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job was to find out just where their grasp reached so that the arteries could be hacked and the vast spider-like apparatus would bleed to death. He had done pretty well in a year, getting further and further inside the circle. He had held his breath when brother agents were murdered; he had won the confidence of the big boys; he was in.

Then Tina Antony appeared, the American-born daughter of one of the czars; and with her arrived Pete Jenner — ex-roommate of Ricci before he became Ricci — who was curious about why his old friend didn't recognize him and who was much interested in Tina.

So was Ricci.

And Belle was interested in him — blonde Belle who had left America with Lucca to console his exile and who, in her own way, was trying to play this straight.

Lucca, the racket boss who was meant to be a racket boss, and Antony, who might have been something better; Gino, the willing, amoral ox; Leclerc, the finger man who lost his nerve; all these and the above are vividly etched characters in a story that winds as swiftly and dramatically as the coast road where most of it is played. And the sun that brightens that road only heightens the shadowy fear.

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THE BRIGHT ROAD TO FEAR

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Richard Martin Stern

THE BRIGHT ROAD TO FEAR

BALLANTINE BOOKS, NEW YORK

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Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 57-14683

Printed in the United States of America

American Book–Stratford Press, Inc., New York

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PS3537
St4578 7

To Dot, of course.
And to Pink,
who urged.

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ALL THE WAY along the ancient road from Lucca's house, with the blue of the bay on the one hand and the brown of the countryside on the other, driving slowly in the bright day from American habit unlike the Italian, he had tried to think back as carefully as he could, and had been able to find nothing, no clue, no smallest indication; and yet the feeling remained strong that somewhere, somehow, he had made a mistake. And no mistakes were allowed.

Gino, sitting broad and solid and comfortable in the seat beside him, said, "You are quiet, Ricci." He spoke in Italian, always in Italian, with a slurred peasant accent.

"I'm thinking," Ricci said. His name was now, and for the past year had been, both back in the States and here in the old, sunny land, Ricciardi Morelli—Ricci, for short; a young man with close black hair and quiet eyes and an outward attitude of calm—assiduously cultivated, rigidly enforced.

"Too much thinking is not good."

"You may be right." In a way the feeling he had was that of vague sickness; and the name of the disease was carelessness, and sometimes it killed quickly and sometimes by slow inches, but it left a man just as dead in either event. He thought of stopping to telephone, but he had no excuse, not with Gino here beside him, not with their orders plain and clear and delivered to them together so that there could be no separate understandings.

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"It is nothing," Gino said. "This Joe Antony is a friend, an old friend of Angelo Lucca. It is as simple as that. He is an important man, and so he needs protection, as all important men need protection. And so Lucca has sent us." He nodded. "Together, we will see that nothing happens to Joe Antony, eh, Ricci?"

It was hard not to smile at the simplicity of a mind that saw only what was on the surface, that behaved like a well-trained dog, listening to orders and accepting them and obeying. "Maybe Antony won't want us," Ricci said. And there would be a pause, he knew, while this new idea, like a coin in a slot, set mental gears to working.

After a little time Gino said, "But Lucca sent us. And Lucca and Antony are friends, old friends from America. Aren't they, Ricci?"

"They were, as far as I know." About Lucca he knew much, names, dates, facts, suppositions dating from Lucca's childhood to his deportation, and since. About Antony he knew little, actually, only hearsay and vague newspaper accounts. He would have to find out more when he could. If there was time.

"Then," Gino said, "I don't understand. Why would Antony not want us to protect him?"

"Maybe they aren't friends any more, big one. Maybe Lucca doesn't want them to be friends as they were in New York—partners. Maybe Lucca sent us to make sure that Antony doesn't get any ideas about partnership." This was one interpretation, only just beneath the obvious surface.

There was another pause. "You are too deep for me, Ricci." Gino shook his big head slowly, dismissing responsibility. "You tell me what to do and I will do it. If we are to teach this Antony a lesson—" He shrugged. "We will see that he doesn't forget it." And he nodded. "I see now why you were thinking. I understand. It is not simple, eh, Ricci?"

Maybe it was simple, maybe not. He couldn't know. It was possible that he was looking too deep, finding shadows that were not there. Maybe after a year now he was getting jumpy. Again he tried to go back in his mind. The telephone call, he thought, was the key, and he had not been able to hear even Lucca's side of the telephone call.

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They had been at breakfast on the sunny terrace overlooking the swimming pool—Lucca in linen trousers and sandals and a short-sleeved shirt; Belle, who was young and overly blonde and addicted to shorts and halters that were not really halters at all; and Ricci. Until then, little more than an hour ago, he had thought that he was going north to Genoa, which was the primary goal, the aim of a year of patience.

When the call had come, Lucca had gone into the house to answer, and there had been no excuse to follow him. And Lucca had returned, smiling, but, then, he was almost always smiling, and it had been impossible to tell if anything was changed. Lucca had said merely, "I've got a little job for you here in town."

Ricci had been drinking his coffee. He remembered that now. He had raised the cup to his lips, and he had held it there, motionless, long enough to adjust himself, to make sure that the attitude of outward calm was secure. Had he overdone it? He couldn't know. And he had lowered the cup slowly. "You're the boss. I thought I was going to—take a little trip, is all." He had spoken in English, always in English in front of Belle—although it was better, safer, not to speak with Belle any more than he could help.

"That can wait," Lucca had said. "This is more important, now." And, to the girl, "Beat it for a while. And tell Gino I want him."

"I can't even talk his language."

"You've got sign language," Lucca had said. "That's all you ever need." And he had patted her haunch as she walked away from the table.

Gino had arrived, and sat down, and put on his frown of concentration. Lucca had switched to Italian. "Joe Antony," he had said. "Friend of mine. He's here now, from New York—" For only a moment anger, resentment, ugly and unashamed, had showed in his face, in his brown eyes. "—same way I'm here. Same reason." And in that moment Ricci had thought Lucca was going to spit. Then the expression was swiftly gone. "He doesn't know his way around . . . yet." He was genial again, genial Lucca.

Gino had nodded, frowning still. Ricci had said nothing.

Lucca had said, "Go on over. Have a talk with him. Tell him

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you're going to take care of him. I—wouldn't want anything to happen to Joe."

"Take care of him," Ricci had said, without expression.

"You're a smart boy," Lucca had said, and he had smiled, nodding. "That's what I like about you. One of the things." Then . . . "Take good care of Joe. He's a nice fellow. A smart fellow." He had paused, and had the smile altered? "Almost as smart as you are, Ricci."

"And my little trip?" Ricci had said.

"It can wait. Joe's more important. Maybe you won't even have to go to Genoa, ever. It's a long drive."

"You're the boss," Ricci had said, and that had been that.

Why, he asked himself now? Why the change of plan? Because he had, somewhere, somehow during the past year made, not a single big mistake—he would, he told himself, have realized that—but perhaps a series of small, subtle mistakes. And had the phone call concerned them? And was Antony, then, a test?

He drew on all that he had read and heard about Antony: Lucca's silent partner, disbarred lawyer, accountant, fixer; it was even said that Antony had been Lucca's brain. Was that it? Was he, Ricci, on his way to Antony now to be looked at, listened to, sized up in the light of suspicion? And why had Gino been sent along? There were too many questions, and too few answers, only the uneasiness which was not yet fear—not yet.

"You are still thinking, Ricci?" Gino said.

He made himself relax. There was only one way to go—straight ahead. Otherwise, dodging shadows, he spoiled everything, threw away a year's work, threw away even more—the hope of success.

"No," he said. "I've finished. My thinking is done, big one."

"Good," Gino said. "Too much thinking is bad. Then . . . "You will tell me what to do, Ricci. And I will do it."

The house was old and large, with thick stone walls and twisted columns supporting the roof of the loggia. Over the front door there was a coat of arms carved in stone, and what family, or conjunction of families it represented, Ricci did not know. But it was not Antony; of this much he was sure.

Antony had not been born on a hilltop in an old, honored house.

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Antony would have been born somewhere down in the slum and maze of the city surrounding the harbor, facing out on the bay. And Antony's parents would have taken him, as a child perhaps wearing his first pair of shoes bought for the voyage, to New York, which was to say America, the bright land, the hopeful land where a child could grow and learn and make of himself what he would. As Lucca's parents had taken young Lucca. As his own parents had taken him—with the difference that he, Ricci, had been born in the new land.

There were other differences, too, of course, between him on the one hand, and Lucca and Antony on the other; but he did not dwell on these because they contributed nothing to his understanding. His roots, Lucca's roots, Antony's roots were here, in the old land, and by that much all three were alike; by that much he could understand how their minds worked.

Inside the house the entrance hall was vast, high-ceilinged, and the floor was of marble; there were rounded niches in the walls, and small busts looked out, as in a museum. Ricci noticed that Gino walked almost on tiptoe as they followed the maid. He smiled, not really feeling like smiling but unable to control it. He had the outward attitude of calm securely in place by the time they reached the library, and Joe Antony.

He was leaning against his desk, a large desk, waiting for them —a middle-sized man in his fifties, with only a little gray in his black hair, neat, quiet, with a gambler's face that showed only what he wanted it to show. Joe Antony, not American now, never American again; up close he seemed smaller than his pictures, smaller than his reputation. "Well?" in Italian, and there was neither friendliness nor unfriendliness in the voice.

Gino stood perfectly still, waiting, looking at Ricci. Ricci said, "Lucca sent us—"

"You told that to the maid. She told me. So?"

"We're a sort of welcoming committee," Ricci said. Behind Antony, silhouetting him, the sunlight sparkled on the bay, brought intense color to the lemon groves sloping down the hillside. The city seemed distant, remote. A large white ship lay at quarantine in the harbor. "He wants us to help you get used to the place."

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"I was born here," Antony said.

"But you're going to live here now. There's a difference."

Antony looked at Gino. He looked back again to Ricci. "Go on."

"Why," Ricci said, "there's nothing to it. You're here. You're an old friend of Lucca's. He wants to be helpful."

"Nice of him."

"Angelo Lucca," Gino said, "is a good man." He said it with conviction, as he might have said that God was good, or *Il Papa*.

"I've known him longer than both of you put together," Antony said. And then, to Ricci again, "The pitch. Get to it."

He was Ricciardi Morelli, and he told himself not to forget that, never to forget that. The questions were still questions and, for the moment, unanswerable. "Lucca," he said, "wants to be sure that nothing happens to you."

"Like what?"

"You're a name. You're rich. There's competition here, too, just like in America. Lucca thinks you'd be better off with us around . . . safer."

"Tell him to forget it," Antony said. "Nothing's going to happen to me."

Ricci said nothing. Gino watched, and waited, standing broad and solid, no longer awed as he had been on the marble floor of the hall. There was silence, a long silence.

"They threw Lucca out of America," Antony said. "Now they've thrown me out." He seemed to study Ricci, the crew haircut, the American clothes. "They threw you out, too?"

"They couldn't. I was born there." There was more silence.

"I don't need you," Antony said.

"Lucca thinks you do."

"He's wrong."

Gino made a small sound, almost animal. Ricci looked at him, and Gino was silent again.

Antony said, "I don't know what Lucca's doing. I don't want to know. I'm retired, through, finished. I'm not competing with anybody. I don't need protection."

"Maybe some people won't believe it," Ricci said.

"I don't care what some people believe."

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"Maybe Lucca doesn't believe it." In a way, Ricci thought, there was a formality to the scene, a set pattern, as in a play, each statement and each response prescribed. He concentrated on this, forced himself to feel it, as an actor should feel his lines and his part, and his mind reached out to anticipate the dialogue.

"If he's got a good thing," Antony said, "and wants to keep it to himself, I couldn't care less. Tell him that."

"We don't tell him. He tells us." It was then that the change came in Antony's face—unmistakable signs of capitulation.

Antony turned to the window, his back to the room. He stood silent for a little time, looking down at the lemon groves and the bay, the white ship lying at quarantine. Over his shoulder he said in English, "He wants you to keep an eye on me, see that I'm behaving myself. For how long?"

"He didn't say," Ricci said, also in English.

Antony's voice came slow, distinct, meaningful. "You'll be talking to him. Tell him I won't forget this."

"I'll tell him."

"Tell him—" Antony stopped there. He turned back into the room. "All right," he said, in English still. And then, "You re here. You'll do what I say."

"Sure," Ricci said, and the pattern was now complete. "You're being smart."

"When I want you to say something," Antony said, "I'll let you know."

Gino looked from one to the other. To Ricci he said, "Please?"

"We're staying here," Ricci said, in Italian.

Gino smiled, showing his large yellow teeth. "Lucca will be pleased."

Ricci said nothing. He had an uncomfortable feeling that it had been too easy, almost as if there had been prearrangement between Lucca and Antony. He told himself that it was still too early to know.

The library door was closed again, and Antony was alone. He walked around the big desk and let himself down into the leather chair. He sat for a few minutes, motionless, staring unseeing at the

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far wall. Idly he picked up a letter opener, bronze, polished, and turned it over and over in his hands.

The young, bright, tough one—he thought of Ricci this way, as opposed to Gino, who was merely stupid muscle—had been right. He, Antony, had been smart. It was always smart, he told himself, as he had told himself for so many years, to go along with the tide, drift, merely keeping your head above water, until the force of the tide was spent. Otherwise, struggling futilely, you used up your own strength and accomplished nothing.

There were many other ways to say the same thing, and he knew most of them, had, at one time or another, like a teacher trying to break through into a child's mind by restating facts over and over again in different terms, used most of the aphorisms on himself: Don't beat your head against a brick wall; if you can't whip them, join them; he who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day; if it's inevitable, relax and enjoy it; a dead hero does nobody any good—the list was long. Through overuse, the clichés had lost some, but not all, of their meaning.

He didn't want Ricci and Gino in the house; he admitted that. So? He didn't want them here because they were a part of Lucca and he wanted nothing to do with Lucca, not now, particularly not now; not ever again. He turned in the chair to look out over the lemon groves and the harbor, the bright water, the white ship lying at quarantine. *Particularly not now,* he thought. But what other way had there been?

He knew Lucca. He knew how Lucca's mind worked, every small suspicious twist, every vicious reaction. *Antony is over here now*—this was the way Lucca's thoughts would have run—*and Antony is not a man to let himself rot with inactivity; therefore, Antony will look around and see what goes, and cut himself a piece of anything that looks profitable, because Antony is smart, tricky, always finding angles that nobody else can find; and once he gets started, even if his beginnings are small in this new land, as they were in the States, he will grow until, one day, he becomes a menace. The way to neutralize Antony is to move in on him right at the start, and if it takes two men, one of them with brains and*

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the other with muscle, to keep a lid on him, why, the price is cheap. Antony is a deep one, too deep, and brains are dangerous.

There was another way, of course, to deal with danger, and there was no doubt in Antony's mind that Lucca had thought of it, as he always thought first of violence. *But there is one thing I did teach him,* Antony thought now; *and that is that violence should be the last, and not the first resort, that a mere show of force is usually enough. And he learned the lesson, and remembered it, most times, or neither of us would be over here, merely deported; we would have been, by now, just lumps, lying in fancy coffins, not respected or even vaguely feared by the worms.*

He was safe, he told himself, as safe as Joe Antony could ever be, as long as he behaved. He thought of this and tried to draw comfort from it. *Relax, it's all right; there was nothing else to do.* The clichés repeated themselves, unbidden, in his mind. They sounded shopworn, like last year's advertising slogans.

He stared at the letter opener in his hand. He was impotent, helpless. *Admit it,* he told himself. He was through, finished, retired, he had thought. They had deported him, and he had almost welcomed it, because over here there would be no new men coming up aiming, always aiming, at the top and knowing that the only way to get there was to pull down and destroy the ones above them, all of the ones above them whether they pretended to step aside or not. Over here, he had thought, it would be different—plain Joe Antony, bothering nobody, worrying nobody, just sitting on his hilltop and looking out at his lemon groves . . . content.

So it wasn't like that, and he blamed himself that he had even dreamed that it would be. He had fooled himself. Worse, he had broken a promise made long ago, and thereby fooled somebody else.

The great white ship blew its whistle and the sound rolled across the flat water and up through the lemon groves. He heard it, listened to its echoes. He lifted the letter opener and held it poised, and then slammed it down on the desktop. The door opened almost simultaneously, and he looked up, his face expressionless once more.

It was a woman this time, wearing black, all black. She was old

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and tall and straight, with tightly drawn white hair and thin lips, and dark, deepset eyes. She closed the door. She said in Italian, "Who are these men, Giovanni?"

"Don't call me that. My name is Joe."

There was virulence in her, and she did not bother to disguise it. "In America, perhaps. But America sent you away." And again, "Who are these men?"

Even in his own house, because of the accident of age, and relationship, because she was his aunt, his father's sister, he could be flouted. He kept his voice uninflected. "Friends. They're staying here."

"Why?"

"I invited them."

"Friends," she said.

Antony stood up. He glanced out of the window. The ship was already moving in toward the dock. He turned back into the room. "You are going with me to the ship?"

"No."

He stood there, irresolute, unable to make up his mind. He even pleaded . . . "She is of the family."

The old woman said, "She is your daughter. From America. I have never seen her. I did not know her mother."

"She is of the family."

"Now," the aunt said, "after all of this time, family has become important to you?"

"The family," Antony said, "what there is left of it, you and me, lives up here in this house on a hilltop now, instead of down there." He gestured only faintly with his head toward the city.

"It is true," the old woman said. "But down there, we were honest people, Giovanni—"

"My name is Joe."

The eyes looked at him with something close to contempt. "You left that name in America. And with all of your money, you cannot return to it."

He held tight to his temper, because the other was the important thing, the thing he was afraid to face alone. "Will you come to the ship with me? She . . . the girl—"

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"No," the old woman said.

He walked past her as if she were not there. He opened the door and went out. He took his hat from the table, and he started across the entrance hall, walking carefully on the slick marble. Then, halfway, he stopped. In his anger, his impotence, he had almost forgotten. "Maria!" The maid appeared quickly. "The young man," he said. "Tell him I want him. Alone." He went on, across the vast hallway, and the marble heads in their niches seemed to watch him as he walked. Outside, in the bright sun, he took out his dark glasses and put them on. He knew the rules. He was tied, tethered on a short chain. He could go nowhere without one of Lucca's men—nowhere. He stood on the steps of the loggia, trying to make himself relax.

The room upstairs was large, with a stone balcony and a vaulted ceiling and heavy, dark furniture, a room meant for tapestries and candles in ornate sconces. Gino was on one of the beds, his feet up, one hand behind his head. "I like it here."

"You like it anywhere, big one," Ricci said.

Gino nodded. When he smiled the large yellow teeth showed. "It is true. I am friendly. And so I find friends wherever I go." And this, too, was true. "It is all work, eh, Ricci? Whether we are at Lucca's house, or here, or wherever, it is all work."

"A man said once," Ricci said, "that work was doing something when you'd rather be doing something else."

Gino took his time, thinking slowly around the concept, examining it as carefully as he could. "And do you believe that, Ricci?"

"I was just talking, big one."

"No," Gino said. "When you say a thing, it is for a reason."

"Forget it."

"It is true, Ricci." Then . . . "Is that what it is like in America? Do people there talk only when there is a reason? Like you and Lucca and this Antony downstairs? He is a deep one, too."

"In the land of the blind," Ricci said, "the one-eyed man is king."

"I don't understand."

"It's not important." The uneasiness remained, the feeling that

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it had been too quick, too effortless downstairs; Antony had given in almost without an argument, and the more he thought about this, the more he disliked what it might imply. When the knock came at the door he felt a sudden small prickling up and down his spine, like the tiny feet of mice scampering over a grave. He looked at the maid, Maria.

From the bed Gino said, "Cute one. Come in. You will call me Gino, and we will be friends, great friends, and we will drink some wine and maybe sing a little, and then—"

To Ricci the maid said, "The *signor* is waiting. For you alone." She was gone.

He wore his outward calm as he moved toward the door to obey. Gino said, "It is all work, eh, Ricci?" He lay back on the bed. "If you want me, I will be here." His eyes closed. He raised one heavy hand and began to move it delicately in rhythm, crooning softly to himself. The tune was Puccini's: *"Un Bel Di,"* "One Fine Day." It was the last sound Ricci heard as he closed the door.

Antony was still on the loggia, wearing his hat and his dark glasses, his gambler's face composed. The car was waiting, a chauffeur Ricci had not seen before holding the door. "Sit up front," Antony said. But then, "No. In back, with me."

Ricci nodded. He followed Antony into the car, settled himself in the seat. Now, he told himself, the catechism begins, and his mind felt bright and clear, able, alert, almost free. It had always been so, once the waiting and the uncertainty were past.

Antony did not look at him. He faced straight ahead. "You were born in America," he said. "You came over here with Lucca?"

"No. Later." They spoke in English.

"But you knew him over there?"

"No," Ricci said, and so far it was no more than the truth.

Antony said nothing. He waited.

"Tiny Presser," Ricci said. "I got in a little trouble in Frisco, went East. I saw Presser—"

"Where?"

So far it was easy, automatic; the preparations had been made with care. "His apartment, on Tenth Street." The apartment with the two-story living room and the enormous bookcase and the

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library of classical recordings; and Tiny Presser, himself, grotesquely fat, asking his questions in a soft womanlike voice, watching with his small, bright eyes. From Presser you got clearance, or you did not; and if you did not, you stayed out of any real business. Oh, you could operate on your own, in little ways, petty ways, but if you got too big, anywhere from Boston to Miami to Seattle to San Diego, you ran into the organization that led back to Presser again, as, sooner or later, a check returns to its point of origin. Presser was, in a sense, a personnel director. Presser had been the starting place.

"And Tiny sent you here," Antony said, "to Lucca."

"That's right."

"How long ago?"

Drag your heels a little, Ricci told himself; *you're not a boy scout.* He turned his head to look at Antony. He said nothing.

"I asked you a question," Antony said.

"I heard it."

"Let's get this straight," Antony said, without any particular emotion. "When I ask a question, I want it answered. When I tell you to do something, I want it done."

Ricci shrugged. "I came over here nine months ago."

"That's better." Then . . . "You're going to pick up the easy money, be a big shot someday." Something in his face and voice had altered.

Ricci shrugged again. "You've got a nice car here. Nice house."

Antony ignored it. "Know where we're going?"

"No."

"We're going to meet a ship."

"So?"

"Let it go," Antony said. He was alone, all alone—first the aunt rejecting him, now this young punk. No matter. He told himself that he had been alone most of his life, that he was used to it. "You a ball fan?"

"Some."

"Coast League," Antony said. It was no question. "Some day they'll have the majors out there, two three clubs, anyway." There

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was a sort of relaxation in this kind of talk, American talk. "I used to have a box up at the Stadium, every year, United Steel on one side and Coke and Carbide on the other, right on first base, near the dugout." He turned to look at Ricci now. "Ever see that Mantle? Clobbering one? Beating out a bunt? Ever watch Berra standing up there, swinging at the bad ones and knocking them into the seats?"

"On television," Ricci said.

There was no relaxation. He wasn't in America; he was back in Italy. The taste in his mind was bitter. "Even microwave doesn't reach this far," he said, and they rode in silence for a time, along the ancient road. "You got a girl? One girl, I mean?"

"No."

"Got a family?"

"No."

"Nobody?"

"I told you."

Antony nodded. "Just a tough kid," he said. "In a hurry. Traveling light."

Ricci shrugged.

"And going the wrong way," Antony finished.

The ship had already docked and the covered gangways were in place. They left the car with the chauffeur, and walked through the crowd, through the clusters of kids, ragged and hopeful, through the knots of hotel hustlers, the eager family groups, toward the railing of the customs shed.

There was a smell to the waterfront, a blend of cargoes and oil and garbage and salt water, of people and automobile exhausts, of luggage and trucks and old rotting wood, of garlic and stale cooking oil and tenements not far off and pavement heated by the sun. And, dominating it all, the towering ship.

"Here," Antony said. He was holding out a postcard-sized picture. "Take a good look at it, then we'll both try to find her."

Ricci took it slowly, expressionlessly. He looked at the face in the picture, at the eyes which seemed to smile, at the bright hair, short cut, and the lift to the young mouth. He looked at Antony again as he handed the picture back.

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"My daughter," Antony said. "Taken last year. That's how she'll look, I think." One picture a year—how many did he have now? One picture a year, and that was all. "The last time I saw her, close-up, she was wrapped in a blanket and screaming because I didn't know how to put her diaper on. That what you were wondering?" He was talking too much. Not that it mattered, really; but it was the principle that bothered him. He was talking out of mere nervousness, which was stupid. He, Joe Antony, talking just to be doing something, like an adolescent kid. "All right," he said harshly. "Keep your eyes open."

"Sure," Ricci said. He turned to watch the passengers coming into the customs shed, thinking that he had never heard Joe Antony had a family, a daughter, wondering how many people did know, wondering if Lucca knew, because if he did—

Antony said, "There she is." His voice was no voice at all, merely a whisper; and he stood there against the low fence, his hat already in his hand, and his eyes fixed on the girl, who was the picture come to life, as a man fixes his eyes on the sky and searches it for his salvation. He was unaware of Ricci. He was unaware of anything but the girl.

She came through the gate, tall and young, and somehow determined, unsmiling, following the porter with her bags. Her eyes were gray, Ricci saw, and clear, and her eyebrows were heavy, and maybe her mouth was a little too wide, but it all went together; and there was a depth to the eyes and to the face that the picture had not shown.

She saw them waiting. She looked at Ricci first, and then reluctantly, it seemed, at Antony, who held his hat in both hands now, seeming not to know what to do with it, whether to put it on or drop it or merely hold it tight, rumpling its brim. He was smiling, or trying to smile, and his voice, merely a whisper still, said, "Hullo," only that, and he made no move.

A light coat was over the girl's arm, and she clung to this and to her purse as Antony clung to his hat. Her voice was low-pitched, but not shaky, Ricci noticed. "Hello."

Ricci saw no more, wanted, strangely enough, to see no more.

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He turned away, and looked at the porter who was setting the girl's bags down. In Italian he said, "Bring them."

"There is a charge, *signor,* and I am engaged—"

"Bring them." He watched the porter hesitate, shrug; and he turned and led the way to the car. It was there, as the chauffeur stowed the luggage in the trunk, that it happened.

He had known all along that sometime, somewhere, it would; and he had tried to prepare himself for it, thinking how it would be, and how he would react, forcing himself to memorize this, rehearse it silently. But still it took him by surprise, from behind. "Hey! Johnny! What are you doing here?" A man's voice, an American voice, carrying loud and clear.

He could almost, but not quite, control the impulse to turn; and so he let himself continue the movement, his face expressionless, his eyes looking deliberately past the man of the voice to Antony and the girl. "This is all the luggage?" he said, and his voice was quiet, steady.

The girl nodded. Antony said nothing. And the American voice said, "Hey. What *is* this?"

Ricci looked around slowly. There was blankness in his face, in his manner. "Something you want?"

The man was young and tall and wide through the shoulders. He wore a tweed suit and no hat, and he was frowning, staring at Ricci now. "What gives?" He began to smile, broad and friendly. "Remember me? Pete Jenner?"

"Sorry," Ricci said. He shook his head. "You've got the wrong fellow." Out of the corner of his eye he saw Antony, no longer confused by the girl's presence, watching steadily. Ricci smiled at the tall man. "Forget it. No harm done."

Jenner's smile disappeared now, and in its place embarrassment began, the sense of ridiculousness in the presence of strangers and the strangeness of the land. "Look. I don't know what your pitch is, but don't tell me I don't know who you are. Johnny Bellanca, a guy I lived with for two years—" He stopped there, anger plain now, and stubbornness.

It could have been anybody who had known him, Ricci thought; it had to be this one. He said, no longer smiling, "I told you you

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had the wrong fellow. Maybe you didn't hear me." And he turned his back, watched first the girl and then Antony get into the car. He closed the door. The prickling had begun again, up and down his spine. He started for the front door of the car.

Jenner's voice stopped him. "Maybe—maybe I made a mistake." His voice was doubtful.

"Forget it," Ricci said. "No harm done." He got in beside the chauffeur. There had been ample harm done. The last he saw, without appearing to look, Jenner was still standing there, large and uncertain, staring after the car. Ricci let his breath out soundlessly. And now the telephone call was urgent, mandatory, perhaps even already too late.

In the back seat the girl sat silent. Antony had his hat on again. He said, "A good trip?"

"Yes."

"Good weather?"

"Yes."

"I—hoped it would be."

There was silence.

"Tina," Antony said. "Do they still call you that?"

"Yes."

"George and Lucy—" Antony began.

"They're fine."

"I haven't seen them in a long time."

"They told me." Ricci, listening, wished that he could turn to watch the girl's face, because what was in the voice was deep and bitter, almost contemptuous, resentful.

"Once a year," Antony said, "a letter from George, and a picture—"

"That was the agreement, wasn't it? They told me that, too."

Antony's voice was normal, uninflected. "That was the agreement. We kept it, both of us." And then, "I hope you like it here."

The girl said nothing.

Antony said, "That's Ricci up there. He's from America, too."

Ricci could turn now. He looked at the girl and nodded. Her eyes seemed to look through him. Antony watched, without any expression at all.

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This house, Lucca's, was of glass and stone, all planes and sharp angles, almost a duplicate of the house he had built in Florida. Behind the house, an extension of the broad terrace, the free-form swimming pool, tiled and surrounded by lawn, repeated, in miniature, the sparkle of the bay below. Lucca had seen the house and the pool once from the air, had flown over it for just that purpose. It had looked, he thought, like a jewel, a large, ostentatious jewel, and he had been content.

He still wore the linen trousers and sandals and short-sleeved shirt he had worn at breakfast. He was slender-seeming and deeply tanned, young-looking, with soft brown eyes and a tiny scar on his left cheek that dimpled when he smiled. Genial Lucca.

To Belle, who wore a Bikini now in place of the shorts and halter, and who lay, supine, on a beach mattress by the edge of the pool, he said, "I don't care where you go. Just beat it when Pierre comes. Go read a book. Go listen to the radio. I don't care."

Belle said nothing. She lay quiet, her eyes closed.

"You hear me?"

"It was in English," Belle said. "And English I understand."

"Don't get smart." All day, beginning with the telephone call at breakfast, he had felt pressure building inside himself. It was now almost beyond control. "Thinking about Ricci?" he said, looking down at the girl.

She opened her eyes then, and shaded them with her hand to look up at him. "Meaning what?"

"Nice kid, isn't he?" Lucca said. "About your age, maybe a little older but not much. Good for laughs. With you, that is—"

"You're dreaming," Belle said. She lay back, her eyes closed once more. "He talks English, is all."

"And he swims real good," Lucca said, "and he laughs at your jokes like they were funny, and he'll dance with you if you twist his arm—not very hard—"

"That one time," Belle said. "That was all." She rolled onto her side to face him, shading her eyes again. Her body, almost completely exposed, was slim, taut. "What's eating you?"

