subject for murder, a murderee, not a murderer."

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"First, who was she?" Blake cut in ahead of Peter, to his indignation. "We've got to know!"

Kennedy's lean brown face hardened. He leaned forward.

"Listen," he said, "I'll tell you who she was. She was Bianca Fior! That mean anything to you? She played in big-league company, and she could hold her own beside a battery of beauties like Helen of Troy or Cleopatra as a siren."

"Bianca Fior," Dennis only said slowly. "That means white flower, doesn't it? I told you I felt that way when I saw her. As if I'd stumbled by mistake into some kind of bloody fairy tale."

"This isn't being in a fairy story," Blake said softly and sharply.

"It's better than being in a nightmare," Dennis answered.

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Chapter 4

DE MORTUIS

"BIANCA was a home-grown goddess," Kennedy said. "Statue of Liberty of North Beach. There's a lot of mystery about her beginnings, and a lot about her end. You see her like that big dame in New York Harbor, big, beautiful—God, she sure was!—and with a past and present like a sort of foggy mist around her. Who was keeping her? The police'd like to know. They might run up against something dangerous. Some big politician, maybe. An ex-rum-runner's gal, maybe. They're moving cautious. Too many prominent men in her background. Too much politics, maybe. They'd be a lot easier in their minds if Bianca hadn't been bumped off."

Blake nodded wisely.

"She was beautiful—and bad," she emphasized. "And we're going to find out about her. Peter, you'll take headquarters, won't you? And tackle Dennis's inspector?"

"Okay by me," said Peter. "What's his name? Sullivan? I'll find out about the inquest, too. I've got to get to the office first, and I'll go on from there."

"That reminds me, brother," Kennedy said to Den-

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nis, "you've got to come clean with me. We need pictures—lots of 'em. Papers are hollering for them. And that's a funny thing. I looked around your room a bit after you'd gone last night, and I couldn't see a single picture, or letter, or anything of yours there. Just some cigarettes and books. No wonder the lady mistook that room for hers, or for an empty one. No one'd know you'd ever lived there. Nothing personal around."

"I don't like a lot of truck," Dennis said.

"I'll say you don't," Kennedy said dryly. "Your room would make the Sahara desert look all cluttered up with Victorian keepsakes. But don't let *me* trouble you."

"You don't," Dennis retorted, grinning. "Was that all you had on your mind?"

Kennedy, under cover of lighting another of his eternal fags, gave him a long, cool appraising look from bright cold eyes.

"All," he said briefly, puffing out blue smoke. "Just to find the lady's stabber, and to cover police at the Hall, and to get some pictures of one Dennis Devore, radio singer, released by the police after an all-night questioning."

The bright little green-and-gold sun room had begun to be filled with blue tobacco smoke since Kennedy had come. He'd turned it into an office.

"Is that necessary?" Blake asked.

Kennedy nodded. "Play in with me, and I'll play in with you," he said. "That's fair, and I've got to hold down my job. Do I get them?"

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"Yes," Dennis said. "You'll have to take them yourself, though. I mean—the broadcasting studio hasn't any of me."

"So I discovered," Kennedy said. "We'll take 'em on our way to our good deeds today. Stop by at the office with me, and it's done. Where'll we four meet next?"

"What are you going to do, Blake?" Peter asked.

She raised innocent eyes to his. "I'm a lady novelist looking for local color," she said simply. "I'm going to interview the hotel staff, on Dennis's corridor. To find out about those other guests who *didn't* find a body in their respectable rooms."

Peter got up then, preparing to go.

"We part here," he said, "then. Dennis, what are you going to do? We've ruled you out of the Hall of Justice and the hotel part of it."

"I'll have to go to the studio and settle up accounts," Dennis said. "I'll bet you a nickel, even, they'll cancel my contract."

"Or else raise your salary," Kennedy grunted. "You'll be a great drawing card now, kid."

"Oh, yeah?" asked Dennis coldly. "Because I might be a murderer? If they offer to do that, I'll fire myself!"

He'd gone white around his nostrils. His eyes blazed darkly, and he breathed a bit quickly. Kennedy watched him, that inquisitive bird's head of his on one side.

"I'd sure like to play poker with you," he said.

Dennis cocked an arrogant eyebrow at him.

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"Do you think I look like a professional card player?" he asked, rather coldly still.

Kennedy grinned.