"That's a nice outfit you got on," Lucca said. "Why wear it today?"

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"I always—" She stopped there.

"Sure," Lucca said. "Every day. That one, or one like it. Only thing is, Ricci isn't here to see it today."

"You're dreaming," Belle said again.

"Why wear anything?" Lucca said. "Why not prance around here in a pair of shoes and some earrings like you used to at stags?"

"I never worked stags," Belle said, "and you know it."

"We could fix up a blue spot," Lucca said. "You could—"

"You used to be a nice guy," Belle said. "Now, over here, you're—" She stopped herself.

"Go on," Lucca said. "Over here, what?" His voice was suddenly soft, almost gentle. "Say it. You mean since I couldn't beat what they hung on me, and they threw me out of America, you don't like it any more? No shows to see, no old pals to wave a new mink at, only dirty Italians who can't talk English? That what you mean?"

She rolled onto her back again and sat up, all in one long, smooth movement. "That isn't so. And you know it. I'm your wife."

"Wife," Lucca said. Then . . . "When I picked you up, what were you? A dancer?" He shook his head. He was smiling, and the dimple showed, but the soft brown eyes showed no humor. He was deliberately working himself up to anger, and he knew it, but he had no intention of stopping. "Unh–uh. Dancing was just a front, an excuse to take off your clothes and get a little business. You say no; I say yes. Now you're at it again—"

"Maybe," she said, and her voice surprised her by its steadiness, "maybe you're trying to say something. Maybe you're trying to say you're tired. All right. So am I. Tired of you, tired of this imitation Florida, tired of lots of things, but mostly just tired of you."

"You don't talk that way," Lucca said. His voice had become quite soft. "Nobody talks to me that way. I own you—"

"You don't own me," Belle said, and some of the steadiness was gone. There was a tightness, almost panic in her throat. "Nobody owns anybody else. I go where I want, do what I want. I've got a passport. I'm an American, and you can't—"

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It did not look like a hard blow. He delivered it open-handed, leaning down almost idly from his chair. His knuckles caught her cheek, and knocked her sideways and down to the mattress. She rolled over, huddling herself like a hurt animal. She lay still.

"I own you," Lucca said. "You don't go anywhere, you don't do anything unless I tell you." The smile came and went in spasms, uncontrolled, uncontrollable. "Now get up."

He watched her uncoil herself slowly. Slowly she sat up, slowly rose to her feet. Her breathing was deep, uneven, frightened. Her cheek was already turning red beneath its tan. "Look at me," Lucca said in the soft voice. He waited until she turned her head. "Okay. Remember it." Then, almost a whisper, "That crack about a passport, about being American—" He paused. "Make that again, even think it again, and you'll wish you'd never been born. Now beat it."

He sat where he was, facing the pool again, forcing down the anger that was almost fury. Belle and Ricci—he wasn't sure about them, had really not even thought about them before, but the accusation had been a starting place, an excuse to blow off steam. Belle and Ricci—it made no difference whether what he thought about them was true or not. It could be true, he told himself. And if it was, it was all of a piece with the rest of the world which had gone sour, suddenly sour, without reason. He had been on top, he was accustomed to being on top; he had known all of his life that the top was where he belonged and where he was going to be. Now, inexplicably, he was here, and he couldn't go back . . . and he hated this country, all of it—Florida house, jewel-like swimming pool, sun, lemon trees, and all.

America wasn't much in many ways—already he thought of it as America, as the Europeans did, no longer as the States—but it was what he was used to, what he had always taken for granted, and it was barred to him now, *barred* to him, and there was the basis for his rage. Barred to him, Angelo Lucca, a name that meant something, but not barred to Belle, or to Ricci, or to a hundred and sixty million other punks—only to him.

And there was more. In America things worked; you took it for granted that they would work, that when you turned a faucet

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water would run, that when you gave an order it would be carried out. Over here it was different, as the telephone call had proved. Over here you had people like Pierre working for you, Pierre for whom he waited now. By the time Pierre arrived, he had himself under control, only a sort of quiet savagery remaining in his mind.

Pierre was tall and graceful. He wore his hair long over the ears, and he spoke a very precise English with an English accent. He was uneasy. "It was bad luck," he said. "I am sorry." He had driven most of the night and all of the day, two-thirds the length of Italy down from the small town near Genoa, with fear riding on his shoulders. All during the drive he had concentrated on thinking of something more than apology, mere confession of failure; and he had achieved miracles of specious defense, all of which now, in front of Lucca, collapsed in his mind like bright bubbles.

"You're sorry," Lucca said. His voice was toneless. "You were supposed to meet a fishing boat at a beach early last night to pick up a package. You told me on the phone that the fishing boat came in where it was supposed to and when it was supposed to. Where were you?"

"We," Pierre said, "that is to say, the motor car was—detained." He told himself to smile, but his lips refused.

"So the boat waited," Lucca said, "just sat there on the beach until a cop on a bicycle came along. One cop. On a bicycle. And there was shooting, and I told you there wasn't to be any shooting. And the package was lost, tossed in the water because they were afraid to be picked up with it." His voice was still level.

"The policeman," Pierre said, "had been told where to go, and when."

"Had he?" Lucca said. He didn't believe it. Watching Pierre squirm, feeling the pressure of the rage in his own mind, he refused to believe it, as he would have refused to believe any excuse.

"It was—certain," Pierre said.

"What happened to the car?" Lucca said. "What held it up?"

"It needed petrol," Pierre said. "Gasoline, that is. And the pump in the village was locked. It was necessary to find the owner of the pump, who was not at home. He had gone down to the café

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for a glass of wine. That is where we found him." He paused. "But you must comprehend that there are several cafés, and—" He stopped, seeing the change in Lucca's face. "It was—unavoidable."

"And you're so sorry," Lucca said. He made himself lean back in his chair. He could feel his face smiling in spasms. He ignored it. He pointed with his thumb over his shoulder. "See this house?"

Some of the tenseness went out of Pierre. It was going to be all right, he told himself. "I have seen it. I have admired it. It is —lovely. The taste which it displays—"

"I had it built," Lucca said, "from my own plans. Four bedrooms and four baths and a modern kitchen. All the fixtures come from America. The best. Only thing is, they don't work most of the time. And there isn't a plumber here who can make them work." He was silent.

"A pity," Pierre said.

"That's what I thought you'd say. Like the boat and the cop on the bicycle and the gas pump that was locked and the character drinking wine in a café. Pity. Nothing to be done. One of those things. They happen."

"I—" Pierre said, "I am not sure that I understand."

"That's right," Lucca said. "And you can say it again. You can keep on saying it." His voice was rising, and he controlled it with effort. He said, almost wearily, "Okay. You're sorry. Now beat it." He closed his eyes.

"But—" Pierre began, and there he stopped, watching Lucca's face, feeling his own fear return, almost a panic in his mind. "I cannot just . . . beat it. This you must comprehend. I have no place to go. There was shooting. A man is dead. I am known—"

Lucca opened his eyes. He merely watched, and said nothing.

"But I cannot just . . . beat it. I have no money—" He might as well have been talking to himself; the soft brown eyes that watched him were not even human, they showed nothing.

"Too bad," Lucca said. And then, "I don't even know you." He waited for and saw the defeat appear in Pierre's face. He closed his eyes again. There was the sound of a chair scraping, of foot-

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steps, slow, reluctant, going away. He sat where he was, in the sun, alone.

Gino was in the shade of the kitchen wall. He was smoking one of his thin, knotty cigars. He had a glass of wine on the bench beside him. He had seen the car return, Ricci in front with the chauffeur, Antony and a girl in the back seat. He felt no curiosity. Men like Lucca and Antony, yes, and Ricci, did things for reasons that were complicated and frequently incomprehensible. He was accustomed to this. Had the girl in the car resembled Belle, borne in any of the recognizable patterns the stamp of Belle, he would have understood her presence. But to his eyes the girl had not; therefore, he did not understand, nor did it bother him. Here in the shade it was pleasant. He sat quietly, and smoked and sipped his wine. It was there that Ricci found him.

"I'm going to walk down to the village," Ricci said.

"Good," Gino said. He finished his wine. He stood up. "I will go with you."

"No, big one. Stay here. I'm going to telephone. To Lucca."

Gino smiled. It was pleasant to point out what Ricci did not know. "There is a telephone here. I saw it. It is in the room with the books where we first saw—"

"What I'm going to say," Ricci said, "I don't want Antony to hear." Which was the truth, if not all of it.

Gino sat down again, resigned. Always there were reasons within reasons within reasons, like the layers of an onion. "I will wait."

Ricci walked down the curving hill road, between the tall poplars, feeling the warmth and the sun and seeing the sparkle of the water but paying attention to none of those. Seeing Jenner had been a bad break. Antony had not been fooled—he told himself that he had to assume this, even though he could not be sure. And there was the further complication of the girl. And still prodding at his mind, the sense of uneasiness, the feeling that somewhere, somehow, he had made a mistake.

He called Lucca first, and he had to wait while Lucca was summoned to the phone. "He says he's clean," Ricci said, "through, retired."

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Lucca's voice held nothing. "Okay. You're staying?"

"Until you're satisfied, he says. He—didn't argue much." He waited, but there was no comment. "He told me to tell you he wouldn't forget."

"So he doesn't forget," Lucca said. "The girl was on the boat? His daughter?"

So he had known, Ricci thought, and he wondered if it was important. "We just met her."

"She's staying where?"

"Here. At the house."

"Okay," Lucca said. "Stick around. I'll call you."

There was something in Lucca's voice, Ricci thought. He tried to isolate it, and failed. "Anything wrong?"

"What would be wrong?" And then, "Belle says she misses you."

"Say hello," Ricci said.

"I'll do that. I'll tell her you miss her, too."

Ricci said nothing.

"That right?" Lucca said. "Kind of lonesome without her parading around, waving it at you?"

"Whatever you say," Ricci said. This he did not like.

"Just stick around there until I call," Lucca said. "Try not to get too lonesome." The phone went dead.

Ricci hung up. He took time to light a cigarette before he made the second call, and as he worked with the tiny wax match he looked around and saw no one. Holding the receiver tight to his ear he heard the phone at the other end only once before a voice said, "Randall."

"Bellanca," Ricci said. He talked fast, low. "A man named Jenner, Peter Jenner, American, just off the ship, at a hotel probably. He recognized me, spoke to me."

"In front of Lucca?"

"Joe Antony. I'm staying at his house now. Lucca sent me. With Gino. I don't know for how long."

There was silence on the phone. Then, "Trouble up north last night. Lucca lost a shipment. We lost a man. That fit?"

Too many questions, too few answers. "I don't know."

Randall said, "A man named Pierre Leclerc. You know him?"

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"Yes. Tall. Looks like an Englishman. Smooth."

"That's the one. We want him, and we've lost him. Keep an eye out." Then . . . "Jenner. Damn. We'll find him, talk to him. You be careful, hear? Antony's a smart one."

"Cautious," Ricci said, "like a little mouse." He paused. "Antony has a daughter. Lucca knew it. She's here, off the ship. Called Tina."

"No daughter," Randall said, his voice businesslike once more.

"Raised by somebody else—George and Lucy. A letter and a picture once a year to Antony. That's all I know."

There was another pause. "Could be. We'll check it."

He looked around, caught by movement, by sound. Gino stood there, almost at his elbow, grinning around the thin cigar. Ricci said into the phone in Italian, "Gino is here. He says to tell you that the wine is good and the maid is plump, like a pullet."

"I catch," Randall said. "Be careful. They play rough." And that was all.

Ricci hung up. He had the outward calm in place. "I thought you were staying at the house, big one. That's why we're here, to keep on eye on Antony."

"He wants you, Ricci. He sent me to find you."

"Oh," Ricci said. Now it would come, he thought; because of the bad break of seeing Jenner, now it would come. So let it. There was still no way to go but ahead.

Gino crooned to himself again, *Il Trovatore* this time, as they walked together back up the curving road in the sun.

Alone in the library, sitting at the big desk, Antony told himself that he should have seen and understood from the beginning, from the first moment of Gino's and Ricci's arrival. But he had not. The fine edge of wariness had been dulled by these last few months. Thinking, fooling himself into thinking that he was all through, finished, he had relaxed. And this was the result. The girl was here now; he had brought her here. And Ricci had seen her. And by now Lucca would know—although he was sure, now that he was thinking clearly again, that Lucca had known all along that

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the girl was coming, that it was because of this knowledge that Lucca had sent Gino and Ricci and chosen this day to send them.

He blamed himself. He knew Lucca, every twist and turn of him, all of his ruthlessness, even viciousness. Twice he had reached for the telephone to call Lucca, to ask point-blank what it was that he wanted, and why; and twice he had stopped himself, afraid to trust his own temper, afraid that he might antagonize, and thereby compound the threat. All he could do now was sit tight.

He sat quietly, trying to think, to weigh the factors of Lucca, Ricci, the girl, himself. Gino he ignored. He, Antony, knew too little, there was the trouble; he knew nothing beyond the fact of his own culpability. He would have to play it by ear, make it up as he went along. And he had only one level, and it flimsy, perhaps even non-existent, with which to pry loose facts. But he could try, because there was no other way. He was still sitting there at the desk, a large book open in front of him, his reading glasses in place, forcing himself to be quiet, even patient, when Ricci came in.

"Close the door," Antony said. He took off the glasses, closed the book carefully. "Sit down." Then, "We've got a telephone here."

Ricci nodded.

"Remember it," Antony said. "You haven't got anything to say to Lucca you can't say in front of me." He knew how to deal with this kind, the young, hard ones. In a way, it was like dealing with a strange dog; the trick was never to show fear or weakness, only a sort of contempt.

"I'll keep it in mind," Ricci said.

"Or was it Lucca you called?" He watched for some sign in Ricci's face. There was none.

"Who else?" Ricci allowed himself to smile. "I told you I didn't have a girl." He thought briefly of Lucca and of Lucca's voice when he had spoken of Belle; and he swore silently in his mind. He had leaned over backwards to stay away from her, given her no slightest encouragement; there had been nothing, nothing at all between them to give Lucca any ideas. Belle was friendly, and she liked to show herself off, be admired, but it was no more than that.

"I called Lucca myself," Antony said. The lie came easily,

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naturally. "He tells me you're a smart boy." He paused. "Maybe a little too smart sometimes."

Ricci grinned. "I beat him at gin."

"He didn't say it," Antony said. "I'm saying it." He took his time, knowing the value of surprise. He picked up the book, looked at its title, set it down again. "History of this part of the country. I was born here, and I don't know anything about it. You read Italian?"

"Some," Ricci said.

Antony leaned back in his chair. "Where are the Bellancas from?" This was the lever.

"I wouldn't know," Ricci said. He had been waiting for it, and he was sure that nothing showed in his face, in his eyes, in his voice. "Who are they?"

"Sometimes," Antony said, "you think you recognize somebody. I've done it. Everybody does it." He kept his voice uninterested, conversational. "When people look alike, they move alike, walk alike, sometimes even have the same gestures. Ever noticed that? It fools you."

"I've noticed," Ricci said.

"You walk up to a man in a bar," Antony said. "You're sure you know him. Then he turns around and you see his face up close, see his eyes and the way his mouth moves when he talks, hear his voice—and you see you've made a mistake."

"I've done it," Ricci said.

"Only," Antony said, "the fellow at the ship, Jenner, didn't think he'd made a mistake. Even after you told him, he didn't think so." He knew, even before the answer came, that he was accomplishing nothing, that he would have to try to find another way.

Ricci shrugged. "Never saw him before." And he was silent again.

Antony sat up. He folded his hands on the desktop. He looked at them for a few moments. "Maybe." Then, looking at Ricci's face once more, "You ever on the junk?"

"No." The pattern, Ricci thought, was beginning to form, the question and answer routine, jumping from subject to subject with-

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out apparent purpose, but the purpose was there, of this he was sure, and he watched and waited, silent.

"Lot of it around," Antony said. "Comes in from Turkey, Greece, I've heard. They refine it into heroin, send it on to the States, through Canada, Mexico—I've heard."

"That right?" Ricci said. "I wouldn't know."

And this way, too, was futile. "All right," Antony said. "You're a tough kid." There was one more way. "If you're just a tough kid, only that, I might as well be talking to myself. If you're not—" He stopped there and watched Ricci steadily.

Ricci shrugged.

Antony said, "You know about Lucca? You know about me?"

"Not much."

"Just names to you," Antony said. "A couple of names you read about sometimes in the papers, hear about here and there." He nodded. "Nobody was interested in putting my name in the paper once. Or Lucca's. We weren't worth it. We were kids together, lived in the same block. His old man had a pushcart, later on a little grocery store. Mine mended shoes." And then, "What did yours do?"

"He was a janitor," Ricci said. "When he worked. So?"

Antony nodded again, mere acknowledgment that he had heard, no comment. "Lucca was a tough kid. I wasn't." He paused. "Don't get me wrong. Probably I would have been, if I could. It was the thing to do. But all I had was my head, no muscles. I ended up as a lawyer, while Lucca was riding liquor trucks. I got married, too. We had a kid. We called her Tina."

Watching, listening, alert, Ricci tried to see the direction Antony's mind was taking, but there were no signs, no indications that gave even a hint. Antony's voice was neither friendly nor unfriendly; it was detached, as if the man spoke not of himself but of someone he once had known—a kid who had grown up in a tough neighborhood, and who had gone one way while his friends, his pals, Lucca, went another; a young man hanging out his shingle as a lawyer, taking whatever cases he could get, starting out, maybe dreaming as all young men dream of the things he would have one day for himself, and for his wife and kid. "So?"

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"Lucca got in trouble," Antony said, and his voice was still uninflected, still detached. "I defended him. I got him off." He was silent, remembering.

Ricci said nothing.

"You know about the old folks?" Antony said. "The ones who come over from the old country? From here? You're Italian, too."

"What about them?" Ricci said.

"They stick together. To them America's a new country, and they don't understand it, and you're afraid of what you don't understand—so they stick with their own. You've seen that?" Then, not waiting for an answer, "They stuck with their own—Lucca. They testified for him, for us—Lucca's old man, my old man, all of them. And so I got him off—acquitted."

"So?"

"Nobody ever proved perjury," Antony said. "But it was pretty plain, even to me after a while. And the bar association thought so, too. And I couldn't convince them I hadn't arranged it. They disbarred me."

He was wasting his time, Antony told himself, watching the young face that showed nothing, that was schooled to show nothing, like his own; watching the eyes that looked without expression; watching the hands that made no slightest move. He could find no indication of anything, belief, disbelief, not even, in the twisted concept so familiar to him, admiration. Still he went on, thinking of the girl upstairs and of his own stupidity, because there was no other way but to humble himself.

"Lucca offered me a job. Thinking for him, he called it. I couldn't practice law, not legally, so I took it." Not right away, not for long months, empty hopeless months, not until he had hit bottom. The succession of piddling jobs, dishwashing, clerking, hashing, whatever he could find, and the money, their savings, dribbling away dollar by dollar to fill the gap between what he could earn and what they had to have. But that had not been bottom. He had reached bottom all at once, unsuspectingly, shatteringly. Tina, *his* Tina—not the small carbon copy still merely a bundle and a voice and clutching tiny hands—but *his* Tina, his wife, gone, suddenly gone, inexplicably, incomprehensibly gone, because of an operation that

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there hadn't been money for, and he hadn't even known, she hadn't even told him until it was too late. That was when he had gone to Lucca.

"I had the kid," he said. "I gave her to a lawyer and his wife, friends—we had been friends. We made an agreement. We kept it, both of us. They raised the kid. I didn't see her, or them. I didn't try." Except once, for a week or so, afternoons, sitting in his car across the street from the school, watching the kids come out on their way home, seeing Tina that way, never speaking to her, just watching from across the street—until the afternoon when the teacher came out and stood there and looked at him, and he knew what was in the teacher's mind, young girls and a man watching them day after day, and he had driven away and never gone back.

He leaned back in his chair. "I did all right. I did fine." He paused. "Now I'm over here, and I can't go back." He waited for a reaction.

"Why tell me?" Ricci said.

He allowed none of the disappointment to show. He merely nodded. "I told you I might be wasting my time." He reached for his glasses, put them on, finding it difficult to keep his fingers from trembling with the futility he felt. He said, "I didn't tell Lucca about Jenner, and about somebody named Bellanca."

Ricci shrugged. "I told you he had the wrong guy."

"Sure," Antony said. "But remember it, anyway." He made a small gesture of dismissal, and he watched Ricci stand. "Remember something else," Antony said, and he let the futile anger show now. "I didn't ask Tina to come over here, after all this time, to have anything happen to her."

"Like what?"

"Anything. Just remember it."

Ricci closed the door as he went out. Gino would be behind the kitchen again, sitting in the shade, content. And in the normal course of things he would now go to Gino and sit with him, talk, tell him what had happened, even though Gino would not understand all of it, but would, by his mere attentive presence, provide a sort of backboard against which thoughts would bounce and come back altered. But he didn't want to see Gino. He was almost

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afraid to see Gino, in whom, as if in substitution for intelligence, there had been provided a kind of perception, a sensitivity to mood and feeling like that of a dog, that sometimes, startlingly, penetrated too close to the truth. It was better, safer, to think by himself.

Antony was smart. He had not been fooled about Jenner; he had said as much. But Antony had not told Lucca. Or, had he? There was no way of knowing. And why the pitch, the personal history? What had been the purpose of that?

Ricci was unimpressed by what he had heard. A man had his own path, and he followed it. The concept that man was the victim of circumstance or of higher force, he had never accepted. A man was free to choose, and some chose one path and some another, and many cried out that they had been duped but it was not true. The mistakes a man made were of his own making, just as his achievements were. And he paid for the one and enjoyed the fruits of the other, and outside influences had nothing to do with it. He found it difficult to believe that a man as intelligent as Antony would think otherwise. Why, then, the personal history? And why had Antony not told Lucca about Jenner? Or had he?

He had gone out of the front door, turned idly across the lawn toward the rose gardens. It was there that the girl found him.

She had changed her clothes. She now wore a skirt and a sleeveless blouse and sandals, her hair bright in the sun. Looking at her, he thought of the difference between this one and Belle—Belle in shorts and a halter, Belle in her damned Bikinis, knowing her effect on a man, any man; flaunting herself. Belle—and now Lucca hinting, making remarks that showed his annoyance. He swore again silently, while his face smiled politely at the girl.

"You're American, he said," the girl told him.

"That's right."

"You look American." She was still unsmiling; her gray eyes watched him thoughtfully.

"Maybe it's just that I like my hair short. Keeps it out of my eyes." It had been a long time since he had talked to a girl, any girl, like this, idly, relaxed. There was never relaxation with Belle.

"It's more than that," she said. Then, "Why are you here?"

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"In Italy?" His smile spread. "Nice place. My family came from here."

"The Bellancas?"

His smile disappeared. "That guy," he said. "I must have a twin somewhere."

"I met Pete Jenner on the ship."

"The one who thought he knew me?"

"Yes." Her hand went out, lifted a rose. She stared at it quietly. "He told me that a friend of his, a roommate from college, had been here after the war and liked it, and that was why he had come on vacation." She looked up. "The roommate's name was Bellanca, Johnny Bellanca."

"I feel haunted," Ricci said. "Pretty soon I'll be wondering who I am. My name's Morelli, Ricciardi Morelli."

"And you work for—him."

"Your father?" Ricci said.

She was silent.

"In a way," Ricci said.

She would not let it go. She was young, and it was important. "And did you work for—him, in New York? Before he was deported?"

"No."

"Then you don't—know him very well?"

"No."

"I didn't even know I had a father," she said. "I thought he was dead; that's what they told me. That was the—bargain." She smiled faintly. "I'm trying to get used to the idea that I was just given away, like an extra kitten."

He had a sudden idea, and then he rejected it. Antony would not have gone through his personal history in order that he, Ricci, could tell the girl the facts—if they were facts. Antony was perfectly capable of doing his own talking.

He said, "Joe wrote you? Asked you over?"

"Yes."

"And so you came."

"I came." Her head was up. She watched him steadily, with the

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same directness that Antony himself had. "Wouldn't you have come?"

"I suppose I would."

"To see for yourself? Somebody you didn't even know existed, and then you find out—wouldn't you?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I guess I would." The directness in her was deeper than mere appearance; it was a quality of her mind, and this was something he had not encountered in some little time.

The girl said, "Is he doing the same things over here? The things they deported him for? In his letter he said that he was through, retired, that in a way he was glad for the trial and the deportation because they gave him a chance to stop. In New York, he said, he would never have been able to stop."

"Maybe that's right."

"Then what do you do for him? You, and the other one, the big one sitting out by the kitchen?"

"We run errands," Ricci said.

"Should I believe that?"

"I guess you'd better ask him," Ricci said. "He's your father." The accident of seeing Jenner had been bad; the girl's presence here compounded it. And always in the back of his mind was the feeling that he had somehow, somewhere, made a mistake; he could not shake the feeling off. Granted that Lucca had known about the girl's coming, what made it important, important enough to send him, Ricci, here, instead of to Genoa where he was supposed to have gone? And there was Belle, and Lucca's pointed remarks about Belle and himself.

First, and most important, of course, was Jenner. Randall would have to get to Jenner fast and shut him up, because he had been sore, good and sore, and in that mood he could do anything—go around to the Embassy maybe and start asking questions, talking. Sooner or later word would get back to Lucca. Unless Lucca knew already because Antony had told him, and in that case the fat was already in the fire. A letter or a cable to Tiny Presser in New York, starting inquiry about a man named Bellanca, Johnny Bellanca . . . he told himself to simmer down. *I'm getting jumpy*, he thought; *a year of it is too much. I should have been able to wrap it up long*

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ago. But he hadn't, and maybe he had fouled it up instead, even before Jenner appeared; maybe that was why he had been sent here, instead of to Genoa, after that phone call this morning. *Easy*, he told himself; *you can't be sure of anything yet*. But he didn't have to like it; he retained that privilege. He walked around to the kitchen.

Gino's cigar was almost finished; the glass of wine was low. "She is pretty, that one," Gino said. "She is thin, scrawny like all American women, but her face is pretty." He leered at Ricci, the large yellow teeth showing.

It was a pleasure to swear in Italian, ugly gutter words he had learned as a boy. And it was a relief. And Gino didn't mind; Gino only laughed.

Tina walked into the house. She stood in the entrance hall, looking around at the marble floor, at the niches with their empty-eyed busts. She should, she supposed, feel something, a warmth of kinship, of identification, a consciousness of having roots here in these surroundings. She felt nothing but strangeness, unfamiliarity, the same kind of tourist-uneasiness that Pete Jenner had shown standing by the car, afraid that he had made a mistake but convinced that he had not.

She thought of Jenner, who had been pleasant, amusing, attentive aboard ship—with whom she had swum and danced and talked and laughed. Aboard a ship life was compressed, and you gave little thought to the ending of the voyage. It was only during the last few hours, while you watched your destination approach, that you recognized that the trip had been mere interlude, a means of getting from one place to another; and when the gangplank went down, a kind of reality took over again. *I'm here*, she thought; *and I should be excited in a foreign country, as the travel folders say, but I'm not. I'm confused, and alone*. The busts in the niches watched her with their empty eyes. And then, gradually, she became aware that someone else was watching her, too, and she turned to look at the old woman in black, all in black, with tight-drawn white hair and bitter eyes. Tina's smile was automatic, friendly.

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"You are the daughter," the woman said in slow, distinct Italian. "Do you speak the language?"

"A little. I studied it at school."

"One learns his own language in the home."

Tina said nothing.

"But you are American," the woman said.

"Yes."

"Why did you not stay in America?" She paused. "You came because Giovanni wrote to you. Now that he is here, and cannot return, he is like the fox who lost his tail, he wants others to do the same, leave America and come here."

"Giovanni," the girl said, slowly, wonderingly.

"That is his name."

Such a small thing, the girl thought, to come with such impact; Joe was the shortened translation for Giuseppe, not Giovanni, which in English was John. *I didn't even know his real name,* she thought; *but I'm here, I came—*

From the library doorway, Antony said, "This is your Great-Aunt Luisa; my father's, your grandfather's, sister." He repeated it in Italian.

The girl nodded. The woman merely bent her head.

"She's giving you a bad time?" Antony said, in English again.

"No. We were just—talking."

"She doesn't like Americans." He looked at the old woman, and he changed back to Italian, too rapid for the girl to follow. "This is my house. This is my daughter. You will be at least decent—"

"Decent," the old woman said. She spoke slowly, that the girl might follow. "You speak of decency, Giovanni?" She turned then, and showed them her thin straight back as she walked away.

Antony's face was expressionless. "You've changed your dress," he said to the girl.

"Yes."

"Everything all right? Your room, I mean? Got all you need?"

"Yes. Thank you."

"I don't know much about—that kind of thing. It's been a long time. Little things, I mean. What women like to have. You'll tell me if there's—anything."

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It was more than stiffness between them, more than unfamiliarity; the girl could feel his embarrassment, share it. "Thank you."

"Joe," Antony said. "I guess you'd better call me that."

"Not Giovanni?" She saw the sudden tightness come into his face and then quickly disappear.

"Just Joe." His voice was as before, even. He gestured toward the library behind him. "This is my room." Then, still quietly in the almost detached voice, "You'll have questions." He nodded faintly. "I'll try to answer them. Now, if you want." He smiled suddenly, a mere movement of the lips, mocking himself. "I'm not looking forward to it, if that's what you're thinking."

George, her foster father—always she had called him that, never deceived as to their relationship—had told her this about Antony: "In his own way, he's honest, or was. I don't think he'll have changed; I don't think people ever really do change once the mold is set. You're like him in some respects. Maybe it's genes, after all, and not environment. I don't think he's ever really fooled himself. He knew where he was going. Maybe he didn't know how far, but he knew the direction. And maybe he had justification, if there ever is justification for . . . preying on other people. I'm not helping much, am I? I don't think I can help. You and Joe will have to settle it between you. He and I made a bargain. We both kept it. You'll have to take it from there."

Sitting now in the library facing Antony behind the desk, she thought of this. Antony watched her, waiting. She said, "I don't know what to ask. There's too much. I—had a mother once, I suppose." And out of a sense of embarrassment and confusion, "I think most people do have mothers."

"Your mother died," Antony said steadily. "It was, at least partly, my fault—" The phone rang, and he looked at it for a moment before he picked it up and spoke his name.

Lucca's voice said, "Long time, Joe. How's everything?"

The girl was watching him. He tried not to look at her, and he tried to make his voice uninterested. "What do you want?"

"Not very friendly, Joe."

Antony said nothing.

"Somebody with you?" Lucca said. "The kid, maybe? I always

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wondered what happened to her. I figured that sooner or later she'd turn up, but you had me fooled in New York, never a sign of her. Now she's here? She like Italy?"

"What do you want?" Antony repeated.

"Why," Lucca said, "we used to be pals. That was why I sent the boys over, to show you we still are pals. They'll take care of you, keep an eye on you. That Ricci's a smart boy, Joe."

He couldn't keep his eyes from the girl's face, and he could see the change that was in it, the withdrawal, the return of the stiffness that had, for only a few moments, faded away. "I'll call you back," he said.

Lucca chuckled. "No need, Joe. Just come on over. We'll have a little talk here."

"No." He wanted to say more, but the girl's eyes watched him, as other eyes had watched him from a jury box, from a courtroom filled with spectators, and he tried to hide in silence, knowing that he could not hide, ever.

"Oh," Lucca said, "I think you'll come, Joe. I don't want to play rough. I just want to talk to you." The voice changed a trifle, softened. "I hear she's a good-looking kid. Look like her mother?" Then, "You don't want anything to happen to her, Joe. You'll come, and we'll have a little talk. Ricci knows the way. Bring him along. I'll be waiting." The phone clicked dead.

Antony hung up slowly. He took his time, getting himself under control. He said, in the quiet, detached voice, "You asked about your mother. She—" He looked up then, at the sudden movement, the sudden sound.

Tina had got up from her chair. "I don't think I'd believe you," she said. "No matter what you told me. About—her. About anything." She turned quickly. She was gone.

He sat quiet, expressionless for a long time. Then, wearily, he stood up and walked slowly to the door and out into the hall. It was empty, only the busts in their niches were there to see his defeat. He raised his voice, "Maria!" When the maid arrived, "Find the young man again. Tell him I want him."

"Si, signor."

"And tell Luigi I want the car."

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Randall was a short, stocky man with sandy hair and a reddish mustache and intensely blue eyes. His hands were broad and thick and covered with fine reddish hairs; they rested on his thighs, motionless, as he talked. Jenner was on the bed. "Cloak and dagger," Randall said, "maybe it is. I'm not going to tell you all of it. I've told you this much just so you won't go around asking questions, making people wonder about Bellanca."

"A pretty big dose," Jenner said, "for my first couple of hours in Italy. Johnny Bellanca is Johnny Bellanca but he isn't." He was smiling.

"You don't really believe it," Randall said. "You aren't even sure you can believe me—" He took out the small leather folder again, and tossed it on the bed. "—that I'm who that says I am, what it says I am." He nodded. "They speak English at the porter's desk. Have them call the consulate for you. Give your name to the consulate switchboard and ask to talk to the consul general himself. He'll speak to you. Tell him what you've got there—" He nodded to the leather identification folder. "—and tell him what I look like."

"Oh," Jenner said, "I'll take your word for it."

"No," Randall said. "Because then you'll only be partly convinced."

"Oh, hell," Jenner said. "Do you guys always have to do things the hard way?" He watched the blue eyes, the unsmiling face. "All right," he said. "To make you happy." He reached for the telephone. And when the call was done, "Okay. You've proved your point."

Randall took back the leather folder, put it in his pocket. "A man was shot last night. Not here. It doesn't make any difference where. Maybe that will convince you we're not playing a game."

"Killed?" Jenner said. "That's what you mean?"

"Oh, yes. He's dead." He stood up. "You can kill Bellanca just as dead, just by talking around."

For the first time the smile disappeared. "You mean that," Jenner said. It was a statement, no question.

"That's how it is," Randall said. "Remember it." He was at the door. He started to open it. Jenner stopped him.

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"There was a man with Johnny," Jenner said. "Who was he?"

Randall pushed the door shut again. "Why?"

"No special reason." And the smile was back. "I thought I recognized him, too, is all. Seen him somewhere."

"Maybe," Randall said. He hesitated. "You may have seen his picture, anyway. His name is Antony, Joe Antony."

"Oh," Jenner said.

"Deported from the States a month ago," Randall said. "Citizenship revoked. Permanently. For cause."

"So that's who—" Jenner began. He stopped there.

"That's who Bellanca is playing around with," Randall said. "That may give you a rough idea."

"It does," Jenner said. He watched Randall nod, open the door, go out. The door closed. Jenner stayed where he was on the bed. It was funny, he thought, how things worked out. Tina had given him no address, no way of looking her up to continue their shipboard laughs. Now it was easy; it shouldn't be hard to find out where Joe Antony lived. As the serious Mr. Randall had pointed out, the porter downstairs spoke English and seemed eager to be of service. Tina, he thought, would be surprised when he turned up on her doorstep. And he began to smile again—old Johnny, playing cops and robbers; he'd have to needle him about that.

They drove in two cars, Antony in his own, Ricci in the car he had driven over that morning from Lucca's house. Ricci led the way. He had no idea what was up, or why; Antony had said only that they were going to Lucca's house, and that, he decided, merely proved what he had thought all along—that Lucca and Antony were picking up where they had left off in New York. As far as it applied to him personally, beyond this he could not, would not, allow his mind to go.

Instead, he made himself think about other things, achieving for the first time in this long day an inner detachment to match his attitude of outward calm.

Something had gone wrong up at Genoa and Lucca had lost a package, Randall had said, and whether the package had been raw opium coming in from Turkey or from Greece, or whether it had

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been the refined product, heroin, made no difference; one shipment had been stopped, and by that much Lucca had been defeated—he had lost one battle, but the war continued; or, rather, stagnated.

There were, in a sense, two levels to the war. The first, lower level, consisted of small engagements, skirmishes, really, like this one last night, isolated, and relatively unimportant: A passenger liner in New York had been searched, on the basis of information he, Ricci, had furnished, and a hundred thousand dollars' worth of heroin had been found in an upholstered chair in the First Class lounge and two crew members were serving time for that; a suitcase going through Customs at Idlewild had yielded, from an ingenious false compartment, another forty or fifty thousand dollars' worth of heroin, and the passenger who had flown in with the suitcase would not, for some years, be in a position to take another whirl at dope-smuggling; last night's affair, about which he knew only what Randall had told him, was merely one more incident on this level. Operation Nibble was the way Ricci thought of it; and it could continue indefinitely and accomplish very little beyond annoyance to Lucca and periodic small bites out of his profits.

The second level of the war was something else again; it was the grand strategy, and so far it had not got off the ground. It was aimed, not at individual shipments of narcotics, but at the organization itself, Lucca's organization, Lucca. Infiltrate, find out how the organization worked, establish a co-ordinated plan, and execute it. The traffic would stop, only temporarily, of course, because some other Lucca would come along eventually, but that was no concern of Ricci's nor of Randall's.

And so far, after more than a year, only the first step of the strategy, the infiltration, had been accomplished. *I'm inside,* Ricci thought, *and I haven't done any good at all.* He put that thought out of his mind.

Pierre Leclerc, Randall had said, had disappeared. And Randall wanted to find him. That would mean, then, that Pierre had been mixed up in last night's affair, in which, besides a package of narcotics, a man had been lost. So Pierre was loose, and Pierre was valuable; this much was plain. Randall, being Randall, would not waste energy trying to find Pierre merely because a man had been

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killed; had it been only that, he would have left it to the local authorities. Randall's interest in Pierre meant that Pierre might have information and might be persuaded to talk about it, information that would apply to the grand strategy, otherwise Randall would not have passed the word along to Ricci.

So it was all neat and clear, Ricci told himself, and he wondered what he was going to do about it. Driving along the shore road, looking ahead and up to Lucca's hilltop, he thought of Lucca. After last night, he decided, Lucca probably felt like a man being nibbled at by ducks—blunt-billed ducks at that.

He looked in the rear-view mirror as he approached the village at the foot of the hill. Antony's big car followed dutifully. Ricci slowed for the turn, signaled, saw the answering signal of Antony's chauffeur. He made his turn around the local café and he almost, but not quite, put on his brakes.

There was a car parked at the side of the dusty street near the café. Its top was down and there was dried mud and dirt splashed along its sides as if it had been driven a long distance. He knew the car; he had seen it several times at Lucca's house. It was empty, but Pierre would not be far away. And then, looking in through the café's open door he saw Pierre himself, standing at the low bar, knocking down a large drink as if it were water. Pierre did not look happy.

Behind Ricci, Antony's car rolled slowly around the corner. Pierre was here, and there was a telephone in the back room of the café, this Ricci knew, and Randall could have a man, or men, out here in no time at all. He switched off his engine, waved desperately with his hand to warn Antony's chauffeur. He coasted to the side of the dusty street, stopped, stepped on the starter and made it whir and whir in futility against the closed ignition switch.

Antony's car pulled alongside. Antony's head appeared in the rear window, the gambler's face expressionless. He said in English, "Just like that? Died on you?" There was nothing in the voice.

"This gasoline," Ricci said. He tried the starter again. Then, "The house is at the top of the hill. I'll be up as soon as I can—"

"Luigi's a mechanic," Antony said. "He'll fix it. You come with

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me." He changed to Italian, and Luigi opened his door and got out, started for Ricci's car.

So there it was, Ricci thought, and he let no disappointment show in his face. He switched the ignition on and off and on again, pretending to fuss with the switch. He tried the starter once more. The engine caught. Ricci spread his hands. He looked at Antony and shrugged.

"It happens like that sometimes," Antony said, and there was no way of telling what he thought. He settled back in the seat. Luigi got in beneath the wheel again, closed the door.

Ricci pulled out into the street again. In his rear-view mirror he could see Pierre's car, just sitting there, empty; and he thought of Pierre himself, inside, a sitting target. He swore to himself, softly and with feeling, as he drove on, because there was nothing else to do, toward the glass and stone house.

Lucca was in the living room that looked out on the terrace and the pool. He still wore the linen trousers and the short-sleeved shirt, and he was smiling, showing the tiny scar as a deep dimple. The soft brown eyes were bright, genial. "Joe. How's the boy? Like my place?" He waved his hand at the big room. "Like Florida, eh?"

They had not shaken hands, and Antony's face was expressionless as before. He looked slowly around, and then back again to Lucca. "You miss America, is that it? Tried to bring it along with you?"

"You know how it is," Lucca said. He was silent for a moment. Then, "Okay." He looked at Ricci. "Beat it for a while."

"I'll stretch my legs," Ricci said. "Walk around outside a bit." The telephone at the foot of the hill, and Pierre, maybe there still.

Lucca shook his head. "We won't be long. And we might want you." His voice altered subtly. "Get yourself a beer. You know where it is." He paused. "Go find Belle." He paused again. "She hasn't had anybody to talk to all day."

Ricci hesitated, wary. "Maybe she likes it that way. I wouldn't know."

"I told you," Lucca said, and this time there was no mistaking the tone.

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Ricci shrugged. "Sure." He started for the kitchen.
"She's upstairs," Lucca said.
Ricci merely nodded.

Standing at the bar in the small café at the foot of the hill, Pierre sipped his third pernod, feeling the warmth of the first two working through him, loosening the knot of fear that lay in the stomach. He told himself that he was not—name of a name!—a lackey to be summoned, sneered at, dismissed. He was Pierre Leclerc. He allowed the concept to remain, comfortingly, in the front of his mind for a brief time. He had another sip of his drink.

He was Pierre Leclerc, and last night's affair had not been his fault. It had been one of those things, unforeseen, unforeseeable, unfortunate. The package had been lost; that was Lucca's loss, not his. A man had been killed; it had not been he, Pierre, who had fired the shot. This was the plus side of the ledger.

But there was the minus side, too, and he was calm enough now to consider it logically—he told himself this, too. He was known, and that was not good. There would be a search for him, and that was worse. The man who was dead—his name had been Walther, from that part of Italy which the Austrians still referred to as the South Tyrol—*had* gone to the police, as he, Pierre had told Lucca. Walther must have gone to the police; there was no other explanation. And if that was true, how much had Walther told them, the *flics?* About him, Pierre, for example? It was this that brought the knot back into his stomach, despite the pernod.

He had come south as fast as he could after last night's trouble. He had hoped—no, name of ten thousand blue little devils! he had not hoped, he had merely run blindly like a frightened mouse, without hope, without even thought, to Lucca as to sanctuary. And sanctuary had been refused, and he was on his own now, with little money, too little money to do what he should do, take ship, to Africa, perhaps, French Africa where things were in a turmoil and the authorities would be too busy to pay him much heed. In Algiers, he told himself, a man could——

He made himself stop dreaming. He was here, and he had to hide. *Consider,* he told himself sternly; *face the problem logically.*

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There was the hotel in the city. He had been there two or three times, always on business for Lucca; he was known there as Lucca's man. He would rather, much rather, have thought of another place, unknown even to Lucca, but he knew of none. And in the hotel, which was named The Apostle, heaven knew why, he would, at least, be out of sight of the police. There, then, was where he should go. Immediately.

He finished his drink. He considered having one more, and made himself reject the idea. He felt better, much better, his own man again—almost. He paid the bill and walked out to his car.

It was even possible, he thought, that Lucca would change his mind, that he would remember that he, Pierre, had in the past rendered more than small service; perhaps Lucca might even begin to comprehend, once his anger had cooled, that last night's affair had not been the fault of anyone, that it had been merely the kind of thing that sometimes happened, the wheel turning and the red coming up when one had placed his money on the black. But he told himself that he could not place much faith in this possibility. Lucca was, after all, an American. And Americans were beyond understanding, incredible, *formidable!*

Upstairs in her own room, Belle sat on the low, broad bed. She had taken off the Bikini; its two tiny pieces lay where she had tossed them in the center of the floor. She had gone into the bathroom and turned the shower on and soaked herself, scrubbed with soap and rough sponge as if she could cleanse not only her body but all of her, particularly the stain she could not reach—a blend of pain and shame and fear in her mind.

She had dressed in slacks, tight-fitting but by her standards modest, and a loose blouse—only these. She had arranged her hair automatically, and had spent some time over her make-up. Her left cheek was red, but the redness didn't show much. The hurt was inside, where it could be concealed, and remembered. There had been no tears.

She had no illusions about herself. Long ago she had found that illusions were extra weight, unnecessary handicap, and she had discarded them as she had discarded her given name, which was

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Bertha. It had even amused her, she remembered this now with vague uneasiness, that the name Bertha had come back to haunt her on her passport application and in large, clear type, on the passport itself.

The passport lay in the top drawer of the dressing table, and she thought about it, as Lucca had told her not to think about it, perhaps because Lucca had told her not to think about it. It was like probing a sore tooth with her tongue . . . something she could not help doing.

She would not use the passport, she had already accepted this. There was no place to run, no place she knew where she was not known, where Lucca's influence was not still felt; and once this had been a source of pride, now it was something else, a source of fear.

But it was not fear alone that held her; and this, too, she knew, although the knowledge was something she felt, that did not spring from reasoning. There were many ways to say it; like Antony, she had her own clichés, polished by use; you take the rough with the smooth; you make your bed and you lie in it; you pay for what you get, because everything costs something. Long ago she had learned that you took what came because nobody had twisted your arm in the first place.

She touched her cheek gently with her fingers, pressed the sore spot, felt for swelling and found none. She had been hit before, but not by Lucca, and never like this—in an offhand, almost idle manner, like a dog being taught a small lesson. And here was the seat of the shame and the anger: she had been treated as if she were nobody; and everybody was somebody, or if he wasn't he was better off dead.

She didn't think of herself as smart. Brains were the weapons of people like Antony, whom she had known in New York, or of Ricci, yes, even of Lucca. She had only one weapon, and she knew all about its uses.

Sitting there, unmoving, feeling the shame and the anger in her mind, she thought, *Nobody owns anybody else. Nobody's that big, and nobody's that little.* Lucca was vulnerable; he could be hurt. Lucca wasn't God.

When the knock came at the door, she said, "Come in," and she

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looked up, her face smooth and untroubled, composed. It was Ricci.

He had a glass of beer in his hand, and he looked young and American with his short-cropped hair—like the man in one of those TV commercials Belle used to watch between innings of a ball game. Her smile appeared slowly. "Hi, stranger."

"Hi." He was uneasy here, remembering Lucca's voice on the telephone and the way Lucca had looked just now downstairs. Ricci liked Belle; she was honest, without pretense. She knew what she had and she took pleasure in it, and it was as simple a thing as that—innocent, no matter what Lucca thought. But Lucca did think otherwise, apparently, and there was the danger.

"Don't just stand there," Belle said. "Come on in. Close the door. I thought you were gone for a while." She leaned back on the bed, braced herself with her hands behind her. "Where's—the man?"

"Downstairs," Ricci said. "Talking with Antony." He came into the room, but he left the door open. He watched Belle look at it and smile.

"Afraid of me?" she said.

"Scared to death."

"I'll bet," Belle said. "That beer looks good."

"I'll get some."

She shook her head. She held out one hand. "I don't want—much." She watched him hesitate, then hold out his glass. She took it, smiled up at him. "I won't give you anything."

"You're wrong." She was easy to talk to; with Belle you didn't have to pull your punches. Thinking of this now, he thought, too, of the other one, Antony's daughter, who was as different as day from night and yet, basically, the same. *Honest* was the word. "You're poison," he said.

"Am I?" She sipped the beer slowly. She looked up, smiling still, pleased. "That's nice. You tell that to all the girls?"

"Cut it out," Ricci said. "Save the line for somebody else."

"Only you and—the man—talk my language."

"Then save it for him," Ricci said. He was smiling, too.

"Sometimes—" Belle began. She stopped there. She sipped the

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beer again. She shook her head, smiling still, but the quality of the smile had changed. The faint redness of her cheek showed plain, and she knew that he saw it.

Watching her, no longer smiling, seeing the red bruise and knowing its cause, Ricci said, "Trouble?" He wondered whether this was a part of the pattern, if this, maybe, was at the root of Lucca's annoyance.

"No trouble." She touched her cheek with her fingertips. "I ran into something is all." She held out the beer glass.

He took it slowly, feeling a sudden, unreasoning anger, a dislike of Lucca that had nothing to do with logic. He said reluctantly, tonelessly, "It happens."

"Sure," Belle said. "You stub your toe. Maybe I talked out of turn."

He watched her, silent, waiting.

"You were talked about," Belle said. "That answer your question?"

"I guess it does." Vaguely, "I'm sorry." *Damn Lucca,* he thought; *and damn me for letting it happen . . . being careless.*

"You didn't do anything," Belle said.

"No."

She was silent for a moment, studying him. "You're a nice guy."

"That's me." *Shut up,* he told himself. *Forget it. It's done, and it can't be undone. Just make sure you stay away from her from now on.*

"You're more than a nice guy—" And she made herself stop there. *Don't put him in the middle,* one part of her mind said; the other voice, the stronger voice, rising out of the hurt and the shame and the anger, said, *Lucca hurt you. He said he owned you. Do you take that lying down?* And Ricci watched her. He seemed to be waiting. She leaned against her braced arms, shoulders back, smiling. "Forget it," she said.

He nodded slowly.

"You don't want any trouble with him, about anything."

He nodded again.

"Then," Belle said slowly, "it's all settled, isn't it?" And her smile was clear, inviting.

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"Cut it out," Ricci said. "I'm just a man. And you're poison." He said it lightly, but he told himself to remember it.

"Now," Belle said, "you're repeating yourself."

Then Lucca's voice came clearly up the stairs. "Ricci!" And some of the tension went out of the room.

"My master's voice," Ricci said. He smiled, made a small waving gesture as he started to turn away.

"Tell him," Belle said, "that you left the door open." Her voice mocked him.

"I'll do that." He looked over his shoulder to smile at her again.

"Tell him I'm just a—sister to you."

He didn't answer. He went down the hall and out of her sight. She stayed where she was, leaning back, her body arched in its taut curve. The small voice of reluctance was still there in her mind; it grew fainter.

Lucca was alone, standing at the glass wall, looking out on the terrace and the pool. Antony was gone. "I told Joe," Lucca said, "that you'd be along after you did a little job for me." He turned then, and the soft brown eyes watched Ricci's face. "Something on your mind?"

Ricci still had his beer glass. He finished the beer, set the glass down on the low square table. "What would there be?"

"You tell me," Lucca said.

Ricci shrugged. The man was angry; he could see it in the smile that came and went, in the dull shine of the brown eyes. "Nothing to tell." He kept his voice unconcerned.

Lucca said slowly. "I slugged her."

Ricci nodded. "I saw."

The brown eyes studied him for a few moments. Then, "I slugged her because she got out of line. She needed a lesson. She still does."

"I guessed that." And he made himself shrug again.

"No skin off your nose, eh?" Lucca said.

"I don't mix in family quarrels."

"That's a good policy. Just keep it in mind."

Ricci said nothing.

"I don't like to get rough," Lucca said. "I like things nice and easy. Only thing is, people get out of line sometimes and then

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you've got to wave a little muscle." The anger had not lessened, but its focus seemed no longer to be here, in this room. "You understand?" Lucca said.

"I understand."

Lucca nodded. "You're a smart boy. Tiny Presser was right. I told him I needed somebody with brains." He turned again to the window.

Ricci let his breath out slowly. So it was all right, so far. Antony had said nothing about Jenner and the name Bellanca. And Belle —Belle was a matter that was not going to cause trouble; he told himself that he was not going to let Belle cause trouble. Standing here, watching Lucca's back, waiting, he thought of the bruise on Belle's face, and of the way she had talked about it, the way she had talked to him; and, despite himself, the personal, unreasoning dislike of Lucca rose in his mind like a storm.

"I said I had a job for you," Lucca said. He turned slowly from the window. "For you and Gino. I like things nice and easy, like I said, but they can't always be that way." He paused. "You know Leclerc, Pierre Leclerc?"

It took Ricci by surprise. He had forgotten all about Pierre; talking with Belle, thinking about Belle, he had let himself forget, and forgetfulness was inexcusable. "I know him."

"He's down here," Lucca said. "Never mind why. And he's scared, maybe scared enough to make trouble, and I don't want trouble. You and Gino find him, talk to him, tell him that." He paused again. "Gino knows how to tell him."

"You want him so—he can't talk?" Ricci said. "You want him shut up for good?" His voice was steady, and the attitude of outward calm was firmly in place. He had his hands in his pockets, and he kept them there lest they show the tension he felt. His mind was already jumping ahead, anticipating, and he tried to make it stop. *Kill a man on orders,* he thought, *in cold blood.* He knew now what it felt like—a tightness in your stomach and in your chest, and your breathing hard to keep even.

"You're a smart boy," Lucca said. "You figure it out when you talk to him."

Ricci nodded.

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"He'll be at the Apostle," Lucca said. "He doesn't have any money and he doesn't know any place else."

"Right," Ricci said.

"Don't make a mistake," Lucca said. "Any kind of mistake. I'm tired of mistakes, and people who make them." The soft brown eyes looked toward the stairs. "People who get out of line—" The smile came and went in spasms. "—are just asking for trouble. They have to be taught lessons." He looked at Ricci again.

"There won't be any mistake," Ricci said.

He walked out to the car without looking back. Belle was in for a bad time, he told himself; he tried to put the knowledge out of his mind, but it would not go. He started the car, put it in gear. She was in for a bad time, and he was leaving her to it, and she meant nothing to him, nothing at all, she was just somebody he knew, just happened to know, somebody not very bright, even, in a way, childlike, and friendly, living for laughs and admiration. What happened to her was, as Lucca had said, no skin off his nose. He told himself to remember this. As he let out the clutch and started the car down the curving road, his mind felt cold, and the coldness spread down through his body, into his hands and fingers. He hammered softly on the steering wheel with the heel of one hand, and his lips, moving, whispered aloud, almost as if Belle could hear, "I'm sorry, kid. That's how it is." And he could almost see her, smiling and nodding—and that made it worse.

At the foot of the hill he stopped the car and went into the café. Pierre was not there; after this time, he had not expected to find him. He walked straight into the back room, to the telephone, made his call. To Randall he said, "Leclerc's at the Hotel Apostle, hiding out. But don't pick him up yet."

"No?" Randall said. "Why not?"

He could let some of the bottled-up anger come out now. "Gino and I are supposed to teach him a lesson, work him over. And Lucca doesn't want any mistakes."

There was silence. Then, "If you see it that way."

"I do," Ricci said. He was thinking still of Belle, and the coldness in his mind was a deep solid fury. "Afterwards, if he walks out of the hotel, it doesn't make any difference if you pick him up."

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Randall said, "I don't hold any brief for Leclerc. But—"

"That's the way it's got to be," Ricci said. He waited, but there was no answer beyond silence, which was answer enough. He hung up and walked out to the car.

Antony sat at his desk. The aunt, Luisa, stood in the center of the room, tall, erect, contemptuous, her white bony hands clasped in front of her. "Two men," she said.

Antony said, "What did they look like? What—"

"I told you. Policemen. They said they were obeying regulations."

"There is no such regulation," Antony said. "Nobody picks up a passport once you've come through immigration. They stamp it, and that's all there is."

"These things," the old woman said, "I do not know. I am neither a lawyer nor a criminal, and so I am not concerned with the law. If a policeman says a thing is true—"

"They weren't policemen," Antony said. He held his voice down with effort.

"How do you know that, Giovanni?" Her contempt was plain. "You were not here."

"I tell you—" Antony began. He stopped there. *Easy,* he told himself. *Think.* "So you gave them Tina's passport."

"I did not. I sent for the girl. She gave it to them. They went away."

"Fine," Antony said. Then, in English, "Dandy."

The old woman watched him steadily. "You are sure they were not policemen, Giovanni." She spoke slowly. "Who else would come, speaking of regulations?"

He was silent.

"This is not America, you have told me." And the dark eyes, deepset, seemed to glow, smolder. "What you were in America, you have said, you are no longer here. Here you are in—retreat, finished with the world which made you rich." She paused. "Is that not what you told me, Giovanni?"

"My name is Joe," Antony said, but he might as well not have spoken.

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"The girl is here," the aunt said slowly, pitilessly, "your daughter. Her passport has been taken, a green passport, an American passport, such as you, yourself, do not have. I think that you know why it was taken, Giovanni."

He forced himself to sit quiet, to speak without emotion. "Yes," he said. "I know why." He watched the old woman's hands tighten angrily; her thin cheeks worked; she spoke no word as she turned and walked out of the room, closing the door quietly behind her.

He was alone again, as he had, really, been alone most of his life. He told himself this, hearing the empty words and the assurance that was no assurance at all; he told himself that he had made no mistake, that what he had done and what he had not done, had been dictated by circumstances over which he had no control—and his own thoughts mocked him. His whole life had been a mistake, and sitting here now, alone, he decided that he couldn't fool himself any longer. Joe Antony Looks At Life—his own life. It, and he, were as phony as a soap opera. There was no outward change in the face he had trained so long to show nothing. He merely sat, his hands on the arms of the chair, tasting, acknowledging, the bitterness of one more defeat.

Lucca had been friendly, never friendlier; the soft brown eyes had seemed to smile, and the scar-dimple in the cheek had never disappeared. "I got a problem, Joe," Lucca had begun as soon as Ricci was out of the room.

And he, Antony, sitting in one of the modern curving chairs, had listened; and even that late he had been confident, or he had fooled himself into thinking that he was confident, that between brains, his brains, and simple force, Lucca's force, there was not, and had never been, any question of superiority.

"I've got a nice thing here," Lucca had said.

And Antony had nodded. "I won't even try to cut myself in. That's what's in your mind, forget it. You can believe that, Angelo. I've got more money than I need. I'm tired. I'm finished." Remembering this now, he wondered, *Was I really that stupid? Did I really believe that that was all he wanted?* Or had he just been fooling himself again?

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"You talk like an old man, Joe."

"Maybe I am."

"Don't kid me." And the dimple had been very deep, the white even teeth showing in a smile. "Remember me, Joe? I've known you all my life. You were always the smart one, the brain. You could always fool everybody—your old man, mine, the cop on the beat, the teachers, the priest, everybody. 'Joe Antony is a good boy.' You fooled them all."

Antony had said slowly, feeling the first real doubts, "Was that the way it looked?"

"Go on," Lucca had said. "Needle me. That's my Joe." And he had waved one hand in a broad gesture, smiling still.

Antony had sat silent.

"You're an old man," Lucca had said. "Tired. Got more money than you need. You kill me, Joe." He had seated himself suddenly on the edge of the low square table, and he had leaned forward and rested his forearms on his knees; even seated and motionless there was, as there had always been, an impression of movement, force, speed, strength in the slender-seeming body. "There isn't that much money, Joe. You know it. I know it. You can't fool me. Everybody else, sure. But not me, Joe. You never could."

Still he had tried. "I've never lied to you—"

"Lied? What's a lie, Joe? You take two people, they look at something from different sides—who's lying?" He had shaken his head and the smile had not faltered. "Let the priests worry about lies. That's for them—like how many angels can dance on the head of a pin." Again the slender strong hand had gestured broadly, with contempt. Then, almost abruptly, "We did all right in New York. We did fine."

And for the first time Antony saw what he should have seen before, but had not, had looked right at it and failed to see; and at this moment, coming as a surprise, it had shaken him, thrown him off balance. *He wants me. He isn't trying to keep me out; he wants me in.*

"I got a good thing," Lucca had said. "Import-export." He had smiled again, showing the white even teeth, dimpling the tiny scar. "I import from Greece and Turkey. I do a little work, refine the

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junk. I export to America. World trade, like they write about in the papers."

"Heroin," Antony had said.

"Real high-type," Lucca had said. "I give them the best." He had leaned back suddenly, and clasped one knee with his hands, raised the foot from the floor. The soft brown eyes had not left Antony's face. "I'm in business, Joe. But I got a problem, like I said. They don't know how to do things over here." For a moment, only a moment, there had been anger behind the smile. "They're bushers. Remember what they used to say about the Yankees—they thought it was wrong to lose? Over here they don't."

"So?" Antony had said.

"You want to hear me say it, that it? Okay. I got the business. I got the organization. I need somebody sharp to run it. Somebody who knows how. You. Like we did it in New York, Joe, same job—thinking for me." And there had been silence.

"I'm through, finished. I told you that."

"Sure. I heard you."

"The answer is no."

" 'Joe Antony is a good boy,' " Lucca had said. "The way I used to laugh when I heard somebody say that—my old man, maybe, when somebody swiped some bananas. When you defended me, remember? The old man said, 'Joe Antony is a good boy. If he believes you did not kill this man—' In Italian, the way he talked, slow, not loud. '—if Joe Antony believes you, then I will believe you, too.' " He nodded. "We're right back there again, Joe. You'll come along."

Sitting now in his library, thinking back over the scene, the words, the expressions, the gestures all vivid and clear, Antony remembered his feeling had been that of looking into a mirror and seeing a reflection of himself unlike anything he had ever seen before; the difference subtle but overpowering, merely a line or two changed and the entire image altered, sincerity become deceit by the lift of an eyebrow, the curl of a lip.

"You'll come along, Joe," Lucca had said again. "Same reason you came over here to talk to me. We don't kid ourselves. You

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drag your heels. That's okay. I expected it." He had stood up suddenly, smiling still. "Just don't drag your heels too long, Joe."