"No, you wouldn't be as dangerous if you did. You're scared, and yet you're cool and dangerous," —he emphasized his points with his lighted cigarette stabbed into the smoky air, leaning forward—"and you're picking your way through this with the brains of a quarterback. The way you're using all of us—you remind me of a great back I once saw picking his way through a broken field at full speed."

Dennis looked at Kennedy and finally smiled it off.

"I've often wondered what happens to great football players," he said, airy again. "Beyond becoming wrestlers or candidates for the Old People's Home."

His eye lit on Peter in passing for an infinitesimal instant, without expression. Peter blushed.

Kennedy said, "This one I'm telling you about got in a jam, after he graduated. He ran down a man on a dark night on the highway down near Salinas way, and he didn't stop. Didn't even turn up till next morning to leave his name. Man died. He was some Italian wholesale dealer up here, I think. Pretty important. And this guy'd been speeding, evidently. They tried him for manslaughter, and he got off pretty well—on probation for a year, I think. Then he disappeared."

Blake said, in a soft rush, "Oh-h-h!" and stopped.

"He didn't stop, or come back until next morning?" Peter inquired, expressionless. His big brown face was like a rock.

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"There was a girl in the car with him," Kennedy said. "Her name never came out. I think this football bird I'm telling you about got her home okay."

"Really?" said Dennis.

Kennedy stared at him. There was a short, intense second of silence, almost unbearable to Blake and Peter. Dennis went on smoking.

"I *said* I'd like to play poker with you," Kennedy remarked. His voice was that of the most lively admiration.

He hoisted himself to his feet.

"Well, come on," he said. "You're coming with me to the office, you said, for pictures."

Dennis got up, too, in a swift motion that reminded Peter of Blake's way of moving.

"After today," he said, "there probably won't *be* any Dennis Devore, radio tenor. I—I hope you'll think kindly of him."

That irrepressible grin of his just faintly touched dark eyes and sober mouth.

"He wasn't a bad guy," he gave him his requiem. "*De mortuis*, you know."

He turned to go, after Kennedy.

"Dennis," Blake said suddenly, "where are you going?"

"I don't quite know." Dennis wrinkled his brow mildly. "I can't live at the hotel—I suppose I'll get a room somewhere."

"I told you I was baching it," Kennedy broke in grudgingly. "I've got two rooms over on the north side

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of the city. Lots of room there for two. Thought I told you."

"You didn't," Dennis said. "But thanks. I'll accept." His voice was brief and bitter.

"You needn't thank me," Kennedy growled as ungraciously. "I like to have my exclusive story under my eyes all the time."

Clearly it wasn't one of those hospitable impulsive invitations. It looked regrettably like an invitation by *force majeure*. Dennis had an ominous semblance to a prisoner being led off to a dark dungeon that he hadn't inspected and chosen himself.

"Be here for breakfast tomorrow," Blake said hastily and impulsively, as this aspect of it struck her.

Dennis nodded and smiled at her reassuringly and followed Kennedy down the stairs.

Peter said, a bit heavily, in the silence, "I feel as if I were riding a surf board. Things seem to happen fast, when that Dennis guy is around. But—I don't know. It may be dangerous, but it's exhilarating." He grinned sheepishly.

"Yes," Blake said. "I feel that way, too. Rather—short of breath."

"What are we in for, anyway?" Peter said, sobering.

"I don't know," Blake said. "But we sort of had to do it, Peter. There didn't seem to be anything else to do."

"Not at the time, no," Peter agreed. "We just held onto our surf board and let it ride. But now—you heard what Kennedy said. About that ex-football hero who

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ran a man down and let him die in the road? If I thought Dennis was the one he meant who did it, it would be something else again. What do you think, Blake?"

He was suddenly impressive again, with a stern weight of integrity in him that bulked sheer as his big self.

"I think," Blake said slowly, "the only thing the matter with Dennis is that he's too chivalrous."

"What?" said Peter.

"Look how he acted about that Bianca woman, and she's the one that's got him into all this trouble," said Blake sturdily. "I shouldn't wonder—if he hadn't been too chivalrous at some other time in his career."

"Well," Peter said, "you'll cure him of that if anyone can, I'm sure."

"*De mortuis*," said Blake softly, "*nil nisi bonum*—indeed! I wonder just what he was thinking of—besides Bianca."

Peter began to laugh.

"I've just thought," he explained to her questioning eyes. "I've got two old codgers coming in to make a change in their wills today. I'll have to put 'em off. They're in no danger. They've lived to their placid eighties already—they can wait. Nothing's ever happened to them much. It's Dennis who needs to worry about reaching the ripe age of thirty alive!"