And now he wondered whether he had known, when he had walked out of the glass and stone house and got into the car, that this was not the end, that there would be another argument advanced, not in words but in action, which was Lucca's forte. And so there had been the two policemen, maybe fake, maybe real, it made no difference, waiting until he was gone from the house and then picking up the girl's passport just as a hint to make it plain that she was the lever for Lucca to use. *And he'll use it,* he thought; this he knew.

He looked up at the knock on the door. He watched the door open. Tina stood there, and, behind her, a man Antony had seen before and could not for the moment remember where. He got up from his chair, his face expressionless, composed.

"This is Pete Jenner," Tina said. "We met on the ship." Her face was grave, and there was a curious emphasis to her words. Watching her face, trying to see into her thoughts, Antony wondered whether she, too, was seeing the image he had glimpsed in the mirror, the person Lucca saw and was sure that he understood. "I wanted Pete to—meet you," Tina said. This time her voice made plain what she felt.

"You wanted him to see the skeleton in the closet," Antony said in his quiet detached voice. He nodded.

"This," Tina said steadily, "is my father, Pete."

"How do?" Jenner said. He was smiling.

Antony nodded, remembering now. "We met, or almost met, didn't we?"

"I guess," Jenner said slowly, smiling still, "that I made myself out to be a bigger ass than I am. He did look like—somebody I used to know."

"We all make mistakes," Antony said. "Sometimes we even believe them."

"You're a philosopher," Jenner said.

"And you didn't expect that." Antony nodded again. "I don't blame you."

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Jenner's smile was gone. He looked uneasy. "That wasn't what I meant."

"Wasn't it?" Antony looked at the girl. "You're going out?" He wondered whether this was what it was like having a daughter, watching her, worrying about her, wanting to keep her close, safe, even isolated, and knowing that you could not, knowing that there was no such thing as safety, ever, realizing that the young were so vulnerable.

"Pete's asked me to dinner."

"That was nice of him," Antony said.

"But I thought that if you had made—plans—" She let the sentence hang unfinished.

"No plans," Antony said. She was young, and she was ashamed of him, he made himself face this. He asked himself why she should not be? But she was here and she was a guest and she was determined not to flout hospitality; all of this was clear in her manner. "It was considerate of you to think about it," Antony said. He saw the relief in her eyes. "Have a good time." And he looked at Jenner again. "Take care of her."

Jenner nodded. His smile was back, and his young assurance. "With my life. I don't know the town, but the porter at my hotel said the Hotel Apostle was a good place to eat?"

"I've heard that," Antony said. He stood there and watched them go out. He sat down in the leather chair again. He felt spent, empty inside. Maybe what he had told Lucca was, after all, no more than the truth. Maybe he was old, too old, and tired. And Lucca was still youthful, strong, unchanged. But brains didn't wear out from use, he told himself, and he was still what he was, Joe Antony and all that the name Joe Antony meant. And Lucca was still just—Lucca. *I'll do his thinking for him,* he thought with sudden decision, and the lines of his face now were deep, harsh. *And he'll wish he'd never heard of me by the time I'm through.*

He picked up the telephone and placed his call. It was answered almost immediately by Lucca's voice, husky and a trifle breathless.

"Angelo," Antony said.

"Oh, it's you." The voice turned friendly. In the background Antony could hear sounds, muffled, unclear, like a child whimper-

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ing or an animal in pain. "I was just taking care of a little—business," Lucca said. "What's on your mind, Joe?"

"I've been thinking," Antony said. Slowly, "You've convinced me."

"That's my boy," Lucca said. His voice seemed to smile. In the background the sounds were fading. "You've made my day for me, Joe. My troubles are over."

Antony hung up. He leaned back in the chair. Lucca's troubles were just beginning, he told himself. He had no plan, but this was unimportant. He would play it by ear, make it up as he went along; there would be opportunities. Of one thing he was certain: by the time he was through, Lucca would be finished, destroyed.

Ricci left the car in front of Antony's house. He went in through the big door, across the marble entrance hall. The door to the library was ajar, and through it he could see Antony leaning back in his chair, his eyes almost closed. Ricci went in. "Gino and I are going out for a little while." The coldness in his mind was undiminished.

Antony's eyes studied him.

"Okay?" Ricci said. "Lucca wants us to—take care of something for him." Despite the coldness and the fury, he made himself put it like this, play the part, stay in line as Lucca had said.

Antony nodded. Then, quietly, "You kind of like Belle, eh? I thought you were a tough kid, traveling light."

"Belle," Ricci said, and that was all.

"Nice girl," Antony said. "Not very bright, maybe, but a nice girl."

"You're dreaming," Ricci said, "both of you—you and Lucca." He could see no sign of belief in Antony's face; there was nothing. And, as that morning, he felt the prickling feeling up and down his spine, into his scalp. Lucca was the strong one, but this one, Antony, was the one to fear. Ricci shrugged. "Ask her."

Antony nodded again. "I think Lucca has—or is." He paused. A small thing, he thought, but it was a beginning, a wedge between this one and Lucca; jealousy was a potent force once it was set in motion. He felt no scruples; in Lucca's world, no holds were

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barred. "I just talked to him on the phone. He was—asking her."

"Let him," Ricci said. He thought again of Belle, sitting on the bed, sipping from his beer, smiling at him. She had known, he told himself. She had seen Lucca's mood, as he, Ricci, had seen it after Antony had gone, Lucca's anger scarcely controlled, his savagery, from whatever cause, that would have to have an outlet. Belle had understood what was coming once he, Ricci, was gone; and she had sat there and sipped at his beer and smiled—

"You couldn't care less if he kicks her around," Antony said. "Is that it?"

"That's it." He made himself say it flatly. Then . . . "Gino and I won't be long."

Antony merely nodded, still settled back in his chair, expressionless.

Ricci found Gino in the kitchen. He had a large plate of spaghetti, and he was working on it with satisfaction. The maid, Maria, was at the sink. "This," Gino said, "is my friend Ricci. He is from America, like the *Signor* Antony." His mouth was full of spaghetti.

The girl turned. She smiled shyly at Ricci.

"He will want a glass of wine," Gino said. He waved his fork. "And, perhaps, food—"

"Big one," Ricci said. "Come along. The food can wait."

Gino sighed. He put down his fork. He finished the wine in his glass. He stood up. To Maria he said, "Until later," and he followed Ricci out through the kitchen door. "She is friendly, that one. And she is learning to cook well. And she is, as you said to Lucca, plump like a pullet, not skinny like the American girl, like Belle—"

Ricci slammed the door of the car. Gino got in his own side. "Have I made you angry?"

"No," Ricci said. The coldness was back again, fury controlled, deep and solid. They drove down the hill in silence, turned toward the city.

Gino said, "Where are we going?"

"To see a man."

"Ah," Gino said.

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"Pierre Leclerc," Ricci said, and he turned his head to watch Gino's face.

"He is a nice fellow," Gino said. "A friend of Lucca's."

"Not any more," Ricci said.

There was silence.

"You understand, big one?" Ricci said. "He is to be taught a lesson. We are to persuade him that he is not to talk, make trouble."

There was no hesitation. "We will teach him," Gino said. "We will teach him a good lesson, eh, Ricci?"

Now, Ricci told himself, he knew precisely how it felt to be sent on an errand of violence, feeling anger, yes, but not against the man you were going to harm; feeling the anger deep and explosive but directed against the man who had sent you and against yourself; and trying to channel this anger, this explosiveness, against a man you scarcely knew, and finding that it would not, could not, be channeled.

As he drove, conscious of Gino's relaxed presence, he wondered whether Gino felt this revulsion, this feeling of shrinking back from something unpleasant—and he knew that Gino did not. Ricci drove steadily, neither fast nor slow. The first lights of the city seemed to approach quickly. It had to be done, he told himself; there was no other way. No mistakes, Lucca had said, and there was an end to it. And he tried to feel no pity for Pierre, who deserved, beyond any doubt, anything that might happen to him. Still, in his mind, the revulsion, the shrinking feeling remained, even grew, underlining his impotence.

He found a parking space across the street from the Hotel Apostle. He got out, dropped the car keys in his pocket. "Come on, big one," he said. They started across the street.

The restaurant of the Hotel Apostle was not large; it opened onto the lobby. There were potted plants against the walls, and the drapes at the windows were heavy and dark, full length. The menu was in both French and Italian, and the wine list was long; a bus boy and a waiter hovered near the table. Jenner said, "I

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wasn't even sure I could find you. It's a big city, and for all I knew, you might have gone anywhere."

"How did you find me?" Tina said.

"Oh, a—" He hesitated, thinking of Randall. "—a fellow at the hotel, at the porter's desk, made a couple of phone calls for me." The words came easily, naturally. He waved one large hand. "You didn't think you were going to get away, did you?" He shook his head. "Not with Jenner in pursuit."

"You recognized—him," Tina said. "My father." There was no other explanation. "You found where he lives."

"Pictures in the papers," Jenner said.

"Yes. And—other places. Don't they call it the rogues' gallery?"

"Beating yourself over the head, aren't you?" Jenner said.

"Maybe."

"Trying to tell yourself your blood's tainted—that sort of thing?"

She faced him, for the moment angry; then the anger faded. "No. That would be pretty silly, wouldn't it?"

"It would," Jenner said. He was smiling again. "Have some more wine." He gestured. The waiter moved quickly, refilled both glasses. "It would scare me to death to have this kind of service at home," Jenner said. "I'd know I didn't have enough money to pay the check."

"Then we'd wash dishes."

"Better," Jenner said. "Much better. You sound almost natural, the way you did on the ship. I approve."

Tina said suddenly, "Where's your passport?"

He leaned back in his chair, and his smile was very broad. "You've got the damndest change of pace."

"Have I?" She smiled faintly. And then, "Where is it? Did the police take it?"

He was frowning now. "Why on earth would the police take it? I haven't done anything. It's here." He touched his breast pocket.

So now she knew, she thought; although she supposed that she had, really, known all along, or at least suspected, feared that the taking of her own passport had not been mere routine. The two men, in uniform, and the aunt, Luisa, standing watching, saying nothing. She had doubted them, but she had told herself that it

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was all right, that regulations were to be obeyed. *Face it,* she told herself now; *you were afraid to make a fuss; it was merely that; you didn't want to be embarrassed there in front of the old woman.*

"Something wrong?" Jenner said.

She made herself smile again. "What would be wrong?"

He shook his head. "You seem to drift off my wave length sometimes."

She smiled at that without effort. "Tell me about Johnny Bellanca."

"There's that change of pace again. Why, for the love of heaven, Johnny Bellanca?"

"Didn't you come over here because of him?"

"That is correct."

"Where is he now? What's he doing?"

"I—don't know," Jenner said. "I've lost touch with him. He could be anywhere." He waved one hand again. "Forget him. Pay attention to me, smile at me, hang on my words—"

"Roll my eyes in adoration?"

"Exactly."

"All right," Tina said.

"I'll be witty."

"You do that."

"Pick your subject."

She began to smile again.

"Not Johnny Bellanca," Jenner said quickly. "I don't want competition, even from a man who isn't here."

It was then, looking idly through the lobby entrance, that she saw Ricci, and Gino beside him. Ricci walked steadily. His face wore a fixed expression, determined, somehow menacing. She looked at Jenner, and saw that he, too, had seen and had, like herself, looked quickly away. "Speak of the devil?" Tina said.

And for a moment, for only a moment, she saw agreement in Jenner's face, quickly gone; the smile appeared in its place. "That guy again," Jenner said. "Every time I see him I think I'm looking at—you-know-who." He paused. "He's beginning to haunt me." He was silent, thinking, strangely enough, of Randall.

"You were going to be witty," Tina said.

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The elevator was old-fashioned, of open grillwork; it crept upwards within the helix of the stairs, seemed to pass each floor reluctantly. Gino stood broad and solid, imperturbable; he was humming softly to himself, *Aïda* this time, the Triumphal March, taking his rhythm from the soft clank of the turning gear wheel. Ricci stood by the gates, watching the floors as they dropped past. He felt naked, exposed, as if a spotlight were shining on him for the world to see.

There was no other way, he told himself, trying, even now, to channel the cold anger in his mind. Lucca and Pierre, yes, and Antony, too—there was nothing to choose among them; they deserved no pity, no consideration, no mercy. You stepped on a snake, or took a stick to it without compunction, and without immediate cause, and you thought no more about it. And a part of his mind examined the rationalization and rejected it contemptuously. Pierre was a human being. He repeated in his mind, *There is no other way*.

The elevator had stopped. The gates opened. Ricci, standing there, was unaware. The elevator man said quietly, "The sixth floor, *signore*." Ricci looked at him, and nodded, and walked out onto the carpeted floor. He glanced at the numbers on the wall plaque: 613, the hotel manager had said, eager to please those who came from Lucca, but fearful nonetheless. Ricci turned left and walked down the corridor. Gino followed almost at his elbow.

"Always you are thinking, Ricci." It was not complaint; there was even admiration in the slurred peasant voice. "Doesn't it tire you?"

"Sometimes, big one." The words came easily, too easily; and he thought, *I've played the part so long I'm beginning to live it, beginning to sink down to their level.* And then . . . *No matter. Get it over with.* He raised his hand and knocked once on the door, tried the ornate handle and found it unlocked, pushed it open, walked in.

It was a large room, facing the street; two windows, heavily curtained, reached almost to the floor. Pierre was there, tall, graceful, his too-long hair a trifle rumpled. He had been lying on the

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bed, and he was getting up now, rousing himself, watching them, smiling at them; he ran both hands over his ears, brushing the hair back. A bottle of absinthe, a glass, and a water carafe stood on the bedside table. "Ah." His smile was a trifle silly. "Lucca has sent you with a—message for me." He spoke in Italian, and he straightened himself to his full height. "An apology, perhaps."

"Not exactly," Ricci said. Then, "You're drunk." Beside him, Gino stood waiting, his legs widespread, firm.

"Drunk," Pierre said. "It is an unpleasant word. I am . . . relaxed. I was tired." His smile was no longer silly; there was contempt in it now. "I was working last night, I, Pierre Leclerc, while others slept in their soft beds."

Gino shifted his weight, tensed himself. Ricci put out his hand, and Gino was still again. "Meaning us?" Ricci said.

"You. And others. Down here in that hideous house of glass and stone, that—"

"That isn't the way I heard it," Ricci said.

"Ah!" He seemed to gather himself, force his eyes into sharp focus, drive back the absinthe fuzziness. Only his words betrayed him; it was as if he translated into Italian from French. "It is that Lucca—Lucca has told you otherwise, eh? It is that Lucca has said that all of the fault was mine? That it was I who locked the gasoline pump. That it was I who threw away the package into the sea. That it was I who informed to the police, and not Walther—"

"Walther," Ricci said quietly. So it had been Walther, who came from Yorkville in Manhattan, who had been born in Sterzing, now called Vipiteno; Walther who laughed and loved to ski, who could dance *Schuhplattle* in a Yorkville beer hall, and sing German *Lieder,* or argue with Ricci in his harsh northern Italian about which of the two girls at the next table would smile at them first. "Walther," he said again. "And so you killed him." In his mind there was sudden calm.

"Lucca even told you that," Pierre said, and there was craftiness now in his face. "But it was not I, do you comprehend? I was there, while others were sleeping, but—"

"You just fingered him," Ricci said. "Is that it?" Now, at last, the fury could be channeled; now, at last, the revulsion was gone,

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wiped clean away. His mind felt free, unfettered, and there was eagerness in him; he fought to hold it back, to listen, to hear more.

"Fingered," Pierre said. "A word from America." He stood there, tall, graceful, almost sober, the absinthe courage plain only in his contempt. "Fingered," he said again. "Yes. It was I who understood what Walther was. A matter of logic." He tapped his temple with a long forefinger. "Tell that to Lucca. Tell him—"

"No," Ricci said softly. "We will not tell Lucca. He has told us." Beside him Gino stirred again, perceptive as a hunting dog to his master's tension; and again Ricci held out his hand, and Gino held back.

"And what has the great Lucca told you?"

"That you talk too much." This, in a sense, for the record, in Gino's hearing. *Now*, he thought, unleashing his eagerness at last. He took a single step forward.

Pierre stepped back, quickly, gracefully as a ballet dancer; there was no flaw in his co-ordination. His hand reached swiftly for the heavy carafe, found it, raised it. Ricci's first punch caught him with the arm at shoulder height, and he went over backwards onto the bed, dropped the carafe, rolled; and his foot lashed out, too fast to avoid. It caught Ricci high on the cheek, stopped him long enough to give the big man time to get off the bed and on his feet again.

Gino was in motion, his great hands out and grasping—wrestler's hands, strangler's hands.

"No," Ricci said. "Leave him, big one. He is for me." He moved around the foot of the bed, his eyes on Pierre's face. He was unaware of the blood on his cheek; he was unaware of anything, but the fierceness in his mind, the fury controlled. *For Walther*, he thought; *for Belle, for me*. And all of the tension of this last long year was, in this moment, gone, wiped clean away . . .

They left the room as it was—the carafe on the carpet, and the spreading water stain; the picture broken against the wall where Pierre's head had slammed against it, not once, but again, and again; Pierre himself, on the floor, one leg bent beneath him, his hands widespread and his arms braced and his hair hanging long

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over his face, breathing in great shuddering gasps, unmoving but for this.

Ricci paused at the door. He had his handkerchief out, pressed against his bloody cheek. He looked at Pierre, and, again for the record in Gino's presence, he said, "Remember this."

Pierre did not move.

"Do you hear me?" Ricci asked. "Remember this."

Pierre's head came up slowly. He raised one hand and brushed the hair from his eyes. He looked at Ricci, merely looked; his eyes were dark, venomous, animal's eyes.

Ricci opened the door. He followed Gino into the hall. He closed the door quietly behind him. "We will take the stairs, big one," he said.

Their dinner was finished. They sat now over coffee and the pleasant taste of cigarettes. "So you won't be staying long," Jenner said. "You came, you saw—" He was smiling. "—and now you go back again."

"What would you do?" Tina said. "I don't—belong here."

"One day," Jenner said. "The ship docked only this morning, remember?"

"You came as a tourist, didn't you?"

"What does that mean?"

"To look," Tina said, "to see, to try to understand how other people—" She stopped there, watching his smile spread.

"We're on the same wave length," Jenner said.

She was silent for a moment. Then, "Yes. You're right. I came for the same reason. I'm a tourist, too, in a way."

"So?" He was playing with ideas. There were times when he wondered whether that was his role in life; it amused him to think that he was a bystander, seeing both sides, or each of the many sides, and feeling strongly about none. He enjoyed switching positions in a discussion, merely for the joy of demonstrating mental agility. "He wasn't quite what I expected, you know. I doubt if he was what you thought you'd find."

"My—father, you mean?" She was silent again, wondering what she had expected.

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"I had sort of a Humphrey Bogart character in mind," Jenner said, "a Duke Mantee out of *The Petrified Forest.*"

"He isn't like that." In this moment she remembered Antony standing in the hall after the aunt had left them, watching her and smiling that wry smile, saying that she would have questions, and that he would answer them for her—not, he had added, that he was looking forward to it. And she had felt something of his loneliness, then, seeing behind the smile, and the words.

"He doesn't even talk out of the corner of his mouth," Jenner said, "and he didn't point a gun at me when you led me in."

She, too, could smile. "Should he have?"

"A shotgun, maybe," Jenner said. "That's traditional. Young man turns up after a sea voyage with daughter—" He stopped there, watching her face. "What's doing?" He turned to follow her eyes.

Ricci and Gino were walking out through the lobby. There was a handkerchief in Ricci's hand. Even from here, Jenner could see the red stain on the white material. He looked again at the girl.

"I think," Tina said slowly, "that I want to go now. I—" She hesitated. "Please."

"I'll get the check," Jenner said.

Pierre was on his feet. He swayed a little, steadied himself. He walked to the dresser and bent to see his own reflection. Slowly he raised both hands and brushed back the long hair. He straightened, and stood for a moment, irresolute, afraid. The bottle of absinthe and the glass were still on the table beside the bed. He walked to them, poured out a drink, carried it into the bathroom and added a little water. He drank the entire thing in one long gulp, and he stood there for a time, looking at himself in the bathroom mirror, feeling the warmth of the liquor spread through him like new strength.

He was Pierre Leclerc. He repeated it, aloud this time, speaking to his reflection as to a stranger, "You are Pierre Leclerc. You are not—name of a pig, name of a cow!—a nobody to be used, and thrown aside." Then, imitating Ricci's voice, " 'Remember this.' "

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He nodded to himself. "I will remember. Never fear." He turned from the mirror and walked out into the larger room.

The absinthe had taken hold quickly. He could feel it, warm, confident, flowing through his entire body. He was Pierre Leclerc. He swayed a little, but the focus of his eyes was sharp and clear. To try to silence him, like this—ah, that, no! They would have done better to kill him, but they were weak, and he, Leclerc, was not weak. He even smiled a little to himself, and he picked up the bottle and poured himself only a small shot, took it neat; it burned in his throat and in his chest.

He set the glass down, no longer indecisive, and walked to the dresser, steadied himself against it with one hand, while with the other he opened the small top drawer. The pistol was there, long-barreled, deadly. He took it out, smiled at it. He walked a trifle unsteadily to the windows, threw back the heavy curtains. The window was open, and, leaning out, he could see the marquee of the hotel entrance, the street, and the single street light. And he saw two men, one broad and solid, who rolled a little in his walk; the other middle-sized, with short-cut hair, and a white handkerchief pressed to his cheek.

He, Leclerc, had marked the American's face. So there would be something to remember on both sides. There was small satisfaction in that. He leaned far out of the window, raised the pistol, steadied it, forced himself to wait for the two men to reach their car, open their doors, stand poised in that moment, fully exposed in the glare of the street light. The American's memory, he told himself, would be short. And afterward—what did afterward matter? He felt tall and strong and confident, the absinthe like adrenaline in his veins. He leaned out a little farther to make sure of his aim.

The check came and Jenner looked at the total. "They put a bar through the middle of a seven," he said, "and what they do to a nine and a five shouldn't happen. Not to me, anyway." He was just talking, trying to recapture the lightness that had been between them before Johnny—before Ricci—had walked out with the red handkerchief held to his face.

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Tina had her gloves on. She held her purse in both hands, and she waited, as patiently as she could, while he put bills on the check, smiled at the waiter. "Now," Jenner said. He pushed back his chair.

"Pete." Slowly, "I'm sorry, Pete."

He smiled down at her. "A thing of no importance. It's been a long day. You're tired."

"Thanks." She stood up. "It isn't just that I'm tired."

"I know."

She hesitated. "Am I being silly?"

"Who knows?"

"He . . . lives at the house. He works for my . . . father. He came here, you saw him, the way he looked, and the other one, the big one with him. There was blood on his handkerchief when he came out—"

"Ran into a door," Jenner said. "Nobody ever believes it when it happens. People always want to believe—"

"Pete."

He was silent for a moment. Then, "Offhand, I'd say he'd been in a fight. He had the look of it. I could be all wrong."

The girl said, "Would Johnny Bellanca get in fights?"

He was grinning now, looking down at her from his height. "Hypothetical question, of course."

She waited, silent.

"About Johnny," Jenner said, "the answer is yes. Or, at least, it used to be yes. He didn't—compromise much—" He stopped there.

There was a policeman standing at the entrance to the restaurant. There was another policeman behind him. And there were voices in the lobby, raised, excited, speaking rapid Italian.

"I guess," Jenner said, "that we'd better sit down again. It doesn't look as if we're supposed to leave right now."

Tina had left his side. She walked to the doorway. She spoke to the policeman, who made a small bow, and listened politely, and then, with his shoulders and his hands and his mobile face expressed regret, but firmness. Tina came back to the table. She sat

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down. "There's been an accident. That's all he would tell me. They want to ask us some questions."

Jenner was silent.

Tina watched him. Then she watched the doorway, and after a little time a man came through, another policeman, with authority in his face and manner. "It is regrettable," he said in English. Then . . . "You are American, no?"

"Yes," Jenner said. He reached inside his coat, took out his passport. The policeman took it and studied it briefly. He nodded, smiled, looked at Tina.

"And you, *signorina?*"

"I'm American, too."

He looked at her purse in question.

"My passport," she said, "is at my father's house. I'm sorry."

"Your father." His voice was polite, and the words held no inflection.

"His name," Tina said, "is Antony." She paused. "Joe Antony."

"Ah, yes. Of course. I do not know him personally." He paused. "But I know of him."

"Yes," Tina said, and that was all. She sat straight, her shoulders squared, waiting.

"You have dined here," the policeman said. "At this table. Did you, perhaps, see anyone pass through the lobby? Two men? One of them with a handkerchief held to his cheek?" He looked at both of them, and at neither; his eyes seemed to rest between them.

Tina opened her mouth. Jenner's foot touched hers beneath the table. "I saw—no one," Tina said. "We were dining, talking."

"I didn't see anybody, either," Jenner said. "What's it all about?"

"There has been an accident," the policeman said, and his face showed neither belief nor skepticism; he smiled at them both. "Nothing, I think, to concern you."

The road was quite dark. Ricci drove slowly, feeling now the reaction, the controlled fury dissipated; feeling the tension, as familiar now as the sound of his own name, beginning again to build in his mind.

Lucca had ordered, and Lucca's order had been carried out—

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there was satisfaction in that, knowledge of a job done to set against any suspicions there might have been in Lucca's mind about him, or about him and Belle. This much he could tell Randall. Not all of it, of course; not the part about Belle herself, and what he had felt driving off from Lucca's house, leaving her there alone. Randall would not understand that Belle meant nothing to him, that she was merely somebody he liked, and nothing more than that. Randall, being Randall, would imagine things, and would worry; he, Ricci, knew better. Belle would be no danger to him now. Not after this job with Pierre. He felt suddenly tired, somehow purged; but there was no way to relax.

Gino, sitting in the darkness, said, "Your face, Ricci?"

"It's fine."

"I should have held him for you."

"No, big one." *For Walther,* he thought; no longer adding, *for Belle; for me,* because that fury was spent.

"To do it yourself, eh, Ricci? It is good. Yes." He was pleased that he understood.

"Something like that," Ricci said.

"You feel better now, eh?"

Ricci smiled in the darkness.

"It is better than too much thinking," Gino said. "To fight a man, to make love to a girl, to drink wine, to sing—"

"I envy you, big one."

"You?" The voice was incredulous. "You envy me? I do not understand, Ricci."

"Never mind, big one."

"You," Gino said, "to envy me." There was wonder in his voice. And then, "Why do we stop here?"

"To telephone."

There was brief silence. "Yes. Of course. I would not have thought of it, Ricci. Lucca will want to know."

"Wait here," Ricci said. He got out of the car, went into the café. From the telephone he could watch the door. Gino did not appear. He placed his call, and waited, and the quiet voice came almost immediately. "Randall."

"Bellanca," Ricci said. "You can pick Leclerc up any time now.

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I've done what—he told me to do." Then, "It wasn't Pierre who killed Walther. But he figured it out, and put the finger on him. Somebody else did it." He waited. There was no reply. "You heard me?"

"I heard you. We won't pick him up, you know. It wouldn't do much good."

"I don't get it," Ricci said slowly.

"Don't you? He's dead, of course. A man usually is when he falls six floors and lands on pavement. He had a gun, was that it?"

"He—can't be," Ricci said. "He was sitting there—" He stopped. "No gun." There was silence again; it grew, stretched; he forced himself to wait.

"There was one when they got to him," Randall said. "He must have had it in his hand when he—fell—or was pushed."

"I didn't—" he began, and there he stopped. Gino was coming in through the door, smiling, showing his large yellow teeth. "Later," Ricci said. He hung up.

Gino said, "I am thirsty, Ricci. And you must be thirsty, too. We will have a glass of wine, eh?" The smile spread. "It was a good lesson, Ricci. Lucca will be pleased."

Ricci said nothing.

"You," Gino said, "to envy me. This I do not understand." He was shaking his head as he walked up to the bar, hammered on it with one great hand. "Wine," he said. "My friend and I—we are thirsty."

Sitting in the large room with a cup of coffee at his elbow, thick coffee almost syrupy with cream and sugar, Lucca listened to the hotel manager's voice on the telephone. "It is terrible. I did not dream when I told them which room—"

"Okay," Lucca said. "Relax." He was silent for a few moments. "They came out through the lobby?"

"I have told you—"

"I said relax." And then, "Was he there, on the sidewalk, when they came out?"

"I—do not know."

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"Think," Lucca said. "Would you have seen him when they opened the door?"

"I cannot say."

"Who saw them?" Lucca said.

"Many people. The elevator operator, the porter at his desk, two Americans who were in the restaurant—"

"All right," Lucca said. "Then who told the police about them?"

"It was a woman who was on the street. She saw them. She saw him—"

"She saw him fall?"

"I do not know. She came into the lobby, running, hysterical—"

"And you called the cops," Lucca said.

"There was nothing else to do. A man, a guest in my hotel—there were other people on the street. They gathered quickly—"

"But they, Ricci and Gino, had gone?"

"Yes."

Lucca was silent. He looked down at his coffee.

The manager said, "It was only the woman who told the police that they had been here. None of my people remembered anything. But the police went to his room, and it was plain that there had been a—disturbance. The water carafe on the floor, a picture broken on the wall—"

Lucca said, "He'd been drinking?"

"He had sent down for a bottle of absinthe. It was there, beside the bed."

"So he was drunk," Lucca said. "He was having himself a ball."

"Please?"

"Having a party, all by himself, getting liquored up. He knocked over the carafe, broke the picture, stumbled around playing with the gun and fell out of the window. Nobody touched him. Nobody went near him." He paused. "Maybe somebody, in the next room, or the room below, heard him making noise the way a drunk does."

"I do not think that anyone—"

"Find somebody," Lucca said.

There was silence. Then, "I will try." Hopefully . . . "Perhaps the porter will remember a telephone call of complaint about the noise?"

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"Don't get too fancy." He paused, thinking. "I'm not through yet. Where is the woman who came in from the street?"

"I do not know. She left with the police."

Lucca stared at his coffee again. "She saw them. Your people saw them. Who else?"

"Only the two Americans who were dining, and they said that they did not see."

"But you think they did?"

"How can I say? From their table, there is a clear view of the lobby. It is possible that they did not see the two men come in—one does not notice everything. But when they went out—a man with a handkerchief pressed to his cheek one would notice, I think. But they said they had seen nothing."

"Maybe," Lucca said. He was, in some ways, like an animal, with an animal's shrewdness and wariness. "Who were they? Just tourists?"

"The girl is the daughter of Joe Antony—"

"So," Lucca said.

"And the man, I do not know. An American, he showed to the police his passport."

"So," Lucca said again. If the girl had seen Ricci, she would have recognized him. Would she then have kept silent? He didn't know. And the man? "Find out who he is," he said.

"But," the manager said, "but how? Americans—there are many, they come and they go."