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Chapter 5

CHURCH OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

ANOTHER conversation was going on between Dennis and Kennedy, on the front smoker of a Kearny Street car going down into Market Street.

"What's the idea," Dennis asked stiffly, "of the third-degree stuff?"

"Meaning what?" Kennedy said, raising an eyebrow and impassively puffing away.

"Well, I'm coming to stay with you, and it's not for your *beaux yeux* either, guy," said Dennis bitterly. "You practically blackmailed me into coming," he reminded his host.

"Better than being blackballed at your hotel," Kennedy grinned. "Listen, Devore—you want to keep out of jail right now. That's your aim in life—or it ought to be. Undercover stuff. And I'm not keen on having a good story wandering around under other people's noses—and eyes. I want to keep it to myself—for a while, anyway. You stay under cover at my place, where no cop'll think to look for you, and we'll both be covered."

"Why don't you spill your story right now?" Dennis asked. "Afraid? Or looking for fingerprints? There aren't any—I can tell you that. Nothing for the cops to compare, either."

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"Or anything else," said Kennedy. "I noticed that. You sure made a clean break. I don't doubt someone swiped the records and the prints and all that. They would."

He looked sidewise at his rather sullen companion.

"Her folks had quite a lot of influence down there, didn't they?" he asked, grinning.

"Will you shut up?" said Dennis in a restrained but ferocious voice. "And go to——"

"The office," interrupted Kennedy brightly. "Here we are."

They climbed off at Market Street, where the traffic swirled around Lotta's slim fountain. They crossed the street and went up into an elevator, then left that and changed to another, rickety one.

"About that story," Kennedy finally said. "I might aim to keep it, and then produce it for what our British cousins would label 'Sensation in Court.' And then again I might not. It all depends."

"On what?" asked Dennis.

Kennedy grinned at him again.

"On people," he said. "I've seen a lot of 'em. Especially at the Hall of Justice. And they nearly all wilt, innocent or guilty, when they get in there. Something in it gets them. You didn't, and yet you had a lot to be scared about—things like this coming out, for instance. But you didn't lose your nerve. I don't think you've ever lost your nerve. And yet this bird back in Salinas did, according to the story. But it never did seem reasonable to me that a great back, used to think-

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ing quickly, would have lost his nerve so completely, the way that bird did. He'd have thought things out quicker. People are funny. But I know them. That's one thing being on police does for you, anyway. You get so you can't be fooled about people much."

"Oh," said Dennis, thinking this out.

They got out and banged on a rickety wooden door that reminded Dennis of a model speakeasy. A center hole in it opened. A face appeared. Kennedy nodded at Dennis, and the face withdrew. The door opened.

"Scotch," murmured Dennis hopefully.

"No, Danish," Kennedy said following him in. "He doesn't like to be disturbed, that's all. Danes are funny that way."

"I know," Dennis nodded. "I had a Great Dane once. He didn't like to be disturbed, either—especially when he had a bone to pick." He fingered a scar on his right wrist reminiscently.

He sat on a hard chair and looked around a very bare room. It had great windows to the north and west, and an unpainted kitchen table and a couple of hard kitchen chairs in it. Otherwise it looked as if the carpenters and plasterers had just gone away and nobody else had moved in yet. Their host appeared in silence, a round rosy face, and a wet and chemically-smelling black rubber apron. He set up black apparatus, a little way in front of Dennis.

Dennis stared at it calmly and curiously. Only his eyes went black and impenetrably dull again, and the white lines came around the base of his nostrils.

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He thought in a vivid flash of Sullivan standing by while a little unobtrusive man seized his hands, and, finger by finger, rolled them in inked stuff. There was a sort of degradation in having these things happening to one, instead of making things happen as you pleased. Like being an animal, and having to stand for whatever people did to you!

The flashlight went off then in a great sound, lots of smoke and a bright light. The little man nodded to them and disappeared into his warren. Kennedy got up.

"We won't wait for the prints," he said. "Thanks. I guess they'll turn out okay."

"They'd better," Dennis said. He got up, a bit stiffly.

"Smoke?" Kennedy said and fished out a packet of cigarettes. Dennis took one out carefully and lit it from Kennedy's light. His hands didn't shake. He could control his poised body more coolly than he could his hot and impatient mind.