"How did they leave?" Lucca said. "Taxi? He had a car?" Always you had to spell it out every step of the way, draw pictures, and even then these people couldn't always get it straight.

"A taxi," the manager said.

"Then you can find out. Ask the taxi driver, not where he took the girl—I know where Antony lives. Find out where he took the man after they dropped the girl—what hotel, or house, or apartment. Can you understand that?"

"I will try."

"Don't try. Do it. Call me when you know his name and where he's staying."

He hung up and leaned back in the curved chair. Every step of

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the way, he thought. It was like pulling teeth. Nobody over here, but nobody, could figure things out for himself, or do them without falling over his own feet.

He made himself relax. He sipped the coffee. All right. Joe was here now, and this was the kind of thing Joe could handle, and Joe had damn well better handle it, keep his daughter quiet, talk to the man, keep Ricci out of the way for a while with his banged-up face. Ricci—maybe Ricci had better be kept out of the way for good; marked up as he was, the woman the police had taken might recognize him, and whether he'd been in the room when Leclerc had gone out of the window, or been downstairs, it made no difference, because once the police placed him definitely at the hotel they would tie him to Leclerc anyway, as a starting place—

Again he made himself relax. Let Joe figure it out; his faith in Antony's ability to figure angles was deep and solid. Joe would know who the man was, anyway; the girl could tell him that if he didn't know already.

He picked up the cup once more, finished the coffee. It was Joe's baby. And Joe had better handle it right. He felt better. He got out of his chair. In the morning he'd plug Joe in. Right now he had had about all he wanted to take for the day. He looked at the stairs, and thought of Belle.

He hadn't hurt her much, just pushed her around some so she wouldn't get ideas; she'd deserved it after that crack about being American and having a passport. He thought of her now as she had been when Antony had telephoned—in those pants that fitted her like skin, that blouse with nothing under it but Belle; he could see her, plain as a moving picture in his mind. He told himself again that he'd had enough trouble for one day. Right now what he needed was relaxation. He walked up the stairs.

It was morning, bright and clear, a Mediterranean day. Ricci ate his breakfast—a roll and coffee—in the kitchen with Gino, sitting at the wood table while Maria served them.

His cheek was sore, but this was nothing. The trouble, he told himself, was not on his face but in his mind. *I killed him, just as surely as if I had pushed him out of the window myself*. There was

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no other explanation; he had been over it and over it during the night, lying awake and listening to Gino's snores, and he had fitted the bits and pieces together until he knew, as surely as if he had remained in the hotel room, how it had happened, and why. Another drink of absinthe for Pierre, to steady him; and then the gun, first in his mind, and then in his hand; and the low window looking down on the street, and the idea of revenge, simple and direct, driving out all other considerations; this was the way it had happened, it had to be. *I killed him, just like that.*

He walked outside into the warm sun. Gino followed, sucking placidly through his large teeth. "He will remember you this morning, that one," Gino said. "Eh, Ricci? He will not feel good."

"Big one," Ricci said slowly, patiently, "sit here, in the sun. I have some thinking to do." And he waited for no answer as he walked off, his hands deep in his pockets.

Working a man over was one thing; Pierre would not have gone to the police with a complaint, never to the police. But death was something else again, and he made himself think about the fact of death.

The police would be involved. *I opened the door,* he thought; *I touched the door handle on both sides with bare hands.* He tried to remember exactly what the door handles were like, carved and fancy, ornate; he concentrated on this, and satisfied himself that no fingerprints would show.

But had he touched anything else? Or had Gino? He couldn't be sure. Careless again, he told himself as he walked. And always, underlying everything, the guilty thought remained, *I killed him.*

It was in the rose garden again, as yesterday, that Tina found him. She had been watching for him, staying in her room until he appeared, unwilling to face Antony first. She was not sure why she had remained silent last night when the policeman had talked to her; she remembered Jenner's foot touching hers, but that alone would not have done it. In the taxi, all the way out from the city, she and Jenner had avoided the subject. Now, coming up behind Ricci, she said without preamble, "How does your face feel this morning?" And, "How do you feel?"

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He turned at the sound of her voice, the outward calm firmly in place. "Good morning."

"I saw you last night," she said, and she told him where, and how.

He listened quietly. Who else had seen him?

"And when we were ready to leave, the police were there. There had been an accident, they said."

"We?"

"Pete and I."

"Pete." He said it tonelessly. He disliked this. Jenner had found her then; being Jenner, he would continue to see her, and him. "Who is Pete?"

She ignored it. "There was a man, dead, on the sidewalk. The police said that he had fallen, or been pushed, from a window. There was a gun beside him, but it had not been fired."

He wasn't supposed to know, he reminded himself; he was supposed to be as ignorant as Gino. He raised his eyebrows. "What man? And why tell me?" He studied her for a moment or two before he let understanding show in his face. "Oh." He made himself smile faintly. "I was there, and I have this—" He touched the bruise on his cheek. "—and therefore I pushed somebody out of a window. Is that it?"

There were two small spots of color high in her cheeks. "Do I amuse you?"

They were silent, looking at one another.

"The police asked me if I had seen you—a man with a handkerchief held to his face." She paused. "I told them I had seen nothing. I—don't know why. Pete told them the same thing."

"I see." He did not see. Pete's silence, yes; this he could understand if Randall had found him and spoken to him. But the girl, feeling no loyalty toward Antony or himself, a stranger in a strange land, alone, not involved. Why should she have tried to shield him? He asked the question aloud.

"I told you. I don't know. It—didn't make any difference whether I'd seen you or not. There were other people, there must have been, people who work for the hotel—" She paused.

"Let George do it, you mean?" Ricci said. "Don't get mixed up

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in it yourself? If there's an auto accident, don't stop, just ignore it?" This was not the reason, and he knew it was not, but he let it stand as a lever to pry out the real motive because, he told himself, he had to know.

She was angry, at him and at herself. She said, "All right. I did it because you work for—him." She nodded toward the house.

"I don't think he even knew I was there," Ricci said.

"And why should I believe that?"

"No reason." He said, "For the record, I didn't push anybody out of a window. I went there to talk to a man. I talked to him, and then I left." He smiled, feeling not at all like smiling. "The man I talked to, if it was the same man you're talking about, was sitting in his room when I left him."

"You just—talked to him," Tina said. "It was a word he used that hit you in the face like that?"

She was direct, he thought, as he had thought before, and bright, and she kept her mind on what she wanted to know; and if she was afraid, here, alone, mixed up in something she didn't understand, nothing of the fear showed. "It was a very forceful word," he said gravely. Then he smiled. "I tripped and fell, coming out of the elevator. That's how this happened. I was clumsy."

"Johnny Bellanca," she said, "that's why Pete told the police he hadn't seen you." Her eyes watched him steadily.

He shrugged. "I can't convince you. I don't know the guy."

She said slowly, as if he had not spoken, "Maybe that's why I said I didn't see you, either."

"I give up."

"All right," she said. "Shall I tell them, then? The police, I mean?"

"They'll want to know why you didn't tell them last night."

"I'll take that chance."

He didn't feel at all like smiling, he told himself, and yet the smile appeared and he could do nothing to stop it. "You would, too, wouldn't you? You've got your back up—sparks shooting out of your eyes, the bit in your teeth—"

"Flattering, aren't you?"

"I meant to be." No more than simple truth.

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"I can imagine. You haven't answered my question."

"You're like a terrier," Ricci said, still smiling. "You get your teeth in something, and you won't let go."

"Have you any other animals I remind you of?"

He was silent a moment, studying her. "You're quite a . . . female."

"That's an answer?"

"No," he said. Then, "I can't stop you if you want to go to the police." Careless, he told himself, and clumsy, and in a position now where he was damned if he talked to her and damned if he didn't, because she was Antony's daughter and Antony was the one to fear. And again the guilty knowledge returned, coloring all of his thoughts, *I killed him. I told myself, convinced myself that what I did to him was done in anger, and by that much it was justified, but it wasn't true. I climbed down in the gutter with them, Lucca and Antony and the rest; I'm not any better than they are. I killed him.*

The girl's eyes had lost some of their bright anger. She said, "You told me that when you left the man, the one you talked to, he was sitting in his room. Is that true?" And she made a small quick movement with one hand. "Don't tell me I'm quite a female. Just answer me."

Ricci nodded slowly. "True," he said.

She was silent. She looked away.

"I can think it, can't I?" Ricci said gently.

"Think what?" She watched him again.

"That you're quite a female."

"I—" she began, and the anger appeared once more. Then it seemed to fade. "I can't stop you from thinking whatever you want." She paused. "Any more than you can stop me from going to the police if that's what I decide to do." She turned away, and started back for the house.

Ricci said, "I guess that's what you'd call a stand-off."

She gave no sign that she had heard.

Antony sent for Ricci shortly after nine o'clock. He was at the large desk, neat and quiet, nothing in his face or his eyes.

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"Close the door. Sit down." Then . . . "You were a busy little fellow last night, weren't you?"

"Was I?"

"I ask a question," Antony said, "I want it answered. Lucca called me. The hotel manager had called him. So you'll know where we stand."

Ricci nodded. *I killed him*—and he put the thought aside, substituted another: *I can kill myself if I don't watch it, by putting myself in the same position Pierre was in.* He said, "I went down to the hotel. I had a few words with Leclerc. He was all right when we left him."

"You know what happened to him," Antony said. "How do you know? You saw him on the sidewalk before you left?"

"No," Ricci said. "Your daughter just told me. She didn't know who it was on the sidewalk, but it figured that it had to be Leclerc."

"Why?"

"His window faced the street. He'd had some drinks, maybe too many. He probably had another to straighten himself out after we'd gone. He had a gun, your daughter said, and he'd have been able to see us, Gino and me, walking out of the hotel." He went through it all, chapter and verse, as he had reconstructed it during the night. He had Tina to thank, he thought, that now he was able to do without the pretense of ignorance.

"Why did Tina tell you?"

"She saw me, going into the hotel, coming back out. She—"

"She didn't tell that to the police."

"No." He paused. "Not yet." And he could not know if she was going to.

"You got yourself marked up," Antony said. "And they're looking for somebody like that, somebody who had to hold a handkerchief to stop the bleeding."

"I suppose so," Ricci said.

"A woman on the street saw you. Then she saw Leclerc. The police have her now. You weren't very smart."

"No comment," Ricci said.

"Don't get smart now." There was a moment's silence. "He's

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dead, and you didn't mean to kill him. You couldn't care less—is that it?"

"That's it." He made himself say it, enlarge upon it. "Lucca wanted him shut up. He is shut up now He isn't going to tell anybody anything."

"A tough kid," Antony said. "Not as smart as you think you are. Just tough."

Ricci shrugged. *I killed him; I'm no better than they are*—it echoed and re-echoed in his mind.

"And what do you think happens now?" Antony said.

"I wouldn't know." The prickling feeling began, moved slowly up and down his spine, into his scalp—tiny mice feet scampering over a grave. "I made a mistake," he said, "and so I'm hot."

"So was Leclerc," Antony said. "And for the same reason. Now, as you say, he's shut up for good."

"I don't need a picture."

"I think you do," Antony said. "I'll draw you one." He paused. "You were seen going into the hotel, and coming back out. You'd been in a fight; your face is marked. Leclerc's dead. Maybe he fell out the window. Maybe you pushed him. The cops will want to know. Even if you didn't push him, they'll still want to know why you were there, what he was to you, why the trouble up in his room. They'll want to know where you live, what you do over here, when you came over, and why." He paused again. "And if they find you, they'll find Gino, too, and maybe in some ways you're a real bright boy and they won't get any answers out of you; but Gino isn't that bright, and he won't be able to make up anything that will stand examination."

"We weren't in his room," Ricci said. "We went to see somebody else, have a drink with a friend of ours. I tripped and fell down, maybe coming out of the elevator—the elevator operator can remember that."

"Half smart," Antony said. "You opened the door to his room. You closed it again. You wore gloves?"

"The handles won't take prints. They're carved, fancy. I've thought of that."

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"And you didn't touch anything else? Gino didn't?"

It was the weak spot again, and Anthony saw it just as clearly as he did. "I don't think so. I don't remember touching anything. And Gino just stood there."

"You don't remember. Can you be sure?"

He took his time, knowing the answer, the only possible answer. "No," he said, "I can't be sure."

Antony nodded. "At least you're leveling. You're that smart. You can't be sure, and they'll go over the room from top to bottom, every piece of furniture, the walls, the doors, the picture, everything."

"Yes," Ricci said. "They will." The mice feet scampered furiously.

"And if they tie you to that room, it doesn't make any difference who you are, or who you work for—" Under the words his voice held a curious emphasis. "—you're their boy and they'll turn you inside out."

"So I'm hot," Ricci said, and they were right back at the beginning.

"You can say that again." The emphasis was gone; his voice was quiet again. "All right. Stay out of sight. Get the car out of sight. I'll tell you when I want you."

Ricci made no move.

"You don't like it?" Antony said. "Leclerc didn't like it, either." With finality, "I haven't made up my mind yet."

Ricci stood up slowly. "One thing." He watched Antony's head come up; the eyes watched him, waiting. "I told your daughter you didn't know where I'd gone last night."

Antony said slowly, "And what makes that important?"

"I'm just telling you."

"Why?"

This far he could go to protect the girl from seeing what Antony was, and no farther. He was Ricciardi Morelli, and he was in a spot because of his own carelessness; this was the way it had to look to Lucca and Antony; this was the way it actually was, because the spot was real, Randall's attitude on the phone last night had made that plain. And Ricciardi Morelli, as Antony himself had

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said, was a tough kid, in a hurry, traveling light, and he would have no thoughts for anybody else—not for Belle, not for Leclerc, not for Tina, only for Ricciardi Morelli.

He told himself this, but he thought, too, of the girl, standing straight and tall, facing him, confronting him with her directness and her honesty, young and over her depth in the middle of something she did not understand, but not trying to run away from it or even turn her back. Quite a female, as he had said. No matter. He said now, "No reason. I just told you, is all." And he turned away and walked out, closed the door quietly behind him. Antony did not call him back.

There was nothing he could do now. Antony had told him to stay around and stay out of sight—in case the police came out, Antony had meant, or anybody else. There was no way to telephone Randall, and he doubted if Randall could do him any good anyway. Again the tiny mice feet scampered wildly. There was nothing to do now but wait and see what Antony decided, play out the part and keep on playing it right up to the end. *Because I was careless,* he told himself. And, again, *I killed him. Even if it wasn't the way the police think, I killed him.* He could not escape that thought.

He went upstairs to his room and sat in a chair by the window. After a little time he saw Antony come out and drive off in his car to Lucca's house, probably.

From the windows of her room in the glass and stone house, Belle could see the drive and the porte-cochere. She watched Antony get out of his car, and she made no move from the bed, sitting there, smoking a cigarette, flicking ashes to the floor with small, angry movements.

Now, today, for the first time in her adult life, she doubted herself. Oh, it was nothing simple, like the old foolishness about good girls and bad girls. She knew respectable married women she wouldn't touch with a long pole, and she knew others who earned their living any way they could, which meant only one way, who could stand up and look anybody in the eye and mean it. It was

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more complicated than that, and she had never thought of herself as complicated.

She wasn't much; nobody'd get an argument if he said that, or thought it. She was Belle Larson, born Bertha Larson, and she could sing a little and dance a little, and people, men particularly, liked to look at her, and that was about it. She had heard, and read, about women who were called inspirations to their men, who helped them in their jobs, who shared their triumphs and their setbacks—and she wasn't sure whether she believed that or not; she supposed it could be so, but she didn't pretend to understand it. What she had she gave freely and without any idea of uplift—companionship, affection, a few laughs, the basic things between a man and a woman; this was the way it had always been, and had she short-changed anybody? Until yesterday, and last night.

Yesterday had been bad. The marks from yesterday's kicking-around, not the outward marks on her skin, her body, but the other, deeper marks, these remained and would not disappear . . . ever. Her anger was undiminished; the sense of shame, the resentment, strong and vindictive; the determination to do hurt in return for hurt to prove that she was not a nothing, that she was somebody the way everybody was somebody.

But now, shatteringly, she was not at all sure that she was—anything. Not after last night, which had been worse, far worse than a mere beating. After last night she could no longer look at herself, or even think of herself, with any kind of pride. Women who married detesting their men, and she had known some, wanting from them only money, or name, or position, living a lie and not minding it at all—toward these women she had never felt anything but contempt. And contempt meant that you put yourself above somebody, and she always had until last night. Now, facing it, she told herself that she wasn't above anybody; she was right down in the gutter, looking up at the world, and for the first time that she could remember she felt soiled. *Belle, Bertha Larson, how do you like it?* she asked herself.

Her door was open, and she could hear the sounds of voices, Lucca's and Antony's, coming faintly up the stairs. She didn't know what they were talking about; she didn't care; what they said to

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one another came under the heading of their own business—or, it always had. She sat where she was, alternately puffing at the cigarette and flicking its ashes on the floor at her feet. Then she heard Lucca's voice, raised suddenly in an almost angry question, "Ricci? That who you mean?" And Antony's reply was too quiet for Belle to hear.

Still she sat. You didn't peek or pry; you kept your nose clean. This was as much a part of her code as her pride in free-giving was. Or had been. Listening now, no longer passively hearing, she told herself that she didn't like people who sneaked any more than she liked women who lived lies, but the old standards seemed to have lost their clarity.

She stood up slowly. She put the cigarette out in the ashtray, delaying, giving the voices a chance to stop. But they continued, Antony's low-pitched, detached, calm, Lucca's argumentative, unconvinced. In her mind she told the voices to stop. But they did not stop. She let the scruples go; everything, but everything, was changed, she thought, and all because of yesterday and last night. She crossed the room quietly, went out into the hall, stood silent at the head of the stairs.

"I told him," Lucca was saying, "that I didn't want any mistakes. Okay. Maybe it wasn't his fault. It's never anybody's fault. But things don't get done right. He's marked up. He's hot."

"You told me," Antony said in the calm, detached voice, "that you wanted me to do your thinking for you." Always Antony, and only Antony, could talk like this to Lucca. Antony was, in a way, like a judge, or one of the priests Lucca knew, distant and calm, not like ordinary men.

Lucca said, "You been wrong before. You're wrong now. They'll pick him up—"

"They won't pick him up," Antony said, "because he won't be here. I'll take care of it. Tonight."

And Belle, listening, thought of Ricci, and of Lucca, and of herself. She felt fear; its taste was strong and bitter. *So, all right,* she told herself; *you're afraid*. Everything, but everything, was changed since yesterday, and last night.

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The aunt, Luisa, stood just inside the door of Tina's room, tall, thin, unyielding. She said in slow Italian, "The American is here, downstairs."

"Pete?" Tina said. She stood up, smiling, friendly. "Thank you."

The old woman's nod was faint, mere acknowledgment. She turned away.

"Please," Tina said. When the aunt had stopped and turned back into the room, "Have I done anything?"

The old woman was silent.

"If I have—offended you," Tina said, "I am sorry." Choosing the words carefully in the unfamiliar tongue, conscious of their stiffness and inadequacy. "If I have made a mistake, because of ignorance—" It was like talking to a wall or a statue. "Please," she said. "You dislike me. Why? Is it because I am American? Is it because he is my father? Can I be blamed for that? Or is it something else?"

"Why was your passport taken?" the old woman said.

"I do not know."

"They were not policemen." The old woman's lips were pressed thin, disapproving.

"I didn't know. I could not be sure."

"You doubted them?" The old woman paused. "And yet you gave them what they asked for."

"You were—there," Tina said.

The old woman's head moved in the faintest of nods. "But I did not know then who had sent them."

Tina's eyes opened wide.

"They were sent," the old woman said, "by Angelo Lucca." She almost spat the name. "Like Giovanni, he is one whom America sent away."

"I—" Tina began. She shook her head, disbelieving.

The old woman's faint smile was pure malice. "The large man, who is called Gino, was also sent by Angelo Lucca. He is stupid. He saw the two men who pretended to be policemen and recognized them. I asked him, and he told me."

"Then the other," Tina said, "Ricci—"

"He, too," the aunt said. "You should have stayed in America."

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She shook her head. "I had to come."

"Because Giovanni is your father?" Again the faint smile appeared. "Do you accept him as a father, as a daughter does, as a daughter should?"

"I don't know."

The old woman nodded. "Your American is waiting."

"He is not mine. He is just a friend."

"And yet you go with him, to the city, at night, alone."

"But that—" She stopped there. Explanation was impossible.

"That is the way it is done in America. Is that what you were going to say?"

"It doesn't mean anything."

"To Americans, does anything have meaning?"

"Please listen—"

"Giovanni's daughter," the old woman said. She turned away then, and this time the girl did not call her back.

Pete Jenner was standing in the entrance hall, tall and easy, smiling, when Tina came down the stairs. He waved at the marble busts in their niches. "They leer at me. That one in particular—" he pointed "—has a very nasty leer."

"I've noticed," the girl said. She felt relaxed. *With my own kind,* she thought. And yet it was not entirely true; between herself and Jenner there were vast differences, vague so far and almost formless, but real. She could laugh with him, joke with him, and this was good; the differences lay deeper. There was about him, not a weakness, but, rather, a withdrawal, as if he stood on the sidelines, watching, always watching, never allowing himself to become involved. "Maybe they only leer at people with guilty consciences," she said, smiling.

"About last night, you mean?" He shrugged, unperturbed.

"Why didn't you tell the police we had seen—Ricci?" What the aunt had told her had changed everything, she thought. Or had it?

"Why didn't you?" Still easy, he shrugged again. "No sense in getting mixed up in it. We were having dinner. Why spoil it?" Then, "Nice day. New country. I want to walk around, look at things. I could use an interpreter." He paused. "I make it a point always to buy lunch for my interpreters."

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"That's an invitation?"

"You like things made plain, don't you?" He was still smiling, but his eyes and his tone were serious. "The direct type, no evasions or half-truths. I'll try to remember that." Then, "Scoot. Do whatever females do when they're going out."

"They look at themselves in the mirror," Tina said. "They collect bag and gloves. Then they take their time, just to make sure the man is kept waiting." Smiling, "Now you know."

Jenner nodded gravely. "And the man waits."

"If he doesn't, then you know he didn't care enough. Simple as that."

"You win either way." And again the nod. "The man waits, if the girl is worth waiting for."

She was silent, unmoving, watching him; and his smile spread slowly. He said, "I keep forgetting that you like things made plain." He made a sudden small gesture almost of embarrassment. "You are worth waiting for." He watched her turn then and run up the stairs, young and light and lovely. *Are you getting serious, boy?* he asked himself. And he glanced around the hall. All of the statues seemed to leer.

Tina looked at herself in the mirror. She collected bag and gloves. In the hall she stopped for a moment, indecisive. Then she turned, away from the stairs, and walked down the hall to Ricci's room. She knocked, heard his answer, opened the door.

He rose from his chair when he saw her. She said slowly, "My father isn't here, and I am going out—"

"And you want me to tell him," Ricci said. "I will."

"I don't want to worry him." ("Do you accept him as a father," the aunt had said, "as a daughter does, as a daughter should?")

"Sure," Ricci said.

She stood there, unmoving. "You told me that he didn't know where you had gone last night? Is that true?"

"He didn't know."

"Because Angelo Lucca had sent you?" She watched his eyes widen a trifle. "As he sent you here?"

"Well," Ricci said. Then, smiling . . . "Well, well."

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There was determination in the girl's face. "My passport was taken. You knew that?"

His smile disappeared. "I didn't know."

She took her time, standing there, trying to judge him. "I see." She turned away, closed the door, walked purposefully to the stairs and down.

"You hardly kept me waiting at all," Jenner said. "It was no test."

Tina said slowly, "Yesterday you asked the porter at your hotel to find out where I lived."

"That change of pace," Jenner said. "Yes."

"Can we go there, to your hotel? I want to find out where somebody else lives." She paused. "His name is Lucca, Angelo Lucca. I want to go see him."

Ricci sat down again by the window after the girl had gone. He thought about her passport briefly. Lucca had taken it, probably for reasons of his own. And the girl knew about Lucca. No matter. He had enough worries of his own. Waiting—he disliked waiting; and yet waiting was a major part of his job, and he had, actually, done little more than wait for over a year. But not like this, sitting at a window watching for Antony's car to return. This was different, much different. This was the kind of waiting that wore a man down.

Because of a mistake—his own fault or not it made no difference—he was now in the same position Leclerc had been in yesterday. And Leclerc was dead. It was possible that he was killing himself by sitting here, waiting.

Nothing prevented his going downstairs and walking out of the house, driving into the city, to Randall, to safety, now, before Antony came back. Maybe Antony would be alone and maybe not alone; maybe he would return with his mind already made up, and Lucca's, decided that there was, after all, only one way to keep a man quiet, for good, and the sooner it was done the better. Maybe this, and maybe that.

He saw Tina and Jenner come out of the house and get into the taxi that had been waiting, drive off down the hill. Antony's daugh-

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ter. Which was a funny thing, a man like Antony having a daughter like that. And Pete Jenner had not changed a bit in these last few years; he was still a nice guy, with charm and no seriousness; irresponsible, or he wouldn't have come out here. Randall must have told him enough to let him see that it wasn't a friendly game Johnny Bellanca, now known as Ricci, was playing.

Randall. Ricci knew, could see in his mind, how Randall would look, sitting at his desk in the small office, waiting, always waiting and never letting the waiting bother him, the blue eyes calm, the heavy hands with their fine reddish hairs immobile, controlled. And there would be no censure in Randall's eyes if he, Ricci, were to walk into the office now; he would understand; he had said to be careful, hadn't he? And a year was a long time, a year of tension; maybe a year was too long.

He stood up suddenly, walked across the room and back. Lucca didn't like him, he told himself; because of Belle, Lucca didn't like him worth a damn, and so, in a sense, the year was wasted anyway. Particularly after last night. Lucca wouldn't trust him again; and for all this time he had played his part, run small errands, kept himself in line, done what he was told to do, when he was told to do it in order to win only one thing—Lucca's trust. So what did he accomplish now by waiting? What use was a dead hero?

Face it, he told himself. *You can do one of two things: wait it out, or run. Just make up your mind.*

The water of the bay was bright and sparkling beyond the sloping hill and the lemon trees; the sky was blue. Out there in the city people were doing a multitude of things, for a multitude of reasons.

Nobody had to do anything, he told himself. People said they did, but it wasn't true. People said they were forced, but they weren't, except by themselves. You did something because you would rather do it than accept the alternative; it was as simple as that. You chose one action because it was less distasteful than the consequence of not doing it. You waited, for example, because you would rather do that than run. That was all there was to it.

He wondered whether he would remember this later, after the waiting was done, and he decided that it was unimportant whether

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he did or did not. The idea served its purpose now, and that was all that mattered.

He was sitting quietly at the window, almost but not quite relaxed, when Antony's car turned off the shore road and started up the hill. And he was still sitting there when the maid, Maria, appeared at the door. "The *signor* has returned. He wishes to see you."

He nodded. "Thank you, Maria." He watched her smile shyly before she turned away. Here we go, he thought. He walked down the stairs.

In the taxi driving up the hill toward the glass and stone house, Jenner said, "I hope you know what you're doing. Do you?"

"I'm not sure," Tina said, and this was no more than simple truth. She felt keyed up, but the determination was strong and steady.

"You know about this—Lucca?"

She made herself smile. "I read the newspapers, like anybody else."

"That's what I was afraid of. And still you want to walk right up to his front door and spit in his eye." He told himself that what he felt was not fear. And he added silently, *Merely a reasonable facsimile thereof*. He looked at her. "He took your passport and you don't know why, and you want it back, just like that. 'Mr. Lucca, sir, you cad.' " And then, "That isn't very funny, is it?"

"I'm sorry, Pete. You stay in the car."

"Now you shame me. Knight sits on his big fat white horse while lady in distress has at the dragon barehanded." He shook his head. "What if he says no?"

"Then I'll go to the police."

"You're a frightening female. Heels dug in, ears laid back—" He stopped there. He pointed. The house was in full view now. He said, "My God. Out of Miami by Hollywood. Somebody's dream gone mad." He leaned back in the seat. "I'll go in with

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you. Maybe he'll shoot me first." Tina's smile and the touch of her hand on his arm, he told himself, made it all worth while.

There was a maid. Tina spoke to her in Italian, listened to her answer. The maid held the door. Tina said, "Mr. Lucca isn't here. But his wife is."

They crossed the large living room, following the maid. Beyond the glass wall the pool and the terrace were plain. Belle was there, lying in the sun. Jenner said, "Um, his wife?" He hesitated. "Maybe we'd better—" But Tina did not pause.

Belle sat up as they came out on the terrace. She wore one of her Bikinis, two tiny wisps of fabric scarcely concealing anything and she saw, with a small flicker of resentment, the disapproval in the girl's eyes; she saw, too, what was in the man's mind, not disapproval, as plainly as if it were printed on his forehead. She made no move to rise, merely sat there, outwardly calm. Her mind was not at rest, merely quiescent, the sense of fear temporarily suspended. Until tonight, she had told herself, there was nothing to do but wait, and behave normally for Lucca's benefit—or try.

"My name—" Tina began. She stopped there. "My father is Joe Antony." She felt at a disadvantage. This was a beautiful woman, no older than herself; and the body that she flaunted was slender, but full and rounded, lovely, well worth exposing with pride—but, really! It was not prudishness that she felt, not outraged innocence, she told herself; it was closer to jealousy. Which was ridiculous. And it was as if the calm eyes, unabashed, looked into her mind and read her thoughts and found them amusing. Which was unfair.

"I didn't know Joe had a daughter," Belle said. She looked at Jenner.

"I'm just a friend," Jenner said.

Tina said, "Mr. Lucca—"

"He isn't here."

"I know," Tina said. She thought, *We look at each other this way, like two strange cats, because there's a man present—as simple as that, as basic.* "I came for my passport," she said bluntly, almost angrily.

Belle shook her head faintly. "Come again?" She watched only

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the girl, seeing and understanding some of the thoughts that were in her mind. Jenner, she ignored. "Spell it out for me."

Tina took a deep breath. She felt unaccountably awkward, young. "It was taken," she said. "Yesterday, by two men who said they were policemen, and weren't."

Nothing changed in Belle's face. "So?"

"They were sent by—Mr. Lucca."

Belle picked up a package of cigarettes. She took one, lighted it, leaned back on her elbow. All of her movements were graceful, almost lazy, like a cat stirring in the sun. The two tiny pieces of the Bikini left her almost naked, of which fact she seemed unaware. "Joe said that?"

"No."

"Ricci, maybe?"

Jenner said, "You know Ricci?"

"Naturally. We're—great friends." Her eyes did not leave Tina's face. "He sent you? To talk to me?"

"It was my idea," Tina said. "And I came to talk to Mr. Lucca."

"I don't know anything about it," Belle said.

"He has it."

"If you say so."

"And I want it."

Belle was silent.

"If I have to," Tina said, "I'll go to the police."