"We'll go all the way down in this crazy thing," the police reporter said when they were in the rickety elevator again, descending slowly and cautiously. "No use letting people know where you are, if anyone's watching the front entrance."

They got out in a basement of gray concrete and walked through a sort of gray tunnel, landing outside in the dirty sunshine of an alleyway. Kennedy looked away carefully and quickly.

"Okay," he said softly. "No one'll pick you up here, anyway."

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He signaled to a lurking plain dark taxi just on the corner where the alley joined a main street.

"Our special brand," he murmured to Dennis. "Warranted not to talk out of turn."

They got in the taxi without another word. Kennedy leaned forward and spoke to the driver.

"We can stop by at your studio, kid," he explained, sinking back again. "You can fix things up there, and then we'll go on to my place. I wouldn't go back to the hotel if I were you."

Dennis involuntarily shuddered and then held himself rigid again, commanding his betraying body. He saw a lighted hotel room, the graceful walnut furniture, the bed with the sheet turned back—and, beyond the table, that dark and untidy sort of shadow . . .

"I haven't the least desire to go back there, I assure you," he said through stiff, dry lips.

Kennedy looked at him again, that sidewise, quick, stab of a look from bright birds' eyes.

"Don't let it get you, kid," he said more gently.

Dennis looked at him coldly with his dark head haughty again.

"Nothing's ever 'got' me," he said coldly. "Not even getting my picture taken like a San Quentin boarder!"

Kennedy shrugged. They stopped before the entrance to the studio building.

"I'll wait here," the police reporter said. "You won't be long, I guess."

"Not if I can help it," Dennis grunted, getting out.

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He wasn't. It was about five minutes later when he came down the stairs to the street again, the hatless dark head moving swiftly and surely through less sure traffic of people.

"I told you," he said only, getting in. "There goes Dennis Devore, poor fellow! Canned."

"By request?" Kennedy asked.

"Does it matter?" Dennis retorted. "Sure it was by request—my own request. I asked for my time."

"And you got the air," Kennedy punned pitilessly. "Well, there's one less radio canary singing. That's all to the good."

Dennis laughed. He was oddly released and happy.

"You never heard me!" he said. "That remark proves it."

"And I hope I never will!" Kennedy said grimly.

They were in the sunny north section of the city now. Brown-faced, beautiful children with dark hair and great soft dark eyes like deer played about the narrow streets. The taxi went up, and stopped in that position, still going up. They climbed out precariously.

"My joint," said Kennedy. It was a new, clean-looking apartment house—two stories, four apartments, Dennis estimated swiftly. Better than he'd thought it would be. And there'd be a swell view of the Gate, glittering in noon sunshine.

There was. There was something else, too, that he hadn't reckoned on. A grand piano in the small living room. His eyes widened, seeing this. A swell grand

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piano! He knew the sort of tone it would have—dark and lovely, like itself.

"*Cantabile*," he muttered reverently, like a sort of Italian oath.

Kennedy's place was a surprise. He'd thought of something bohemian, which meant dusty and rather bare, like the camping place of a hardened old campaigner. Or else cluttered up so you couldn't move. This was—different. A grand piano. And the shelves of the room covered with books of phonograph records, music scores.

Kennedy was in the small bedroom. Dennis stepped over and looked at some of the books of records. His eyes stayed wide and dark with astonishment. He whistled softly. Into those astonished eyes came the faint flickering of mischief beginning again.

Kennedy came back again, slipping an overcoat on quickly.

"I'm due at the Hall now," he explained in a hurry. "I'll be back around six, I guess. You'll stay holed up right here till I get back. Get me? There's some stuff in the icebox when you get hungry."

"Aye, aye," said Dennis a bit absently. His eyes were veiled, but eager.

He surveyed the records gleefully when his host had gone.

"Blackmail, eh?" he said thoughtfully. "So I'm to stay in all day? We'll see."

He then proceeded to get drunk. He had a cocktail of Gershwin's, consisting of the Concerto, and the Rhap-

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sody in Blue, then a full-bodied draft of Wagner's Ring taken straight, and blissful ecstasies from Beethoven. He began tapering off with Mozart. When Kennedy came back around six o'clock, he was sitting bright-eyed and white-faced at the piano playing and singing, lustily.

His host muttered softly. Dennis turned around, letting one finger pick up and trail the tune in the meanwhile.