"To some people," Belle said slowly, "that's a dirty word."

"It isn't to me."

"You don't want advice, I guess," Belle said. "But maybe you'd better talk to Joe, or to Ricci." She made a small gesture with her shoulders. "Call it a hint, between us girls."

Tina said nothing.

"All right," Belle said. "You're a big girl. I know the feeling. Excuse it."

Tina said, "You're trying to be nice. Thank you—" She stopped there. *She thinks I'm being sarcastic,* she thought helplessly.

In the silence, Jenner said, "Maybe we'd better go, let the lady go on with her sun bath."

Belle looked at him. Her face was blank. "Nice of you to stop

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by for a look," she said. She lay back. "Take your time." Her eyes closed.

Tina looked at Jenner. He shrugged, turned away, started back into the house. Tina looked down at the girl again. "I meant it," she said gently. "You were trying to be nice. Thank you."

Belle opened her eyes. She looked after them, the girl and the man. She closed her eyes again. She had not known there was a girl in Antony's house where Ricci was staying. And now that she had seen her—no matter. "Tonight." She whispered it to herself. "Tonight."

Outside, in the taxi, Jenner said, "Now what?"

"I—don't know," Tina said.

Jenner felt relieved. "Lunch. We're tourists again." Then, smiling, shaking his head, "So she knows friend Ricci." And the smile was very broad.

"You don't have to smirk," Tina said.

Antony was alone in the library when Ricci came in. It was impossible for Ricci to tell what he was thinking. But the waiting was over now; that was the important thing. Ricci sat down.

Antony said without preface, "The police are still holding the woman who was on the street, who saw you and Gino; they don't want anything to happen to her. And they've been over Leclerc's room for fingerprints; we don't know if they found anything or not. They're watching the ships and the airport. Leclerc had a record in France, but they still want to know how he was killed, and why."

"He fell out the window," Ricci said. The prickling, crawling feeling had begun again up and down his spine. But the waiting was over, he told himself, and mere tension he could stand.

Antony seemed not to have heard. "Lucca thinks you're dangerous. So do I. We try to hide you out, here or in town, and sooner or later the police will catch up with you. Maybe before your face heals; maybe not. But even if it is healed by the time they find you, somebody'll remember seeing you the way you are now." He spoke in the uninflected, detached voice.

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Ricci said nothing.

"You've got a passport, but we try to get you out of the country, and we might as well send you to the police in the first place and not waste money buying a ticket." He paused. "My daughter saw you last night. She told you that. Somebody else saw you, too. Did she tell you that?"

Slowly he nodded. "The big guy who was at the ship—Jenner."

"Yes," Antony said. "The one who thought your name was Bellanca. And he didn't tell the police, either. But he may, either the police or somebody else."

"He had his chance last night."

"He may change his mind when I talk to him."

"I don't get it."

"So you don't," Antony said. "I told you before you aren't as smart as you think." He was silent, watching Ricci's face.

Now it comes, Ricci thought; *the judgment. So far it's been mere background.* But he let himself show nothing.

"You're a tough kid," Antony said. "I don't *know* if you can ever be useful again. Lucca doesn't think so. But I'm running things, doing his thinking for him, and I *think* maybe you can, if you don't try to get smart. I don't like trouble when it can be avoided. If I'd known about Leclerc last night, what you were going down to do to him, I'd have stopped it, or tried. There are other ways."

Ricci let himself show a little of the relief he felt; he didn't mind in the least the faint lift at the corners of Antony's mouth.

Antony said, in the same detached voice, "The law says a dog is allowed one bite, that is, one mistake; he's not allowed a second. You've had yours, even if it maybe wasn't your fault."

"I hear," Ricci said.

"You'd better," Antony said. "We'll give you a car, not one that can be traced to me, to Lucca, to anybody. You bought it yourself; the registration will show that. You'll get it tonight, and then you're on your own. If you're caught—"

"I won't be caught," Ricci said.

"No, if you're even half-smart, I don't think you will. If I did,

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I'd agree with Lucca—you'd be better off out there in the bay." He paused. "I hope I'm right."

"Where do I go?" Ricci said. "You have some place in mind?"

Antony nodded. He put on his glasses, pulled a book to him and opened it, his eyes on the pages. "Genoa. Or near there. There's a little town, a fishing village, and maybe you can be useful there."

It was pure luck, Ricci told himself, that Antony was not watching him, because he had allowed himself to be caught unaware, unready, and his face must have showed something. He had his mask swiftly in place again. "Genoa," he said, and he hoped that his voice sounded natural, with no triumph in it, no jubilation. "That's where I thought I was going yesterday morning, before Lucca sent me here." *And this afternoon,* he thought, *sitting upstairs, waiting, I almost threw in the sponge and ran.*

Antony pushed the book across the desk. "Here's the map. Take a look at it." His finger pointed. "There's the fishing village."

The village was close to Genoa, a city of size and a seaport. It was also not far from the French frontier. Ricci digested this automatically. He was conscious of Antony watching him. And he was thinking that this, his goal of more than a year, was being handed to him, as it were, on a platter. *Because I made a mistake, I get what I've been trying to get all along.*

Bending over the map, his face expressionless, he wondered whether it was too easy, whether maybe it was intended to look so good to him that he would not question his luck. Antony was deep, he told himself; Antony, not Lucca, was the one to fear. A car—in order to get him out of town? On a lonely road somewhere, maybe, where if something happened to him there would be no suspicion directed back here? Or was he seeing shadows again? He didn't know.

He looked up. He made himself smile at Antony. "Tonight," he said.

Antony nodded. "That's right." And that was all.

Ricci had left the library, and Antony was alone again, sitting quietly at the large desk. He took off his glasses. He closed

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the road atlas. So now he was committed, he thought, and he wasn't sure whether he was glad or sorry, whether he had been smart or stupid. All he knew was that he had done what he had to do, and that was that.

Jenner had called him a philosopher; he remembered this now for no real reason. He wasn't a philosopher, that was the wrong word. But sometimes he did tend to see things in broad outline; by some obscure mental process adding together the small acts and events and motives, and seeing them all as part of a whole, a combination of forces, seeing, even, the eventual, and final, results. Like now.

From the beginning there had been a sort of inexorability to everything that had happened. The beginning had not been yesterday morning, but a long time ago, years ago; the real beginning had been down in the street where he and Lucca had lived as kids, where Lucca's old man had kept the pushcart and, later, the grocery store, where his own father had mended shoes. He and Lucca, right from the start; this was where the pattern had begun; and everything that had happened since had been inevitable, right down to joining Lucca again. He had thought that he was going into it with his eyes open. So he had been wrong. He wondered whether he was wrong again now. It was too early to tell. Lucca was the imponderable.

He didn't underestimate Lucca. He knew him thoroughly, and he respected him. No, respect was not the word; what he felt toward Lucca was what he had felt once standing outside the bars of a tiger's cage and imagining the animal in its own habitat, governed entirely by its cravings of hunger, thirst, sexual desire, discomfort of heat or cold, magnificently competent to take what it wanted, without scruples to hinder or even to give it pause, strong enough to kill anything that could catch it, cunning enough to avoid what it could not kill. This was Lucca, and there was no one word to describe him in Antony's mind.

And yet, as part of the pattern, as a result of the combination of forces, he, Antony, had chosen defiance, not open but all the more dangerous for being concealed. He refused to examine his motives for the choice; maybe they were sound, maybe unsound,

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maybe as simple as mere stubborn refusal to be pushed, maybe far more complicated and having to do with Tina and more than twenty years of—what he had been doing, and atonement for it, or partial atonement. The motives were important only if they existed; and they did exist.

So now Ricci was going to Genoa because of Antony's choice. And maybe Ricci's name was Johnny Bellanca, and maybe it wasn't, but Antony was inclined to believe that it was. Jenner would know, he thought, and he did not doubt his ability to pry confirmation, or non-confirmation, from Jenner, without Jenner's knowing it. And if Ricci's name was Bellanca, there were two possibilities: that he was merely a tough kid who had changed his name for no important reason; or that he was a great deal more than a tough kid, that the change had been for a compelling reason, that he was playing a part and working, as Antony himself was working, to destroy Lucca. If the first possibility was true, then sending him to Genoa lost Antony nothing; if the second possibility was true, Antony gained a great deal. And so he had gone to some length to persuade Lucca.

Sitting there in the big room of the fake Florida house, he had argued logically, keeping his voice patient, refusing to rise to Lucca's temper. "Sure he's hot," he had said. "No argument. And if the police find him—"

"He's marked," Lucca had said. "Isn't he marked?"

"Yes."

"Okay. He's dangerous."

"Leclerc was hot, too," Antony said. "He wasn't marked."

"He was known."

"And so you tried to have him shut up." Calmly, logically, in the detached voice. "You could have given him some money and seen that he got on a ship. That would have been the smart thing to do."

"He could have come back."

"Why? He was scared. You could have told him what would happen if he did come back—and he would have believed you."

"Maybe."

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"But you tried to do it the other way and it blew up in your face. That's why we're sitting here talking about it now."

"You think I could know that he'd fall out the window? You and your big brain. Would you have known?"

"That," Antony had said, "is my point—you couldn't have known. You started something and you couldn't see how it would end. Are you going to make the same mistake twice?" That had been the clincher, but still the argument had gone on, switching to ways and means.

"I don't want him in Genoa," Lucca had said. "If he falls over his own feet, that's the last place I want him, right in the middle, where the stuff comes in and then goes out again."

"Name a better place," Antony had said. "He's not known there. He's an American tourist—"

"Then get him out of the country, put him on a boat the way you think I ought to have put Leclerc on a boat."

"From here? With a bandage on his face?" He had paused. "Maybe from Genoa, where nobody's looking for him, but not from here."

And Lucca had sat silent, sullen.

"There's another reason for Genoa," Antony had said. "If he gets in any trouble there, if the police are looking for him—and I don't think they will be, but if they are—then you—we—can get him out of the country from there."

"How?"

"Same way the junk goes out, across the frontier into France, at night. He turns up in Paris. Who connects him with here?"

"Maybe."

"All right," Antony had said. "So we can't. We can, but say we can't. There's just as much water up at Genoa as there is here, and it's just as deep if it comes to that." He had made himself say it, although violence had always been repugnant.

Lucca had said, "He just drives out of town, like anybody else, drives all the way to Genoa and nobody sees him—he's invisible?"

"He drives at night, all night tonight. Who stops him? By morning he's way up, Florence, maybe, and who's looking for him there? An American tourist. Cut himself shaving—"

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"If it's that simple," Lucca had said, "why not keep him here?"

Patiently: "The woman saw him. And she saw Gino. Keep all three of them in the same town and you're asking for trouble. Sooner or later they'll run into each other."

"All the answers," Lucca had said. "Like a quiz kid." Then, in sudden anger, "Okay. Take care of it any way you want. That's what I've got you for, isn't it?"

"That's the way I heard it," Antony had said quietly, allowing no triumph to show.

"So okay. But this time I don't want any mistakes."

"There won't be any."

Thinking of this now, remembering this now, Antony hoped he had been right. There were risks, of course, but he thought that they were not insurmountable. Ricci was a smart boy. He hadn't been very smart last night, but maybe he'd learned something from that. He wouldn't want to be picked up by the police, and with any luck he would not be.

But if they did pick him up then he, Antony, was gambling. If Ricci was only what he appeared to be, it would be bad if the police got him. If he wasn't, if his name was Bellanca and he was over here working for Lucca for a purpose, then he would have connections; and the local police would talk to Ricci *and* his connections, and they would believe what they were told—that Leclerc had fallen all by himself, and then the police would turn Ricci loose, and Lucca would never know.

So it was a gamble, but it was a good gamble, Antony thought; and nothing in life was a sure thing. And once Ricci was in Genoa, in the middle, as Lucca had said, then he, Antony, could see to it that Ricci learned everything: where the junk came from, how and where it was landed, how it went, step by step across Europe and, finally, to the States . . . how and where and when and by whom. *As soon as I find out myself,* Antony thought, *he'll find out, too.* But it would have to be carefully done, and this was a bitter concept.

He, Antony, could see both sides of a problem; this was, had always been, both his strength and his weakness. Strength, because the ability to put yourself in another man's place let you under-

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stand how he would think, react to a given situation, and you could, therefore, plan accordingly. Weakness, because the understanding of both sides tended to rob you of the singleness of purpose, even the blindness, that was necessary to carry out any plan. A Lucca acted without thinking; he, Antony, thought—and could not, then, act without hesitation.

And in this ability to see and understand both sides, lay the bitterness. *I have to outsmart the kid; even if he is what I think he is and we're working for the same goal, I have to outsmart him, make him think he's outsmarting me, because otherwise he wouldn't believe anything I told him. To him I'm Joe Antony, only that.*

He sat quietly at the desk, and the bitterness was strong. This was the way Tina saw him, too: Joe Antony, a face and a name out of a newspaper column, a public enemy, deported for cause. *You're the brain,* he told himself; *let's see you figure out how to change this.*

A man was what he had made himself, and there was no changing. The pattern of each life continued, repeated itself, because the combinations of forces were always the same. Sometimes a man struggled, tried to break the pattern, even convinced himself that he had changed—but it was nonsense, really. He saw this now with sudden clarity. *I won't break out.* With luck, he might accomplish what he wanted to accomplish—Lucca's destruction. But he would never break out into the life he had thought he had, only yesterday, sitting here in the library, looking out of the window and seeing the white ship in the bay—before Ricci and Gino appeared. That life wasn't for him, ever.

And in this moment, sitting there, it was as if he could see ahead, read what was already written in the big book—Lucca's destruction, and his own, too. He faced it quietly, objectively, feeling no particular fear, merely a regret that that was the way it had to be, because that was the way it was.

It was dark. The big car, Antony's, drove without haste, skirting the city, Luigi silent at the wheel. Antony sat on the right side of the rear seat; Ricci on the left, the bandage on his face

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toward the inside. "Sure you're getting a break," Antony said. And this, too, he could see, and understand—Ricci's skepticism, even his anticipation of a trap. "You're getting it because, like I told you, I don't do things the hard way when I can help it. Lucca tried it the hard way last night, and look what happened."

Ricci tried to weigh the reasoning. But the doubts remained. He said nothing. There had been no chance to leave the house, get to a telephone, call Randall. There was nothing that Randall could do, it wasn't that; he, Ricci, had made his own decision to take his chances, play his part until he could be sure one way or another, and if, when he found out what Antony really intended, it was too late, why, that would be too bad. But he would have felt better if he had been able to let Randall know what he was up to.

Antony said, "Napoleon is supposed to have said that he didn't want good generals, only lucky ones. You weren't lucky last night. You weren't very good, either. Maybe you learned something. Do it the way I told you, take the roads I told you to take, don't drive so you'll attract attention, not too slow and not too fast, and I think you'll be all right."

"The main roads," Ricci said.

"Why not? You go off on a side road, try to get smart, and you'll wind up dodging donkey carts, the only automobile for miles around. Every village cop will take a good look at you just to make himself feel important."

"I hear," Ricci said.

From the front seat Luigi said, in Italian, without turning his head, "We are being followed, *signor*."

"So," Antony said. There was no change in his voice, in his manner. And then, "Continue. No faster." And, in English again, to Ricci, "You were at the house all day. Any cops?"

"I didn't see any."

Antony repeated the question in Italian to Luigi. "No, *signor*. I think I would have seen, if they were watching the house. We were not followed when we drove to the house of *Signor* Lucca, nor on the road back."

"How long has this car been behind us?"

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"Who knows? There were many cars on the main road before we turned."

"All right," Antony said. "Continue. No faster." He looked sideways at Ricci, seeing his face only dimly. "Any ideas who they might be?"

He had already thought of Randall, and rejected the possibility; Randall would stay clear. The mice feet were scampering furiously up and down his spine, and he thought, *Lucca, of course. It was a trap, after all. And I walked into it.*

"I asked a question," Antony said.

If he's acting, Ricci thought, *he's good.* But he had gone this far, and he refused to throw in the towel now. "No ideas. Unless —" He paused, not really wanting to believe, or even to say, what was in his mind.

"Say it," Antony said.

"Tina," Ricci said slowly, "your daughter. She could have gone to the police. She was in town."

"With Jenner," Antony said. "Yes." He was silent for a moment. "Luigi."

"Signor?"

"We will not go to the garage. One block, two blocks before the street of the garage, turn quickly, turn again, as fast as you can, we need only a moment when the car behind cannot see us."

"Understood, *signor.*"

"And you get ready to jump," Antony said to Ricci. "We'll go on. Maybe they'll follow us. The car's ready at the garage. You're on your own. Don't forget your suitcase. You're a tourist." And then, "Don't look out the back window. They can't be sure there are two of us. Just get ready to jump."

Ricci sat quietly, his suitcase in his right hand, his left hand on the door latch. He was aware that Antony watched him in the dim light, that Antony's face was expressionless, the face of a gambler watching the wheel spin and the little ball roll slower and slower. The big car had not accelerated; it rolled smoothly, unhurried, and the darkness seemed to flow past.

Antony's voice said quietly, "This next corner, Luigi."

"Understood, *signor.*"

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And, to Ricci, without inflection, "You're carrying a gun?"

"Yes."

"Give it to me. Cops don't like tourists with guns."

He held tight to the handle of the suitcase and the door latch. He made no move. "I'll take my chances."

"No, you won't," Antony said. "How do you know they're not cops? You don't. And neither do I. But who else would they be?" Sitting there, unmoved and unmoving, as if he were talking in his own library. "I told you to play it smart." He held out his hand.

Luigi's shoulders made a small, hunching movement, and the engine of the big car roared suddenly as he tromped on the gas. The car jumped ahead, swung into the first turn, accelerating, skidding with its new momentum. The tires squealed on the pavement. Antony's hand held the strap on his side; Ricci leaned against the door. "The gun," Antony said. "You can't be picked up with it on you." And in the same quiet, uninflected voice, but in Italian, "Left at the next corner, Luigi."

"Si, signor." The darkness rushed past now, with its own hollow sound.

Ricci said slowly, "Here." He was Ricciardi Morelli; he was not playing a part, he told himself, he *was* the part, all the way or not at all. He put the gun in Antony's hand. His fingers left it reluctantly, returned to the suitcase handle.

"Good luck," Antony said, as they skidded into the second turn, leaned, straightened, slowed immediately to stop.

Ricci had the door open. He was not conscious of taking a deep breath, but he supposed that he had. He jumped into the darkness, landed running, stumbling, the weight of the suitcase destroying his balance. There was a low curb, and he got his feet over it. There was a building wall. It brushed his shoulder. There were low weeds and rocks tangling his feet, and he let himself go down at full length, fighting to relax his body as he hit.

Behind him he heard the car door slam and the car engine accelerate again, its wheels spinning with power. He lay still, hugging the dirt and the weeds and the rocks; and he felt, rather than saw, the lights of the car behind coming around the corner. He tried not to breathe as the car approached. It went past without

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slowing. He allowed himself to look. The car reached the next corner, slowed, seemed to hesitate, and then turned left and disappeared. Antony's car was nowhere in sight.

And then, lying there, he could breathe again, great gasps of cool night air. Slowly he got to his knees, stood up. His legs were trembling. He brushed himself off, picked up the suitcase, started to walk.

Antony still had the gun in his hand. He pushed it down behind the seat cushion out of sight. He sat quietly, his face composed. "The car has followed?"

"*Si, signor.*" Then . . . "No. It has stopped. It is turning now."

"Turning around?"

"No, *signor*. It has turned at the last street. Toward the garage."

There was nothing he could do, Antony told himself. Ricci was on his own. If they, the police, somebody—if they were waiting for him, they were waiting for him, and that was that. He said quietly, "We will go home." His face showed nothing. Only his thoughts continued, plaguing him. He felt old, tired, inadequate.

The new car was there, in the garage, small and bright and shiny, with tourist license plates and proper documents in the glove compartment. Ricci got in. He sat there for a moment. There was only a mechanic in the place; he had peered at Ricci's passport, stared at the picture and at Ricci himself, and beyond that shown no interest. He stood at the large front door now, and he heaved it open. The street looked deserted. *Here we go,* Ricci thought. He drove through the door, heard it close behind him.

And in the shadows of the building he saw a movement, heard a voice, a woman's voice, familiar. "I was afraid I'd missed you." The voice was not quite steady. "And that would have been a fine kettle of fish." Belle, with a small suitcase in her hand, wearing a coat, her bright bare head clearly visible even in the darkness. Her voice was still unsteady. "Would you give a girl a ride?"

He had both hands on the wheel. He made them relax. He felt weak, drained. "Where?"

"Where you're going. All the way." She was close now, standing

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at his elbow. She said, "I ought to laugh, make it funny, tell you that girls come in handy sometimes for—lots of things." She shook her head. "I'm fresh out of funny. I—lost it all, standing here, waiting, thinking maybe you'd already gone."

"You were in the car behind," Ricci said.

"A taxi. He said he spoke English, and he did—a little. But he couldn't understand I wanted him to stay close, and then we lost Antony's car." She shook her head. "I saw the garage, and I—hoped it was the right one." She stood motionless, waiting, all of the Belle-like assurance, even brashness, stripped away.

Ricci said, "You've left Lucca."

"Yes."

"You're running."

"Yes."

He felt a sudden, unreasoning anger at her, at himself. He said, "So you come to me, put me in the middle."

She nodded the bright head slowly, solemnly. And, for the third time, she said simply, "Yes."

"Damn it," Ricci said, "what do you think I'll do? What do you think I can do? I'm not God." *I'm Ricciardi Morelli;* it repeated itself in his mind, *Ricciardi Morelli*. And Antony's words came back to him, too, out of his memory: "A tough kid, in a hurry, traveling light—" With, now, the break he'd been waiting for for over a year, the break he didn't deserve: Genoa.

Still she stood there, merely watching him, waiting.

He made his voice gentle. "I would, if I could." *I did it once before,* he thought; *I walked out on her and left her there alone, and I've got to do it again*. "I'm sorry, Belle. You and Lucca—" He stopped there. Despite himself his voice turned harsh. "I told you you were poison."

"Yes." Slowly, "I guess I can't blame you." She straightened her shoulders, seemed to straighten her entire body. Her face changed, produced a sort of smile. She stepped back from the car, and she made a small, odd gesture with her free hand as she turned away into the shadows and the darkness.

He could hear her footsteps. He said, "Belle." The footsteps did not stop, or even slow.

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He sat motionless, both hands on the wheel, gripping it hard. Then, abruptly, savagely, he opened the door, jumped out. He ran after her, caught her in the darkness, turned her around. "Damn it," his voice was not loud, but its bitterness was plain. "You didn't even argue. You knew if you just turned and walked off I'd come after you. You knew that, so you did it that way."

There was only silence.

"Come on," Ricci said. He walked her back to the car, tossed her suitcase into the back seat with his own; almost shoved her into the front, closed the door. He went around to his own side and got in. In the dim light of the instrument panel he could see her face. She was not looking at him. She was staring straight ahead, motionless, and as he watched, two tears appeared and rolled slowly down the sides of her nose, and still she made no move.

His anger was gone, spent. He said softly, "You didn't know. I was wrong." He put the car in gear, pulled slowly away. He put out his hand, found hers; it gripped his, and he was surprised at the strength of her fingers. "I'm sorry," he said.

There was a car, a bright red sports car, long and low and shiny, parked in the drive in front of Antony's door. Luigi looked at it with professional admiration; Antony's face was a mask. He walked into the vast entrance hall. It was empty; the busts in their niches staring from their lifeless eyes. He put his hat on a table, walked to the library, pushed the door open.

Lucca was in one of the large leather chairs. He wore a light tweed jacket now, and a small foulard scarf at his throat. He was smiling, showing the small dimple-scar in his cheek. He looked at ease. Tina was leaning against the desk. Her eyes were bright beneath the heavy eyebrows, her shoulders were back, her chin was firm, almost square.

"You're just in time, Joe," Lucca said. He seemed amused. "We were having a little—talk." He paused. "About a passport."

"Mine," Tina said.

Antony walked around the desk. He sat down. He folded his hands in front of him. It was no time for anger, he told himself,

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but it was there, nonetheless, crowding up into his throat, prickling with tiny electric shocks at the back of his neck. He said in the quiet, detached voice, "Passport."

"I told her I haven't got it," Lucca said. "Now you tell her, Joe."

"Two men yesterday—" Tina began. She stopped there. She shook her head stubbornly. She had turned away from the desk; she faced them both now. "I went to Mr. Lucca's house this afternoon. He wasn't there. I talked to—a girl, an American—"

"And she said I had it?" Lucca said. Antony, watching, knowing the man, saw the subtle change in the soft brown eyes; they seemed to cloud like a summer sky when a thunderstorm approached.

"No," Tina said. "She said she didn't know anything about it." She paused. "I believed her."

"Tell her, Joe," Lucca said. "I haven't got it."

The girl watched Antony steadily. He said without inflection, "If he says so." And he watched the girl turn without a word, and walk across the room and out. The door closed. Antony looked at Lucca. "Now," he said softly, "where is it? It's time we settled that."

Lucca still smiled, but the cloud in his eyes remained. "You don't talk to me that way, Joe. Nobody does."

Antony said nothing.

"You hear what I said?"

He remained silent, unmoving.

Lucca said, "Don't ever try to get tough with me, Joe. Just remember that, and we'll get along fine." He seemed to relax a trifle. The smile came and went. "I said I haven't got it. I haven't. She took it." And now the anger was plain again, and ugly.

"She," Antony said.

"Belle." The word itself was a malediction.

"She walked out on you," Antony said, and he made himself think about this, concentrate on it, put the other, the sight of Tina turning away from him, out of his mind. He said quietly, "You asked for it, Angelo."

"Because I kicked her around?" He shook his head. "I told her that she'd wish she'd never been born. She will. Nobody walks out

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on me, Joe. Nobody takes what I have. Nobody—" His voice had begun to rise, and he checked it, mastered the violence he felt, forced it down. The smile spasms stopped. "Forget that. It's my business. I'll take care of it."

"Then?" Antony said.

Lucca nodded. "Business, eh, Joe? Always business. You're right." And he seemed to settle himself in the big chair. Even his eyes now were normal again. "She walked out while I was in town, talking to a couple of . . . friends. One is from Athens, one's from Istanbul. We do business." His smile this time was pure amusement. "They're my suppliers. Like General Motors, I have to start with raw material."

"Opium," Antony said. He nodded.

"You know about it, Joe?"

"Enough."

Lucca said, "You're a smart fellow. You always were. What you don't know you find out about." He smiled again. "Were you going to be President someday, Joe?"

"At least," Antony said. "Only I got sidetracked." His tone said nothing. "You made a deal with your suppliers." He paused. "A big deal, or a little one?"

"Why, Joe?"

Antony said, "That's why you came here, isn't it?" And then . . . "You think with your stomach sometimes, or with your fists or your feet—or a knife, or a gun." He raised one hand in a brief silencing gesture. "I've said that before, Angelo. We both know it's true. That's why you need me." He was walking a tightrope, he thought, treading the narrowest of lines that separated anger and respect in Lucca's mind. He had done it before; he could do it again. His face was calm and composed; his voice, like that of a judge on the bench or a priest behind the screen of his confessional, was dispassionate, removed. "You make little shipments, Angelo. And each little shipment, by itself, runs almost no risk at all."

"Go on," Lucca said.

"But you add all the little risks together, and then you have trouble. You lose a man here—Leclerc. You lose a shipment there

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—like the other night. You try to change your routes, and pretty soon you've used them all up, and you can't use any one of them again. Then you're finished."

"Words," Lucca said. "Forget you used to be a lawyer." But there was no anger; and the respect was not far beneath the surface.

"Put it this way," Antony said patiently. "You've got a tip, a sure thing in the eighth race. What do you do? Set up an eight horse parlay?" He paused. "Or do you save your money, not let it dribble away, and bet the whole roll on the race that will pay off?"

Lucca took his time, the soft brown eyes contemplative. Slowly he nodded. "Okay. You've sold me." He smiled. "My—friends both said the same thing. I told them I wanted to think about it."

"You want me to talk to them?"

Lucca shook his head. "You're going to be busy." His smile appeared, full-blown, dimpling the tiny scar, exposing the white, even teeth. "Niarhos and Kemel—it sounds like a dance team, eh, Joe?"

"Vaudeville comics," Antony said. He repeated the names in his mind, engraved them there. "You said busy."

"Genoa, Joe. Where else? You're a brain, but you can't sit here and see all the answers."

Antony stayed in the library for a few minutes after Lucca had gone. One part of his mind was satisfied, even pleased—Genoa, and a big shipment, soon, a week, ten days Lucca had said. He could ask for no more than that. *Niarhos and Kemel,* he thought. The names would be useful to Ricci, if Ricci had got away all right. He closed that part of his mind as if it were a drawer in a filing cabinet.

Belle had run out. She had taken Tina's passport—he believed Lucca in this; he told himself that he knew the man well enough to know when he was being cagey and when he was not. He wondered where Belle had run to; but he couldn't know. Unless—he sat quiet, examining this new idea, weighing it—unless Belle had run to Ricci. They had been friendly. And Belle could have heard this morning when he and Lucca talked; she could have known

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about the car and the garage; it could even have been Belle in the car that had followed him. So?

He considered the possibility and reached no conclusions, except one: If he had thought of this, it was possible that Lucca had thought of it, too; he did not allow himself to underestimate Lucca who sometimes achieved miracles of almost feminine intuition. And Lucca had not even asked about Ricci tonight, which might mean something. He told himself that there was no way of knowing, and that further thought was useless. He closed this second drawer in his mind.

And now he allowed himself to think again of Tina, turning her back on him, walking out of the room. What else could he have done but back Lucca up? You played your cards as they were dealt to you, and—but the cliché was old, shoddy, shopworn; it sounded false even to his own mind.

He pushed back his chair and stood up. He turned out the lights in the library. Slowly, with the old, tired feeling in him again, he crossed the hall and walked up the stairs. He started for his own room, and stopped. *Face it,* he told himself angrily; *don't let her sleep on it.* And he walked down to her room, thinking that she had been here two days now, and what had he done to get close to her? Nothing. Nothing at all. He had not planned it this way. In his mind, in his daydreams, he had built a lovely tall structure of reconciliation; the girl, shy at first, of course, but losing the shyness quickly, seeing him and understanding him, accepting him —forgiving him. Instead . . . *What else could I have done?* The thought echoed and reverberated like a chant in a hollow chamber. He knocked at her door, his face composed once more.

She was in a dressing gown, silk, shimmering, and her hair was tousled, and wonderful; her eyes were her mother's eyes, looking at him, searching his face, wise beyond their years. He thought how it might have been, a daughter grown, his daughter, part of him. He tried to smile. "That's—nice," he said. "The robe, I mean. They make them here, in Italy, weave the silk themselves. Did you know that?"

She could see into his mind, his loneliness, and she wished that it were not so. "I know," she said.