"I saw Sullivan," Kennedy announced, discarding coats. "He got after me for letting you go this morning. He's just about made up his mind to take you in again. The inquest is coming, and he needs a goat to sacrifice. Threatened me with lese majeste and a few assorted crimes, but I told him there wasn't any warrant out for you yet and he'd better wait till the inquest is over. You're not to go out till then, either. You stay right here, holed up."

Dennis nodded, trailing a cigarette from the corner of his mouth and turning loose on the piano.

Above the syncopated din his voice rose, melting, tender. He was in the throes of sentiment.

Kennedy writhed, bearing up nobly. Finally:

"Do you *have* to do that?" he yelped.

Dennis looked at him.

"I have to do *something*," he said gently. "I'm bored."

Kennedy sat down in the armchair and groaned aloud.

"He's bored," he said bitterly and blankly. "Sulli-

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van's after him, and that big stiff usually grabs what he's after; there's a murder inquest up, and he's bored. Did anyone ever tell you there was wirehaired fox terrier in you?"

"No," said Dennis truthfully.

"Well, there is," Kennedy grunted. "If you wait till I can get my things on again will you promise not to sing? There's a roof-garden ex-bootlegger across the street, on top of that apartment house. No one'll be likely to look for us there."

Dennis grinned and gave up the desecrated piano reluctantly.

"It's blackmail," Kennedy said as they went on down the stairs cautiously. "And you know it. You looked at my music stuff there."

"Blackmail?" said Dennis. He raised an elegant eyebrow. "Where have I heard that word before?"

The roof garden was cool. It had a view of part of the city to the south and sloping down to the north, where the dark Gate ran swiftly in the darkening evening. There were nondescript potted green things around, palms or rubber plants or what Dennis called hotel foliage.

Kennedy talked to the proprietor, a dark-faced but pleasant person with a picturesque version of a dinner suit. Dinner began to come—chicken, taglierini, red wine. They had a table at the edge of the roof, where the wall came up to their shoulders as they sat there.

"What's that big building—the gray one?" Dennis asked.

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"Church," Kennedy said. "All the Italians go to it. It's St. Peter and St. Paul's."

Their host bent over them in an aroma of garlic, dark mustachios highly perfumed, and greasy vestments.

"All," he said, gutturally mysterious about it. "Yes. But not one—no more. She will be there for Mass, and she will never hear it. No more. Ah, *bella—fior d'Italia!*"

All of a sudden he wasn't a greasy, intrusive speakeasy host trying to be mysterious. He was a poet, a lover, a representative of a lover's race, mourning a lost beauty.

"Who d'you mean?" asked Dennis, with quickening breath.

"I mean her—the one they killed." He turned to Dennis as to a confidant. "You heard? They called her Bianca—Bianca Fior."

"You know her—about her?" Kennedy thrust in, keen as a bright thin dagger's blade.

The man shrugged. His dark eyes looked at them from beneath a dark fringe of hair. Honest, mournful eyes.

"No one knew her," he sighed. "Just—the house she lived in, the restaurants she danced in. No one knew her, signor, as she really was. Only I—a little. Two nights ago, just before sundown, I saw her. She was coming from the church, and she was weeping. I saw that. She had been to speak to her friend, the priest. Old Father Malletti. She came there sometimes."

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Kennedy looked at Dennis. His eyes were bright as steel.

"Confession?" he barely breathed.

Their host shrugged again and mopped the table absently.

"No, not Confession, I think. She went to the parish house. Not to the church. I think old Father Malletti knew all her sorrows. As a friend, not a priest, perhaps. He would come to the door and stand on the stairs watching her go away. He did so the last time. He raised his hand. She did not dare to go too directly to God, I think—that beautiful one!—but old Father Malletti would dare to go for her. He is—a saint."

He made the swift, almost invisible passage of one brown, unwashed hand across his greasy white shirt-front, and went back to his noisy kitchen region.

Dennis and Kennedy stared out at the thickened darkness. In the closing night the tall gray church of the Saints, Peter and Paul, stood impassively fronting them.

Dennis cleared his throat finally.

"Well," he said, "I'm not such a dumb dick after all, am I?"

Kennedy stared at him pityingly.

"Kid," he said, "for dumb luck, no. You ought to be down on your knees."

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Chapter 6

"HE IS GONE ON A JOURNEY"

DENNIS yawned with immense exertion, through the thick soft feathers of sleep smothering him. His head drooped forward.

"Wake up!" said Kennedy hastily. "We're going places."

"Now?" said Dennis wonderingly.

He sighed deeply and shook sleep away from him, and obediently followed Kennedy down the stairs and across the street. He stood swaying a little, wand-in-the-wind fashion, waiting for Kennedy to take the lead into the apartment house.

That bothersome, small, hard-bitten gentleman sized him up wearily.

"Look here," he decided, "can you stay awake long enough for me to ask a question at the corner church?"

Dennis just nodded, or rather let his head drop down once. It was too much trouble to open his mouth and say yes.

He followed Kennedy, still half in his dream, to the still-lighted doorway of the priests' residence of St. Peter and St. Paul's. Kennedy rang the bell. After a minute the door opened. The housekeeper stood there,

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light falling on her old-fashioned big white apron and on her sturdy, lined face.

"Father Malletti?" asked Kennedy.

"Oh, you're wanting to speak to *him?*" the woman asked shrewdly. "In particular? Well, I'll have to call someone, sir. I don't just know . . ."

Dennis heard the voices, saw the lighted faces, from far away. Like people on a lighted stage.

The housekeeper turned. A tall young priest stood there behind her. A beautiful masculine voice, like a struck bell, thought Dennis, enchanted, spoke out effortlessly.

"You wanted Father Malletti?" said the beautiful voice. It came from the tall young priest. "Ah, he's away. He's not here."

"Where is he?" Kennedy took him up quickly.

"He is gone on a journey," said the young priest, "to the country. He went Saturday night. A former parishioner of his was dying, and they sent a big, dark car for him to come."

"Where is this place?" Kennedy asked.

"It's near Delroy." The beautiful voice seemed to hang in the air, sighing, over each word. Dennis listened to the sound, not the sense. He was too sleepy. But a word caught his ear.

"That's funny," he said, after they'd thanked the priest and had gone down the sidewalk again. "Delroy! That's where——"

He yawned and forgot again.

"Aren't we ever going to sleep?" he said plaintively.

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"Or will we keep this up all night? The Chinese torture. You're as bad as Sullivan."

"That's where—what?" his active small tormenter said.

"Oh—that's where I've got a small ranch," Dennis answered. "I'll invite you down some time. We've got the best beds——"

"If Father Malletti doesn't get back tomorrow morning," Kennedy said, halting at their door, "I'll take you up on that right away."

Something seemed to strike him then with a curious kind of worry, as though something were—out of tune, and he couldn't locate the note.

"Some people," he said slowly, "are a long time dying, aren't they? A big, dark car coming . . ."

He shook his head. He was blaming himself for the wrong notes. They were in his head, not in the things he'd heard.

There was a wall bed let down in the living room for Dennis. He was in it almost as soon as it was down. A pair of Kennedy's pajamas draped him sketchily. He tucked his head down into the pillow. The light began to grow dim.

"Delroy!" he said very drowsily. "There's a river . . . and cottonwoods . . . cottonwoods . . ."

They were waving in the little wind. He saw the shallow ripples of the broad stream, and the glint of gold under them as the sun struck through to the ledges of smooth sand underwater. A smile curved his mouth. . . .

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"Say," Kennedy said, "I'm going to the Hall of Justice to take the night shift. I may be back late, but I'll try not to wake you up. Can I trust you to stay here while I'm gone?"

There wasn't any answer. The bright light fell full on the face of one who was far away.

"I guess so," Kennedy grunted, turning off the light.

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Chapter 7

THE LONG LEASH

"FELLOW-MEMBERS of the Dennis Defense Society," said Blake impressively, "we are met here to—to——"

"To do honor to a man who," rattled off Dennis glibly, "I should say needs no introduction—a man who has the welfare of this great country at heart—a man who, under a cast-iron exterior, has a heart as soft as a properly boiled egg—a man who——"

"Charter members of this society will please come to order!" said Blake. "Silly nuts——"

"Decline the nomination," said Dennis. "I was only calling attention to your cook. Under that Mongolian exterior rests an artist. His pancakes are a poem. I," he said pensively, "should know."

Blake succumbed. "Louie *is* an old-timer," she said carelessly, puffed with pride. She helped herself to a cup of clear topaz coffee, sniffing delicately with pleasure as she did so. "He says he used to wash gold in the Sierra creeks, just after the forty-niners were there."

"There's gold in them thar eggs," said Peter, opening one as if he expected to find a nugget in it.

Dennis grinned. He'd been absurdly blithe at an absurd—to his reporter host—hour in the morning. Ever since he'd gotten up around half-past seven,

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