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"I can show you," Antony said. "The shops where they are, where they make them, design them. Other things, too, lots of things." He paused, almost afraid to put the question in words. "Would you like that?" And he held his breath while time suspended itself, stood still.

She didn't want to speak, to be forced to answer. The words seemed to form themselves. "Yes. I'd like that." Facing him, standing there, almost hating herself for her weakness.

"Whatever you want," Antony said. "In Rome there are dress designers, good ones, the best, and—and—" He shook his head. After all this time, he told himself, at his age, to be close to tears —like the old folks who wept at weddings and at family reunions, always wearing their emotions on their sleeves. When you are young, he thought, you do not understand these things. He said slowly, "I have never given you anything—"

"It doesn't matter," the girl said.

"I made a promise," Antony said. "Nothing—because I had promised. One picture, once a year, and a letter from George." With no return address on the envelope, lest the secret come out. "I—" he stopped there. He made himself look straight into the girl's eyes. "I'm sorry. For everything."

Slowly, standing there, her hands clasped loosely in front of her, feeling not young but strangely old, she said, "I'm trying to believe you, believe in you. But you make it—too hard." Then, quietly, "Good night."

Antony turned away from the closed door. He walked down the hall to his own room, let himself in. He was alone again. But he was used to loneliness, wasn't he? Wasn't he? His mind refused the answer he sought. And he thought, *When I was a kid, I prayed, knelt down by the bed and believed*. Now even that was gone. He looked at himself in the mirror, kept looking until his face was composed again. Then he began to undress. Maybe, he told himself, maybe in Genoa it would be different.

They were not yet clear of the city. Ricci drove carefully, without haste. Belle sat quiet on her side. Her tears had been brief; and the reaction, the terrible feeling of fear at being left behind,

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had finally subsided. She had meant to approach Ricci lightly, but it had not worked out that way. What she felt now was a humility, a shame, and something deeper, much deeper—something akin to gratitude, but more than that. "I goofed, didn't I?" Her voice was low.

"You couldn't help it," Ricci said.

She said slowly, "Funny, you look at something from one side and it's fine; turn it around, or inside out, and it doesn't look so good." And then, "I'm sorry." Strangely enough she was thinking at this moment of the girl, Antony's daughter, standing there on the terrace, looking down and saying that Belle had tried to be helpful, thanking her for it. Little things like this stuck in your mind sometimes, changed everything. In a way, Ricci and Antony's daughter were alike; she saw that now. She said aloud, "You're a nice guy, a nice, sweet guy, that's what makes it a boo-boo. If you were like the others—" She shrugged, thinking of men she had known, of what she had come to expect from men. "—it wouldn't have mattered."

"Philosophical speculation," Ricci said, smiling, "from you?"

"Big words," Belle said. "But I see what you mean. It is a laugh, isn't it?"

"That wasn't what I meant," Ricci said.

She smiled to herself in the darkness. "Yes, it was. And I don't mind it. I'm not very bright. I know it." She shook her head, smiling still, mocking herself. "Bertha Larson, like it says on my passport. You don't really get away from what you are, do you?"

"Forget it," Ricci said.

They drove in silence for a little time. There were few cars on the road as they approached the city's outskirts. Belle said, "Your face, the bandage—they're looking for you, aren't they? The cops?"

"Probably," Ricci said. It was not a probability, he told himself, it was a certainty. And if he was picked up, his usefulness was at an end. He had been confident when he had told Antony that he would not be picked up. Now, actually on his way and faced with investigation, however cursory, he was not so sure. If the airport and the ships and trains were being watched, the roads would be watched, too; this would be standard police procedure. A man of

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his general description, with a bandage on his face, or, at least, a mark of some sort—this was what the police were looking for, and there was nothing he could do about it. "They won't be looking for an American," Belle said.

"Won't they? Why?" But, in a vague sort of way, he saw what she meant, and it was true. Americans were tourists, unpredictable, incomprehensible, doing strange things sometimes. Often they threw money around as if it were waste paper; they complained about unimportant things; they got drunk and obnoxious, loud, and spoke no language but their own and expected the world to understand them; they had an exaggerated sense of their own importance, and were, consequently, to the Italian mind somewhat childish. Oh, everyone knew about crime in America, shootings on the street in places like Chicago; American movies had made that clear. But the Americans who came to Italy were tourists, a breed unto themselves; from them one expected eccentricity, but not violence, not murder. "You may be right," Ricci said. "But if a cop sees my face—"

Ahead a light flashed, a small light, moving back and forth in a horizontal movement. Ricci began immediately to slow the car. Even before he saw the man behind the light, standing in the center of the road, and the second man waiting beside the two motorcycles pulled off onto the shoulder, he knew. "We'll find out now," he said, and the mice feet began their scampering between his shoulder blades.

"Who do you suppose those men are, honey?" Belle said. Her voice, quite suddenly, was almost petulant, querulous. "What do they want?" And she had moved close, quite close against him; her head rested on his shoulder. "Can't you drive with one hand?"

He wanted to grin, with the sudden admiration he felt. Instead, he put his arm around her, tight around her; her elbow clamped his hand and wrist against her firm softness. She seemed to raise herself in the seat, crowd against him; her hair brushed his bandaged cheek, covered it. As the car stopped and the policeman approached, raised his light, Belle said loudly, "Ask him what he wants, honey. Why is he stopping us like this? Tell him we're Americans."

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Ricci said in English, "What's doing?"

The policeman spoke Italian. "I am sorry, *signor*—"

And Belle leaned even farther across Ricci, to look at the man, her bright hair almost obscuring Ricci's face. "What's he saying, honey? Can you understand him?"

"Search me," Ricci said. Then slowly, distinctly, in English still, "What do you want?"

The policeman's face was a picture of frustration. "*Signor*—" He stopped there. His light swept into the rear seat, rested only a moment on the two suitcases.

"Show him your passport, honey," Belle said. "Maybe that's what he wants. They like to look at them."

Ricci got out his passport with his free hand. Belle still hung across him, her hair fragrant against his face, her forehead warm against his. He held out the passport in a tentative gesture. "This what you're after?" He watched the struggle in the man's face, the dicomfort beneath the stare of alien eyes.

"You may go, *signor,*" the policeman said.

Ricci almost, but not quite, moved. "Passport," he said. "Is that what you want?" His voice was overloud, and he spoke the word as to a child.

The policeman stepped back. He made a motion with the flashlight, unmistakable, indicating that they should proceed.

"Well, I never," Belle said. "He didn't want anything at all, honey."

"I guess not," Ricci said. To the policeman, "Okay?" And he pointed up the road.

"Okay," the policeman said. There was resignation in his voice, in his shoulders and his face. He moved the light again, almost urging them as the car pulled slowly away.

The roadblock was well behind them, and no one had followed. Ricci let out his breath in a long, soft sigh. His arm was still around the girl's body, still pressed tight. Slowly, even reluctantly, he withdrew it. "Like you said, girls come in handy sometimes."

"Sometimes," Belle said. Her voice was quiet again, no longer petulant, no longer querulous.

"Thanks," Ricci said.

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"Don't mention it." She moved away, to her own side of the seat.

"You—" he began. He stopped. "I said something wrong?"

"Of course not."

"Bertha Larson," he said, and he made it light, as light as he could, "thinks pretty fast." He could relax now, for the moment anyway. He doubted that there would be another roadblock, but if there was, with Belle in the car to play her part—

"Bertha Larson," Belle said, "still goofed. She's still poison, like you said." And she was silent for a moment. "Bertha Belle Larson —Lucca."

"We settled that," Ricci said. Nothing, at this moment, he thought, could dim the sense of triumph. He had made a mistake last night, maybe only one of many mistakes, but it had all worked out for the best. And he had spent time today, too much time, waiting and worrying about things that had not happened. He was clear of the city now, and he was headed for Genoa after more than a year of patience and tension.

"We didn't settle anything," Belle said. "I know him."

"You knew him when you made up your mind to walk out."

"Yes."

"Then?"

"I told you I wasn't very bright. Or maybe I just didn't care. I don't know. But you—" She stopped there. Her voice altered, picked up some of its old brashness. "Thanks for the lift. Like I said, you're a nice guy, and if I helped a little back there, then I can feel that I paid my way. Part of 't, anyway. Drop me off somewhere. I'll make out."

"Doing what? Going where?"

She turned to look at him.

"I'm going to Genoa," Ricci said. "Or near there."

"I know. I had big ears this morning."

"All right. We drive all night tonight. We stop over some place, Florence, maybe. Tomorrow night we're there and France isn't far, if you want to go to France—"

"I'm not very bright," Belle said, "but neither are you."

"So I'm not, but show me where—" He hesitated. He said almost angrily, and he could not have explained the feeling, "Look—"

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"I am looking," Belle said. "Drop me off."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Do you want me to?" he said quietly.

"Yes. No. What difference does it make? You said I was poison. I am. I—" She shook her head. She was silent for a moment. "I'm not very much. But I don't put people in the middle for me."

"The Golden Rule," Ricci said. "Do unto others—"

"You don't have to spell it out. I went to Sunday school once, pigtails and flour-and-water paste and pictures in a book and everything." She paused. "That's a laugh, too, isn't it?"

"I don't think so," Ricci said. Now, the anger suddenly fled, he could smile. "Except that it was maybe the wrong Sunday school, and the little boys were probably more interested in you than they were in anything else."

"Not then," Belle said. "Not until later." She was silent again, watching him still. "You haven't answered me why."

"You've heard of looking the gift horse in the mouth?"

Belle said, "I've given you a bad time right from the beginning, I didn't think about it. I didn't think, period. I'm—ashamed of it now. I—"

"Woman," Ricci said, "you talk too damn much." In the dim light of the instrument panel the bandaged cheek gave his smile a lopsided quality. "If you can't think of something cheerful to say, be quiet."

She was silent.

"You hear?"

"I hear." And she thought, *Way back, way far back, why couldn't it have been somebody like this who came along, instead of*— She stopped the thought right there, and forced herself to look it full in the face. *Nobody twisted your arm, Bertha. Bear that in mind.* Strangely, she felt better, able to sit straight and smile once more. "You're quite a guy. I've said that before, haven't I?" She felt like Belle again, in command of herself. She smiled again, slowly, lazily this time. "Okay, so I'll say it again." She paused, and the smile spread, became full blown, even a trifle mocking. "Unless it embarrasses you?"

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He saw the smile, heard the words and the tone. He told himself to be careful, but it was a distant voice dimly heard, and he could ignore it. "Not any more," he said.

The telephone connection was not good—like everything else in this country, Lucca thought. And Giulio on the other end of the line, in the little fishing village near Genoa, was not too bright to begin with, which merely added to the frustration. "I know he isn't there yet," Lucca said. "He's coming. He'll look you up. His name is Morelli, Ricci Morelli."

"When is he coming?"

"What difference does it make? You don't have to plan a celebration." Spell it out, draw a picture, and still they tripped over their own feet. Or got ideas, which was worse. He was thinking of Belle; she had not been out of his mind even for a moment. It was not mere anger that he felt; this was rage, deep, sullen, gnawing at his fiber, refusing to let him sit still. "You understand? And he may have someone with him."

"Who?"

"A woman."

"What woman?"

"Never mind. Just a woman."

"Very well," Giulio said. "They will be two: this man and his woman. You have a message for them?"

"Now listen to me," Lucca said. "Stop clicking your teeth and listen. The man is coming. He *may* have a woman with him. I don't know if he will or not, but I think he will. Do you understand that?"

"But it is simple."

"Yes," Lucca said. "There is no message. But if the woman is with him—*if* she is with him—telephone me."

"I understand."

"And say nothing to them."

There was a pause. Then, "Understood."

"That's all," Lucca said.

Giulio said, "How will I know if it is the right woman? You have not told me her name."

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"Her name is Belle."

"She is young? Old? Pretty? Ugly?"

Lucca said, "She is young. She is pretty." He slammed the telephone back into its cradle. He stood up. The scarf at his throat felt tight and he undid it, jerked it free; the silk burned the skin of his neck with the violence of the movement.

He crossed the room, stood at the glass wall staring out at the terrace, the lawn, the jewel-like pool shining in the night. He had warned her, which was more than she deserved. He had told her that she would wish she'd never been born. She would. What he wanted, he got; what he had, he kept; when he let anything go, it was because it was worn out, worthless. She would find this out.

She was young and she was pretty, he had said to Giulio. That face, that body she was so proud of—she should have thought of them before she walked out. He was Angelo Lucca, and she, she was nobody, nothing; she would be less than nothing before he finished teaching her her lesson—he, himself, in person.

The darkness had faded; to the east, above the hills, a single great star hung in the lightening sky. Belle watched it. They had driven all night, but she felt no sharp fatigue, merely a lassitude and a sense of calm, almost a wish that the night would not end. It was funny, she thought, that a day begun the way this one had begun could end on a note of peace, relaxation, even warmth. And she turned her head to look at Ricci; she smiled, and watched his answering smile. "Tired?" Belle said.

"Around the edges."

"I could spell you."

"No need. We'll stop soon. There's a town not far. I forget its name. It'll have an inn." In a way, he, too, wanted to delay the day, push the morning star back down behind the hills. He could not have said why, except that the night, for the first time in over a year, had passed without tension. Since the roadblock he had not once felt the scampering mice feet, or the tug of worry, or felt his mind turning back in time to examine, to search for mistakes. The night had been easy, comfortable. "You make a good passenger."

"Do I?" She smiled faintly. "I'm still poison."

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"Forget that," Ricci said, and his voice surprised him by its sharpness. He looked at her. "You hear?"

She looked away. "Tomorrow, or the day after, sooner or later—"

"I said, forget it. Tomorrow can take care of itself."

"Now who's making like a philosopher?" And the ease was between them again.

"Okay," Ricci said, smiling.

Belle said, "How did you get—mixed up with him?" And then, quickly, "It's none of my business."

Thinking of Lucca, Ricci said carefully, "I could ask you the same question."

"Yes." She said it tonelessly.

"But it's none of my business," Ricci said.

"No secret." She looked straight ahead as she spoke, conscious of the growing light, the peaceful night ending. "I danced. They called it that, anyway."

"I told you it was none of my business."

She ignored it. "Big town. Bright lights. Out front, the customers, visiting firemen on expense accounts, with their wives, eating eight-dollar dinners. Backstage, me, the rest of us—fifty dollars a week—same old story, pure corn."

Ricci was silent, watching the road. There was only the gentle, monotonous sound of the engine and the rushing wind.

"Nobody twisted my arm," Belle said.

He turned to smile at her then. "Where was the Sunday school you went to?"

"Kansas." Now she, too, was smiling. "If I'd been a boy, I'd have joined the Navy. If you're a girl, you go to New York. Same difference."

"You," Ricci said, "in pigtails." He shook his head.

"And what's wrong with pigtails?" She paused. "I cut them off. My mother cried. Big scene. I ended up crying, too, but it didn't change anything. No more pigtails, just skinny me."

"Skinny," Ricci said.

"Little-girl skinny. Some are fat. I wasn't." Her face was sober. "That's the way it was."

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"I ran away," Ricci said. "I was going to see the world. The ferries were still running then, and I got all the way to Oakland, clear across the bay, six, seven miles." He shook his head, smiling, remembering. "The biggest Irish cop you ever saw, desk sergeant, sent out for an ice cream cone, a double, chocolate and vanilla, he wasn't taking any chances. I broke down and told all. I'd never had a double cone before, chocolate *and* vanilla."

Belle watched him in silence. Her smile was gentle.

"Back in North Beach again," Ricci said, "my mother cried, my father cried, the neighbors came in and they cried." He paused. "I liked it. I was a hero."

Belle's smile spread. "You tried it again?"

"No use," Ricci said. "I'd seen the world. I'd—" He glanced at her now. "—cut off my pigtails." He looked away again, uneasy, almost embarrassed. "There's the town."

"Yes," Belle said. She glanced above the hills to the single star fading in the dawn sky. She watched it with regret, with the knowledge, long ago gained, that nothing could be indefinitely prolonged, that the good things passed too quickly, left you far behind, and you were powerless to delay their passage. Still you tried, and the certainty of other things coming, not good, made the effort all the more urgent and sweet. She looked at Ricci again. He was watching her. "So here we are," Belle said. "You don't like ice cream any more."

"I grew out of it," Ricci said. It was as if he could see into her mind and understand her thoughts.

"And I grew out of my skinniness?" Belle said.

"Yes."

"And tomorrow—"

"Tomorrow never comes."

Belle was silent.

"Here's the inn," Ricci said. He pulled up to the curb, switched off the engine, got out and took both suitcases from the back seat, closed and locked the doors, doing all this without looking at the girl. She stood quietly on the sidewalk, waiting. Together they climbed the steps and went inside.

There was a porter, sleepy and unenthusiastic. Ricci spoke to

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him in Italian, signed the register. The porter carried the suitcases up the stairs, along a hall dimly lighted. With a large key he unlocked a door, pushed it open, carried the suitcases inside and set them down. He accepted Ricci's tip, said his thanks, walked out again.

The room was large. Windows faced the hills, and Belle opened them and stood there, smelling the fresh dawn smell of woods and dew and distant smoke of a morning cooking fire; watching the sky, the star only faintly visible, conscious of herself, and of Ricci. *Two of us, alone,* she thought; *and tomorrow does come, it will come, and that will be the end.* It was a lonely realization.

Ricci said, "I told him we were tourists, American—" He paused almost imperceptibly. "—man and wife." He waited, but she made no move. He crossed the room, stood close behind her. "You don't need your coat." His voice was soft.

"No," Belle said, and she held her arms back, let him draw the coat from her shoulders. Still she stood there, her eyes on the sky.

"Hey," Ricci said softly. He touched her arm and she turned automatically, stood there facing him. "You heard what I said?"

"Yes." There was silence.

"I stayed away from you because I didn't want any trouble."

She nodded slowly.

"You were—Lucca's."

"Yes."

"Now you're not."

"Now I'm not." Repeating his words like a pledge.

Still he stood there, unmoving, and he did not know why. The girl watched him steadily. "Things work out," he said, "in the damndest ways." Then, "I talk too much, I guess."

"I hadn't noticed." They were of an age, she thought, and yet she was older, far older. *Maybe women always are.*

"It's been a long day," Ricci said, and he put out his hands then, caught her arms. She came to him, unresisting, even willing; and, holding her as he had held her in the car, he tasted again her fragrance, of hair and skin, felt her warmth. "You're quite a girl."

She said slowly, "No. I'm not." There were strange, almost

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formless thoughts nagging at her, and she tried to still them, but their strength was too great. "I'm not much. I've told you that."

"Now you talk too much."

She lifted her head to look at him, face him. "I'm just a—woman."

Slowly, gravely, "I've noticed."

She shook her head helplessly, wishing that the nagging thoughts would go away and leave her free. But they continued, even stronger. Against her own will she stepped back, and he let her go, watched her, frowning now. "You were wrong," she said. "Tomorrow does come. And the next day. And the ones after that."

"So they do?"

Not really understanding, she could not explain. "Maybe you're too nice a guy."

"That doesn't make much sense."

"Maybe I—like you too much."

"That makes less."

"It's my fault," she said. "This—you and me—here, now. I know it. I admit it." And the thoughts were gathering shape and form. "I was going to use you. To hurt him, get even with him."

"And?"

"I—don't want it that way. Not—you." She paused. "I'm not very proud of myself." Then . . . "Say what you're thinking. I won't argue."

He raised his hands again, caught her arms. She made no move. His hands dropped. He shook his head slowly. "Forget it." He turned away.

Long after the sun was up over the hills and the sounds of the day had begun, she lay awake, still fully dressed, the coverlet of the bed drawn up over her feet and ankles. Ricci was in the big chair, sprawled out, his shoes off; he slept, stirring gently from time to time, his breathing deep and heavy. She watched him, in a sense watched over him in silent vigil. *Maybe I like you too much,* she thought; she had said it and it was true. And maybe he had been right, too, that her behavior then made no sense.

You were what you were, she thought, and nothing could change

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that. You did what you had to do; and sometimes you did not allow yourself to do what you wanted to do more than anything; sometimes you gave most by not giving at all.

She supposed that somebody smarter than she was could explain the reasons for this: the doing or the not doing, giving or not giving, but she doubted that she would understand. Only one thing she knew for sure: not all of the explanations in the world, understood or not, could turn back the clock or alter a single thing.

At breakfast, sitting with the aunt and Tina, Antony spoke of Genoa. "Nice place," he said. "We'll drive, take a couple of days for the trip. You'll see a little of Italy." He spoke in Italian for the aunt's benefit.

Tina watched him, listened in silence showing neither acquiescence nor protest. The aunt said simply, "Why, Giovanni?"

"Do I have to have a reason?"

"Always you do have," the aunt said. "Perhaps she does not wish to go. The American is here."

To Tina Antony said, "A little trip. You'll like it, I think." And, in English, "We can start over again."

"Can we?"

Watching her, remembering the lovely tall structure of reconciliation he had built in his mind, he said, "I think so. I hope so."

"All right," the girl said.

Luisa watched them both, read the decision in their faces. "When do you leave, Giovanni?"

"This afternoon," Antony said. "Drive as long as we want." He felt a vast relief, but he let none of it show. In a sense, by denying any hidden reason, he had lied, and he admitted this; but he told himself that the lie was justified. He could not, would not, leave the girl here, alone, within Lucca's reach. To the girl again, "You can be ready?"

"Yes." She looked at the aunt. "You are coming, too?"

"No." Merely that, expressionless and final.

"The American," Antony said. "Jenner. Would you like to bring him? Somebody your own age, company." His sense of timing told him not to urge too much. "Think about it," he said. "Ask him, if

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you'd like. Maybe—" He was speaking in English again, unconsciously; he let the word trail off.

"Thank you," the girl said.

Antony stood up from the table. Looking down, seeing the gratitude in the girl's face, he allowed himself to hope a little. Maybe, despite everything, the trip would be the beginning of a new, different relationship. And afterward, when his job in Genoa was finished, driving back, to Venice, to Florence, to Rome, wherever she wanted and for as long as she wanted to stay, with no longer any tension, any worry or secrets between them——

He told himself that he was dreaming again, equating what might have been with what could be but would not. This was logic; and logic was a cold force, even sometimes, like now, somehow frightening. He put the logic aside. He could only try, and hope. "Maybe," he said, "you have some shopping you'd like to do this morning?"

Tina smiled. She was remembering his hesitation, his embarrassment when he had asked her if her room here had everything that she wanted, needed. She said in English, "Female-type preparation shopping, you mean? Something new, because there's a trip?" Her smile spread.

"I don't know much about those things," Antony said. He paused. "But I thought you might. Take the car, Luigi will drive you—"

"Thank you," Tina said again. She turned to the aunt. In Italian, slowly, "Will you come with me? To the city? Will you—guide me in the shops?" There was appeal in her face, her voice.

Antony watched, waited.

The old woman hesitated. Then formally, unrelenting still, "If you like."

Antony reached in his pocket. He took out his note case, opened it. He tried to keep his face composed, but it was hard to conceal the eagerness he felt. He took out a sheaf of notes, large lira notes, and he held them out, looking now at the girl's face. "Please," he said. Again, "Please." He watched the girl hesitate almost as the aunt had hesitated, and then nod quietly. He laid the notes in her

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hand and turned quickly away lest what he felt should burst out and embarrass them all.

It was almost a repetition of the scene that first afternoon, Jenner thought. He sat on his bed in the hotel room. Randall, short and stocky, with his sandy hair and the reddish mustache, the broad thick hands resting immobile on his thighs, sat on the straight chair by the writing desk. His intensely blue eyes watched Jenner steadily as he talked. "I told you about Bellanca, because there wasn't any other way. You'd seen him. I tried to protect him."

"I haven't seen him since," Jenner said.

"Not true. You saw him that night, at the Hotel Apostle."

"Accident," Jenner said. "I didn't talk to him. What difference—"

"You were there with Antony's daughter," Randall said. "You went straight out to see her, you must have, as soon as I left here."

"So?"

"Bellanca was staying there in the house. You knew that."

"I did," Jenner said. "So?"

Randall said slowly, "Tact isn't my business. Maybe I rub you the wrong way. I can't help it."

"That I can believe," Jenner said. And then, "The girl, Tina, Antony's daughter or not, is my business."

Randall said nothing.

"I'm not trying to be ornery," Jenner said. "You're trying to do your job, and if you had it your way everybody would stand back and let you do whatever you thought best. You have a point. But I have a point, too. I'm the public, the—" He smiled briefly. "—free citizenry, if you like, the thing authority is always getting itself tangled up with."

"You talk like a lawyer."

"I am a lawyer, not that it makes any difference. I'll co-operate, within bounds."

"But you won't stay away from the girl, and from Antony."

It was then that the telephone rang, and they both looked at it for a moment as if it were a strange voice intruding into the con-

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versation. Jenner picked it up. He spoke his name. Tina's voice said, "I'm going to Genoa. This afternoon. With—my father." Her voice was not strained, but there was in it a quality of determination overriding embarrassment and reluctance, and the result was almost brusque. "He told me to ask you if you'd like to come with us."

Jenner looked at Randall. Randall's eyes watched him steadily. Jenner said, "That's very generous."

There was silence. Then, "We're driving. Two days, he said. He wants me to see—"

"You're galloping off the reservation," Jenner said. "He told you to ask me?"

"Yes."

He waited, but she said no more. He began to smile. "I guess I've got to ask for a conclusion of the witness. How do you feel about it?"

"I—" She stopped there. He could almost see her smile, relax. "Will you come, Pete? He sees it himself—somebody my own age, is the way he put it, somebody to keep me company." She paused. "Somebody to help out in the silences. Can you understand?"

"Yes," Jenner said.

"Will you come? That's the invitation direct."

Randall sat unmoving, watching steadily. Jenner said, "Yes. Love to come. I'll think up bright quips. I'll be witty. I'll—"

"Thank you, Pete." And the brusqueness was gone now.

He hung up slowly, turned back to Randall. "You heard?"

"I heard," Randall said. Nothing in his face or in his manner had changed. He stood up. "I can't stop you."

"No," Jenner said, "you can't." He was silent. "I'm sorry."

Randall shook his head. "You're in love with her."

Jenner merely looked at him.

"That," Randall said, "always complicates anything." He crossed the room, stopped there with his hand on the door knob. "Do you know where Bellanca is?"

Jenner frowned. He shook his head.

"Genoa," Randall said. "Or he will be by the time you get there. I tell you that so you won't be surprised when you see him." He

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paused. "I guess that's all I can do." He closed the door behind him.

Here, on the Ligurian coast, not far from Genoa, the scenery was changed. The hills seemed stronger, somehow harsh, promising mountains only just beyond sight; their slopes dropped abruptly into the sea.

Ricci drove; Belle sat quietly. No one had stopped them or even noticed them on the road; all the way from the inn where they had rested, the trip had been without incident, and yet, somehow, the peace and the relaxation of the night drive were missing. *Because this is the end of the road,* Belle told herself; and knew that this was only a part of the reason.

From time to time she glanced at Ricci. In sleep, only this morning, his face had seemed young, even boyish. Now it was altered, not angry, but blank, controlled, and older—too old.

Ricci said, "Money is first. You have enough? To go where you want to go?" He told himself that he was looking forward to the ending of—responsibility. "Do you?"

"I brought a few things to hock."

"What kind of things?"

"A couple of rings. A bracelet." Her jewel box had been full, but she had taken only these.

Ricci glanced down at her hands. She wore no rings, and this he had not noticed before; always, at Lucca's house, she had worn jewelry—diamonds, he remembered, and a large square emerald, these in particular, gifts from Lucca who liked to look at them. No matter. She had taken them off for reasons of her own. "That means Genoa," he said. "There'll be somebody there to buy them."

She said nothing.

"You know where you're going?"

"Don't worry about it."

"France would be best," Ricci said. "It's close. From there, you can decide."

"Yes."

"Back to the States, if you want, or anywhere." He paused. "You can go back to the States? There's no trouble about that?"

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She remembered telling Lucca that she had her passport, that she was an American, that she could go where she wanted, and she remembered his reaction. For a moment she felt again the fear that was almost panic. She checked an impulse to touch her cheek where he had hit her. She said, "No trouble."

Ricci said, "I don't know Genoa. I've never been there. But there's a man I'm supposed to see, and he'll know where you can go to sell your things."

"If you say so. Thanks."

"Forget it," Ricci said. But he couldn't leave it like that. "You don't owe me anything. You paid your way just by . . . being along. Somebody to talk to. If there's any thanks, it's on my side."

"That's one way to look at it—backwards."

"I was coming up here anyway," Ricci said. "And if I'd run into that cop alone—" He shook his head. He didn't know why it was necessary that he convince her, but the feeling was strong that he had to. "We're all square." He turned to look at her. "Aren't we?"

She was smiling faintly. She nodded. "All square."

"Okay," Ricci said. "We'll stop at the village and I'll see this character." He felt relieved. "His name's Giulio. How many do you suppose there are in Italy?" And he was smiling. "Like in the States, I guess, mothers name their kids after big people and hope it will do some good—Andrew Jackson Franklin Ike Julius Caesar Brown. Or something."

"It has a good solid ring to it," Belle said. And she thought, *He doesn't even know I'm alive. Not really. And last night, this morning I could have—but I didn't.* And, again, *Nobody twisted your arm.* "With a name like that," she said, "Junior ought to go far."

"For a fact," Ricci said. All the way from the inn, he thought, he had been dreading this time of settlement. And now it had come, and gone, and there had been no awkwardness at all. He did not think of himself as particularly superstitious, and yet there were patterns to events sometimes, cycles of good luck, and bad. For over a year his luck had seemed mediocre, and then, suddenly bad, and now, within the last thirty hours or so, incredibly

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good. Who knew how these things worked; and who but a fool would question them?

The village straggled up from the edge of the sea. There were fishing boats hauled out on the shingle beach; in the dusk they could see nets drying on racks. The center of the village was an open space, a village square, and there were two small hotels and three cafés that Ricci could see, and a gasoline pump sitting out by itself in solitary splendor. He left Belle in the car. He found Giulio in the second café.

Giulio was not alone; there were half a dozen men, fishermen, and a loud game of cards and blue tobacco smoke and the sour smell of wine. Giulio was a small man, with bowed legs and big shoulders and a pinched, cunning face. He followed Ricci outside, into the dusty street. From the café the sounds of card playing and talk and laughter began again. "You are Ricciardi Morelli," Giulio said. It was clear that he wanted no mistake.

"That's right. I'm going to be around here for a while. Joe Antony sent me."

Giulio nodded. "I was told that you were coming." He looked at the bandage on Ricci's face. He said nothing.

"The hotel—" Ricci began.

"Both hotels are good. Both are safe. The entire village is safe." He paused. "Now."

Now that Walther was dead, killed, Ricci thought. This was something he wanted to ask about, pursue, but he made himself wait. "First," he said, "I have something I want to do, some jewelry to sell—rings, a bracelet."

Giulio said slowly, "It is your jewelry?"

"A friend's." And he smiled. "It isn't stolen."

Giulio appeared to be thinking. "Here, in the village there is no one—"

"Maybe you know somebody in Genoa?"

"That is a different thing." And again he was silent, thoughtful. "It is possible. I will have to ask, find the name of a man."

"When?" Ricci said.

"Tomorrow perhaps—"

"Tonight. Now."

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"No," Giulio said. "Tonight—" He spread his hands. "—it is too late. Tomorrow I will see if I can find out." There was stubbornness, finality in the voice.

"All right," Ricci said. "If that's the best you can do. I'll be at one of the hotels here."

He walked back to the car. Belle's bright head watched him, clearly visible in the half-darkness. He got in on his own side, sat for a moment in thought. He had a vague uneasiness, and he could not explain it. There had been nothing odd about Giulio's attitude; it had been precisely what he might have expected from a fisherman in a village that existed on fishing and a few tourists in season and smuggling—an attitude of cunning, and normal peasant reluctance to be pushed, no more than that. And Giulio had accepted him, had said that he had been expected. Still——

He started the car, switched on the lights. He told himself that he was seeing things again, worrying unnecessarily, as he had worried about Leclerc's death and Antony's decision, as he had worried about the car following them to the garage and the possibility of a trap, as he had worried about the roadblock, and, most recently, about the . . . settlement with Belle. A man could drive himself crazy shying at every possibility, every shadow. "We're going to Genoa," he said to Belle. "We'll find a hotel for you for the night. Tomorrow I'll call you from here and tell you where to peddle your loot."

"Anything you say." Her voice was subdued.

"Everything's all right," Ricci said. "Everything's fine."

She made no answer. They rode in silence all the way into the city.

Ricci chose a large hotel, well lighted, obviously expensive, safe. He went with her to the desk, and stood by while she registered. He sent her suitcase upstairs with a porter. "Now," he said, "I'll buy you a drink." He was smiling again.

"Should you be seen like this? Here, right out in the open?"

His confidence had returned, his conviction that his luck was on the flood. He had her arm in his hand, and he squeezed it gently, urged her toward the bar. "You know about good-luck charms?"

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he said. "A horse player carries a rabbit's foot. A gambler has his lucky numbers."

"Yes."

"You seem to be mine. It took me a little time to realize it. As long as I'm with you, nothing can happen." And then, "Nobody's looking for me up here. I'm just an American tourist."

"I'm not a good-luck charm."

"We'll argue about that over a drink."

"I don't want a drink. I might do something—silly."

He looked at her in surprise. "Like what?"

"Who knows?"

They looked at one another in silence. Ricci said slowly, "If that's what you want."

"Don't get mad. Please."

"At you?" He shook his head, smiling again. "No." He hesitated. "You have enough money for tonight?"

"Yes."

Again there was a pause.

"Well," Ricci said. "I'll call you tomorrow."

"Thanks."

He held out his hand. "Good luck." He hesitated. "Good-by. Maybe some place, someday."

She nodded silently. And then, "Come here." She rose quickly on tiptoe, her face lifted. Her lips were soft, warm against his mouth. "Good-by," she said. "And—thanks." She was gone across the lobby, walking quickly, almost running.

He turned slowly away and walked out to the car.

The telephone connection was bad again. "He is here," Giulio said. "He wears a bandage on his face. He looks American."

"That's the one," Lucca said. And then, "The girl is with him?"

"There was a girl in the automobile. Young, pretty, blonde."

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know. They drove away."

"Well, where did they go?"

"To Genoa, perhaps. I don't know."

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The rage and the frustration were almost too much. He began to swear in English, ugly, vicious words going out over the line. And then, abruptly, he stopped. "What did you say?" In Italian again. And he listened carefully, sorting the words from the crackling of the phone.

"He has jewelry to sell. It belongs to her, I think. He will return here to the village tonight. Tomorrow I will tell him where he can sell the jewelry—"

"That," Lucca said, "is different." He relaxed in his chair. He was smiling now in spasms, the dimple scar coming and going in his cheek. "That is much different. Good for you, Giulio."

Gino rode in the front seat with Luigi, the chauffeur; Jenner, Tina, and Antony in the rear. It was the morning of their second day, bright, clear, pleasant. Gino and Luigi talked in quiet voices, as they had talked almost from the begininng of the trip, and Antony listened to them in idle, relaxed amusement. The subject was, and had been all along, wine; and the terms of the discussion changed, waxed and waned from the general to the specific, but the basic disagreement remained, running like a thread, a motif, throughout all of their words. To Antony it was restful.

"You are from the south," Gino was saying, as he had said before. "The south is soft. The sun is always shining and there is no snow, no real mountains."

"The people of the south are soft, you are saying?" Luigi said.

"We are talking of wine."

"True."

"The wine of the south is soft, like a woman—"

"It is not sour, if that is what you mean."

"—but the wine of the north, of Piedmont, my country, is a man's wine. Barbera—"

"Barbera, Barbera, Barbera," Luigi said. And Antony in the back seat smiled to himself. "I have tasted it. My mouth was puckered for days. To compare it to Lacrima Christi, to mention it in the same breath with Lacrima Christi—"

"Barbera," Gino said, "is a man's wine."

Jenner, sitting on the far side of Tina, said, "Who's ahead in

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the argument?" He enjoyed watching Antony's face. Occasionally, rarely at first but now with increasing frequency, Antony's mask lifted, and the depths of the man showed, in solicitude and affection for Tina, in amusement at something Jenner said, in honest appreciation when the turn of the road opened a new view, a panorama of water and trees and ancient land.

Antony said, "No knockdowns yet." His voice was quiet but the corners of his eyes crinkled and seemed to smile. "He—" He pointed at Luigi. "—is sort of a Fancy Dan, a gymnasium boxer, dances around, good left hand. The other one keeps moving in, throwing both hands."

"Fights from a crouch?" Jenner said. "Hooks, maybe? Likes to work inside?"

Antony nodded. "I'd have to give him a little the best of it on aggressiveness. But not much. A good close bout."

Tina had not thought the trip would be like this. She had feared stiffness, awkwardness, and there had been none. From the first moment, at Jenner's hotel, while Gino and Luigi rearranged the luggage in the trunk and on the roof of the big car, there had been nothing but ease between her father and Jenner. They spoke to one another as equals, not as what they were; she had tried, and failed, to detect condescension on either side. She felt out of it, alone in a man's world, not resentful, merely bewildered.

Jenner said, "And the shoes are new, too?" Then, smiling at the girl, "Yours. Or aren't you on our wave length?"

Tina held her legs straight out, rotated her feet. "Like them?"

"I do," Jenner said gravely. "Offhand, I'd say you were an expensive-type female."

"So?" She watched him, smiling faintly.

"No complaints."

"My aunt went with me." She looked at Antony.

His mask was in place again. "You seemed to get along pretty well."

"We did." She had not broken through the barrier of the old woman's stiffness, but a little of the harsh disapproval had seemed to melt as they went from shop to shop, looked at this thing and that, handled, dicussed, even haggled, when necessary, over price.

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Antony said, "She never married. I don't know why. And Italian women need marriage." He paused, and the mask dropped, his eyes crinkled at them both. "Maybe all women need marriage. I'm not much of an authority."

"She must have been pretty," Tina said.

"I thought she was," Antony said. "She was my favorite when I was a little boy. I think I was hers." The crinkles disappeared.

"Then you went to America," Jenner said.

Antony nodded. "She was going to come, as soon as there was money." The smile this time was a trifle bitter. "As soon as my father was rich, the way everybody was in America. It didn't work out quite that way. He mended shoes, same as he had done in the old country."

"I didn't know that," Tina said.

Antony looked down at the girl. "Now you do," he said gently. "Are you ashamed of it? He was a good man."

Jenner said, "The first time my grandfather saw my grandmother, she wasn't wearing shoes. She'd worn them out walking—Missouri to California. There wasn't room in the wagon to ride." He knew why he had said it, and yet the fact that he had done it was somehow surprising. *There's a lot to him,* he thought, looking at Antony; *he's a lot of man, whatever he's done*. He added silently, *And she's a lot of girl*. And that made him think of Randall standing in the hotel room telling him that he was in love with Antony's daughter, making a statement of it, no question. *Maybe I am.*

Tina said, "Why should I be ashamed? I just—didn't know."

Antony said, "You were born on Mott Street. A hospital would have been too expensive. Do you know Mott Street?"

"I've been there."

Antony nodded. "It's changed. It was pretty much Italian then, and most of the old people didn't ever bother to learn English." He was silent for a moment. "They couldn't ever shake off the dream, I think, that they'd get rich somehow, and then go back home. Even when they knew it was only a dream they wouldn't give it up, maybe not most of them, but a lot." He paused again. "The kids didn't see it that way. The only part of the dream they saw, some of them, was the get-rich part."

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And the girl said, "Was that why you—" She stopped there.

Nothing changed in Antony's face. His voice was quiet, detached, patient. "Not exactly. Not completely, anyway. It's a long story." And this, he told himself, was not the place or time to tell it. He had his mask in place again, and he searched his mind for something else to say. He was grateful when Jenner switched the subject.

"How's the bout going?" Jenner asked. "Still even?"

Antony listened. Luigi was saying, "It is a remarkable thing. People, men like yourself, come down from the north. They talk of the wonders of their own country, the beauty of their mountains and their women and their wine and their music. But never, never do they seem to go back to these wonders. Tell me, why is that?"

"Fancy Dan," Antony said, "has decided he'd better carry the fight or he'll lose on points. His corner must have needled him. He's throwing them real good."

Gino's voice was low, rumbling. "Maybe some of them do. Maybe some day I will go back, to stay."

"To your mountains," Luigi said. "To your sour wine."

"Softly, little man," Gino said. Then . . . "Yes."

"It looks," Antony said, "as if we're approaching some sort of climax." He switched to Italian, rapid, authoritative. "Discussion, yes; argument, no." And he watched some of the tenseness go out of Gino's heavy shoulders. In the silence, he closed his eyes for a moment. He was, in a sense, approaching his own climax, he thought. Yesterday, and this morning, he had put Genoa and Lucca and Ricci out of his mind, concentrated his attention on the girl and Jenner, mostly on the girl. And he had no way of knowing whether he had been able to reach her; in this moment he was afraid to open his eyes and look at her face. Genoa was coming soon, too soon. Thoughts of Genoa and of Lucca hung like clouds in his mind.

His face was composed. He opened his eyes. "Hungry?" he said to them both. "We'll find a place to stop for lunch." *And afterward, we'll go on,* he thought; *the trip will end, and everything will be changed.* He was committed, and there was no way now of turning back.

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All morning Ricci had waited, but Giulio had not appeared. It meant nothing, he told himself, and yet the uneasiness he had felt last evening had returned to nag at the back of his mind. He had walked a little along the shingle beach, strolled around the square, drunk a cup of coffee at the café, keeping himself always in sight, available. Belle would be in her hotel room, waiting, as he had waited two days ago in his room in Antony's house; and he wondered whether she was caught, as he had been, in the dilemma of flight or no flight, feeling the uncertainty and the tension. What did she know, really, about him, Ricci, beyond the fact that he worked for Lucca? *Come on,* he thought; *come on!* Speaking silently to Giulio. *Let's end it; let me get her on her way and out of my mind. I don't have much time.*

There was the rub—time. Last night, after he had returned to the village, he had called Randall from the hotel's single telephone. "You made it," Randall had said. "Good. Can you talk?"

"Yes."

"Antony's on his way up there. With the girl. And with Jenner. I tried to stop Jenner, but I couldn't, so you'll have to watch that. Now—" and the voice had changed a trifle "—what does it mean?"

"Antony's running things," Ricci had said. "He's making the decisions, with Lucca's approval." This much, at least, had been made plain; everything so far proved it—the trap which had not been a trap when they had driven to the garage, the total lack of incident on the road, beyond the roadblock, of course, which had been natural; everything had worked out as Antony had said it would, and so there was no longer reason to doubt. Everything, that was, except Belle, and she had been Ricci's own idea, and neither here nor there as far as Antony was concerned.

"He's coming to set things up then," Randall had said. "That's what you think? Then why the girl with him? And why Jenner?"

He had already been thinking about this, turning it over carefully in his mind. "Lucca took the girl's passport."

"So?"

"It could be that Lucca's using her to keep Antony in line."

There had been a pause. "You like that?"

"I don't know." And then, "Or it could be that he's bringing

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the girl and Jenner as a front, and the passport meant nothing." Remembering his own experience with Belle—"Who questions American tourists?"

"I like that better," Randall had said. And, "All right. They left yesterday. That means they'll be there tomorrow some time. Say early afternoon."

And he had been content, he remembered that now, almost eager, anticipating activity after all the time of frustration. "The police down there—"

"Never mind them. I don't think they'll cause you any trouble now you're out of their sight."

And this, too, had been pleasant to hear. "One thing more," he had said. "Was this where Wally bought it?"

"Wally? Oh. Walther, you mean. Forget that."

"I'm here. I can keep my ears open."

"Forget it." And there had been no mistaking the command in Randall's voice. "You're going to have your hands full without thinking about anything else. Anything else, you hear me? He's gone, and you've got a job to do."

Despite himself, he had even smiled a little. "Sure."

"All right," Randall had said. "Maybe I don't need to make it any plainer, but just in case—" He had paused. "If you buy it, the way he did, we'll forget about you, too. You know that. And somebody else will be moved in to try to pick up where you fell down, and he'll try to finish the job. You know that, too."

"It seems," Ricci had said, smiling still, "that I may have heard something to that effect before."

"All right," Randall had said again, the tone of command gone from his voice. "That's the way it is. You keep your eye on what you're doing, which is Antony. And you'll have to handle Jenner any way you can. You've got plenty to worry about without thinking of anything else. I mean anything else."

"I hear. I obey."

Now, waiting, the morning already gone and Giulio not yet appeared, and by this much Belle still his responsibility, he felt the impatience rising, and the sense of uneasiness from whatever cause. *Come on,* he thought; *walk out here on your bandy little legs,*

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Giulio, and let me get it over with. And, again, his mind refusing to leave the concept, he thought of Belle, sitting, waiting, alone. Belle.

She was a funny kind of female, not really what she seemed to be—merely a face, a body parading around in those Bikinis. Her behavior at the inn yesterday morning had been almost virginal. He wondered whether he understood it now, as he had not at the time.

"I was going to . . . use you," she had said. "To hurt him, get even with him." But she had not. Instead, "I—don't want it that way. Not—you." And, "I'm not very proud of myself."

Now, remembering this, and the kiss in the hotel lobby, he decided that she could be proud of herself, as anyone could who behaved according to his own lights. Funny kind of thinking, coming from him. Or, was it? Had she seen him more clearly than he saw himself? Belle? He didn't know the answer.

The bell in the village church tolled once. One o'clock already. And Antony on his way, with Jenner, and Tina. *Damn Giulio,* he thought. He started for his hotel for lunch. Walking in the bright sun, thinking still of Belle, he found himself wondering, incongruously, ridiculously, what kissing the other one would be like—Tina; and he even wondered how Tina would have behaved had she been in Belle's place on the trip, what she would have done at the roadblock, and during the night of driving, and at the inn.

It was well after his lunch when Giulio at last appeared. He sat down and took off his fisherman's cap, laid it on the table. "It is not easy," he said. "Jewelry, such as your friend would have—" He shrugged. "—there is not a ready market."

"I told you it wasn't stolen," Ricci said.

Giulio nodded. "It is taxes you are thinking of. No one wants to give part of a purchase price to the government. Understood. Still—"

"Never mind that," Ricci said. "You have somebody?" *Get it over with,* he thought.

"Oh, yes. I talked to a friend. And he told me of a man, a very good man—" He smiled. "—who does not believe in taxes, either." He took a piece of paper from his pocket, unfolded it, handed it to Ricci. "His name is Renaldo, his hotel, and his room number. If

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your friend will go to him with the jewelry, he is waiting now." He smiled again. "He pays in cash. That way there is no record for the government to see."

"Thanks," Ricci said.

"Nothing. After the war such things were arranged every day. It is not so common now, but there are still people who wish to sell jewelry, paintings, many things." He stood up. "I was told you were coming. I was told to—help you, if I could." He walked off, swaggering a little, his cap swinging from one long arm.

Ricci walked in to the telephone. He could see the street, the dusty square, Giulio heading for his café. He called Belle's hotel, gave her room number, waited, thinking that again he had let himself become impatient, even uneasy, and, in the end, everything had worked out. *Remember it next time,* he told himself. He heard Belle's voice, quiet, but tight, strained. "Hi," he said.

"Oh." And the relief was plain.

"A man named Renaldo," Ricci said, reading from the paper. "He's at the Hotel Metropole. I don't know where it is, but any taxi driver will know."

"Yes."

"His room is 407. He's waiting. He'll buy for cash."

"Thanks," Belle said. And then, "I almost—"

"Decided I'd let you down?" Ricci said. "I almost thought the same thing. But Giulio came through. I don't know anything about Renaldo, but he sounds like—"

"It doesn't matter. If he'll buy, I'll sell." And her voice changed. "You've been—"

"Let it go," Ricci said. Then, gently, "Good luck." He hung up.

So there it was. He felt relief that it was over, finished, his responsibility ended. He felt a certain regret, too, and this he could not explain, but its reason was unimportant. She was on her way, he thought, standing there looking at the piece of paper in his hand; and she'd make out. He found that he was smiling, thinking of her. She'd do all right. There was a sort of gallantry to her, and this was a quality that was durable. She——

He was still looking at the paper, but he was staring at it now. Renaldo—the name meant nothing. But something was wrong, and

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this time it was not mere imagination; he was sure. Hotel Metropole—that meant nothing either. But——

And then he saw it: 407, the room number printed plain and clear. But if Giulio had printed it, assuming that Giulio was literate, or if Giulio's friend, presumably Italian, had printed it, it would have been 407 with the bar through the 7 in the European fashion. Only Americans, and English, wrote their sevens plain and unadorned. His mind felt suddenly cold.

There was a telephone book. He almost tore through its pages. Metropole. He called the number, in rapid Italian gave the room and asked the girl please to hurry. He waited. He heard the phone click as it was picked up. And he listened carefully to the voice that said merely, "Hello." He hung up the receiver without answer, stood there, making himself wait until he was sure the connection was broken. It was Lucca's voice that had answered; there was no mistaking it. Lucca was here, and that meant many things—too many things to think about now.

He called back to Belle's hotel, rang her room. He waited while the phone rang and rang, standing there, the paper in his hand, staring, almost unseeing, out into the square, the coldness spreading in his mind. He almost missed the long black car that rolled slowly into his sight—almost. And he could see Luigi at the wheel, and Gino next to him; Jenner, Tina, and Antony in the rear seat. In his ear the phone was still ringing futilely.

He jiggled the hook, jiggled it again. He heard the hotel operator come on the line. In Italian, speaking quickly, he said, "The lady has checked out of her room. You must stop her at the desk. Don't argue. This is important. I have a message for her. Tell her that Ricci says to wait, not to go where she was going. Ricci says to wait. I am Ricci. I will come for her, there at the hotel, when I can." And then, "Please, *signorina*. Please make sure that the lady gets the message." He hung up. He had done all that he could.

The mice feet were scampering furiously up and down his spine. He put the paper in his pocket, composed himself, drew the outward attitude of calm securely in place. *My fault,* he thought; *all my fault. I should have checked, in some way. And she waited, trusted.* He made himself close that part of his mind as he walked

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out into the street. Antony was already out of the car, watching in his expressionless way. And here came Tina, and then Jenner, each of them looking at him.

Ricci started toward them. He reminded himself that he was not supposed to have known they were on their way. He hoped that his voice was steady, even light. "Surprise," he said. "You didn't tell me you were coming." He spoke to them all.

It was Antony who answered, if it was an answer. "Nice little town." He looked around. "Like a travel ad." And then, "You remember Jenner—at the boat."

"I do." Ricci shook his head, made himself smile. The mice continued their scampering.

"You still look like the guy I used to know," Jenner said. He spread his hands. "One of those things. I'm liable to call you Johnny."

"Morelli," Ricci said. "Ricciardi Morelli—Ricci."

Jenner nodded. "I'll try to remember."

Ricci looked at the girl then. He thought of Belle, comparing the two, and finding them not dissimilar—under the skin, at least. The colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady, the refrain came out of nowhere and ran through his mind. "Hi."

She nodded, and looked at Antony. There had been no special reason for the trip, he had told her, or, at least, allowed her to think. And she had almost believed him. Now, Ricci here——

"Well," Antony said, "let's see about things. That's your hotel? How is it?"

"Fine," Ricci said. "Just fine."

Gino and Luigi carried the luggage in. Gino's face was happy; he grinned at Ricci. "Nice place, eh, Ricci?"

"Nice place, big one."

Gino breathed deep. "The air is good, eh? And the mountains are not far, the real mountains, not the little hills of the south." He glanced at Luigi who walked by, laden. Luigi appeared not to notice. "Here," Gino said, "a man can begin to fill his lungs." He watched Ricci's face, and said softly, "There is trouble, Ricci?"

"No trouble, big one." He had almost forgotten the subconscious perception of the man, like that of dogs who are said to be able to

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scent fear. "No trouble at all." And he stood alone, only feet from the single telephone, and, in Antony's presence, powerless to use it; thinking, *My fault. Because I was smart, cocky, sure that my luck was running. I told Giulio and through him, Lucca, exactly where she is.* Or almost exactly. And he felt again, as he had felt before, the blind, unreasoning anger rising against Lucca who was the focus and center of—everything.

At his elbow, Antony said, "Walk around with me. Show me the town. I want to stretch my legs." It was a request as binding as a court order.

"Sure," Ricci said. He was conscious that Jenner and Tina watched them go.

They strolled in the square. "You made it," Antony said. "No trouble?"

"No. I drove all night—"

"We hit a roadblock," Antony said. "They had the city closed." It was a question, although his voice was uninflected.

"I was an American," Ricci said. "I didn't speak any Italian. I waved my passport and—"

"And Belle helped out," Antony said, in the same quiet way. "She's a smart girl, in some ways."

He supposed he had been prepared for it. He said, "Belle?" And he looked at Antony, frowning. "I don't get it. I was alone."

"Okay," Antony said. "You were alone." There was a bench beneath a tree. "Let's sit down." Seated, he took his time as if he were again behind his own desk. He had given considerable thought to this; Belle and Ricci and the effect on Lucca. And there was only one solution that he could see. "She ran out," he said. "In case you didn't know." And he raised one hand in a silencing gesture. "We'll assume you didn't."

Ricci was silent.

"I like Belle," Antony said. It passed through his mind that once he had thought to set Ricci and Lucca against one another because of Belle; that had been his first, unconsidered action. It was different now. "And I've gone to some pains to get you up here where you could be useful." He looked sideways at Ricci. "There aren't enough people who can be useful, to throw them away."

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Still he was silent, knowing, dreading what was coming. Antony, in his way, was saying what Randall had said; keep your eye on the ball.

"Lucca sees things differently," Antony said. "He doesn't like somebody, he doesn't like somebody." He paused. "He isn't going to like anybody who helped something that belonged to him run out."

"You're still talking about Belle," Ricci said.

Antony merely watched him.

The choice was there, but it was no choice at all. Ricci said, "I don't know anything about her. I told you she didn't mean a thing to me. I told Lucca. She's good for laughs—"

"And good to look at," Antony said.

Ricci nodded. "And that."

Antony nodded slowly. Argument was futile, he thought; and he allowed himself a brief moment of annoyance that Ricci should make things more difficult for them both. *Because I'm Joe Antony,* he told himself; *and he won't trust me no matter what I say or do.* He stood up. In the same detached voice, he said, "Now we've got that settled." And, "I'm not up here on a vacation. You come with me. We've got some people to see." They started back across the square. "We'll take my car. Leave yours for Jenner and Tina, if they want it." He kept his eyes from Ricci's face.

"Okay," Ricci said. He couldn't telephone. He couldn't get into town. And maybe Belle would be waiting, just sitting in the hotel lobby, or maybe the message had not got to her, he had no way of knowing. You made one decision, took one step, and from that point on there was no drawing back. He thought briefly of Randall, and of Randall's warning, but there was, he told himself, no other way. He said uninterestedly, "I'll give Jenner the keys." He didn't wait for a reply; he walked past Antony's car into the hotel and straight up the stairs.

Jenner answered the knock. He looked at Ricci in surprise. Ricci said, "Antony and I are going off for a while. Here are the keys to my car, if you and Tina want it." He spoke fast and low. *There is no other way;* he tried to cling to this, take comfort from it. "The Hotel Genoa. There's a girl there, in the lobby. I hope she's there.

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Young, blonde, good looking—" How to describe Belle? How to make her sound different from ten thousand other blondes——

"Lucca's?" Jenner said. He was smiling.

"You know her," Ricci said. And the relief in his mind was a solid thing, warm. "Get her away, out of sight, somewhere, anywhere. Tell her I sent you. I—can't explain. No time. Antony doesn't know." And then, "You cut yourself in on this, Pete. Don't let me down."

"Cloak and dagger—" Jenner began.

"Pete!" He kept his voice low, but the force in it was plain. "Here." He took the piece of paper Giulio had given him from his pocket. "Show her this, tell her it's Lucca."

"But how? Where? I'm—"

"Just do it," Ricci said. "You cut yourself in. You're not on the sidelines any more." And, as he turned away, he said, loudly, "There's plenty of gas. I had it filled last night." He went back down the stairs. Again he had done what he could, but there was no comfort in the thought. He walked out to the waiting car and got in without a word.

Jenner remained standing in the doorway of his room, the keys and the note in his hand. He felt a measure of anger, resentment, and he decided that it was justified. Johnny, Ricci, whatever he wanted to call himself, had no right to impose, to assume blithely that he, Jenner, would jump when Ricci said frog. And that crack about not being on the sidelines any more—it was one thing for Jenner to say it to himself, amuse himself by thinking it; it was quite another for somebody else to say it right out loud.

He turned back into the room, shut the door. Some people, he thought, took themselves too seriously, and thereby distorted their vision of the rest of the world. He remembered Lucca's blonde, flaunting herself in that Bikini, leering at him—or maybe it had been the other way around. He began to smile. *Face it, boy. The leering was all on your side.* Even Tina had seen it; she had told him not to smirk. He was back to normal again, and he looked down at the keys and the note, the angry resentment all gone.

In a way, he supposed, he had asked for it. *Put me in, coach. I've got my number on, and everything.* And that was funny, too,

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because he didn't know the signals, or what to do when the whistle blew, or even how to keep from falling over his own feet. *You chose a weak reed, Johnny. I'm the theoretical type, not the man of action.* When the knock came at the door, he let his breath out in a long sigh, feeling the relief, sure that it was Ricci returned. It was not. It was Tina.

"They've gone," she said. "Ricci and my father—"

"Yes. I know." He held up the keys, jangled them. "His car, if we want it." And he held up the note too, and stared at it, indecisive.

Tina said, "Why, Pete? Why—everything?"

"It's beyond me."

"It was just a—trip, he said. But he knew that Ricci would be here."

"Wheels," Jenner said, "within wheels. That's the traditional statement." And then, "I don't know."

She closed the door. "Sit down, Pete." She took the chair, watched him sit on the bed. "Pete."

"Ma'am?"

"No," the girl said. "I'm serious."

He was silent, vaguely shamed.

The girl watched him steadily. "His name is Bellanca, isn't it? And that means, that *has* to mean that he's—" She made a small gesture of helplessness. "All the words are embarrassing, clichés—secret agent, undercover—" She spread her hands again. "Isn't that it, Pete? It has to be." And then, "You know. And I know that you know. I can't explain why I'm sure, but I am."

"No comment," Jenner said.

She nodded slowly, watching him. "That's an answer, isn't it?" She paused. "Are you associated with him, Pete? Were you sent to watch me on the ship, to follow me?"

"Good God," Jenner said.

She nodded again. "You weren't. I didn't think so. You're just a spectator, aren't you, Pete?"

He opened his mouth and then closed it again in silence. He tried to recapture a little anger, resentment, but they eluded him. And the vague sense of shame remained.

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"If he is what he is," Tina said, "and if you know it, and have known it, as you have—" She paused. "Then you should have stayed away from him, shouldn't you?"

Jenner said slowly, "You're a hard woman. No—" He raised one hand in a silencing gesture. "—I mean it. You step right up and look things in the eye. Worse, you expect other people to do the same thing." He took a deep breath. "All right. Staying away from him meant staying away from you, and I never thought I'd live to hear myself saying anything as naked-making as that."

Her smile was gentle. "You mean it, don't you, Pete? I'm flattered." The smile disappeared all at once. "Can we help him? In any way?" And her lips were pressed tight. Her chin was firm. "He's after my father. He must be. And the other one—Lucca." Her head was high. "My father." Then . . . "You asked me once if I thought my blood was tainted, and I said no."

"I remember," Jenner said.

"Now," she said, "I'm not so sure. Can you understand that?"

" 'The sins of the fathers,' " Jenner said, "and so you feel you have to atone." He shook his head.

"Maybe it's foolish. I can't help that."

"No," Jenner said softly. "It's—admirable." And he was silent for a moment. "It's also more complicated than you think." He smiled, without humor. "You've built him up in your mind, haven't you?"

"My father?"

"Ricci." The smile spread a little, turned inwards to mock him. "I can't blame you. He's quite a guy."

"I hadn't thought about it."

The quality of the smile changed suddenly. "You," he said. "Fooling yourself? You?"

Slowly, reluctantly, she looked up at him. "I guess maybe I have. Fooled myself, I mean. I'm—sorry, Pete."

He sighed. He stood up. "The metamorphosis of P. Jenner."

She watched him, frowned up at him.

"We go to give your atonement an assist. We go to push me out on the stage where the action takes place." He shook his head. "How silly can a man get—" He paused. "—when he's in love."

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And then, "Come on. That's our exit line." He tucked the note in his pocket.

As on that first morning, so short a time ago, Ricci and Antony sat quiet in the back seat of the big car. That other time, Ricci was thinking, they had been on their way to meet the ship and Tina. In a sense, the drive to the ship had been a beginning. The girl had been in effect the catalyst; everything that had happened since, or almost everything, had been precipitated by her arrival. He had not really thought of it this way before. Now, all of them—Belle, Lucca, Tina, Jenner, Antony—and himself sitting here . . .

Antony said, "You know where we're going?"

Ricci turned his head. "No."

"You just take it as it comes, that it?" The trick, Antony had long ago learned, was to try to put yourself into the other man's mind, see his thoughts, understand them. Then you could predict his behavior.

"I'm just hired help," Ricci said.

"How's your face?"

"Okay."

"I mean," Antony said, "can you get by without a bandage? People remember bandages."

"I can fix it," Ricci said.

"That stuff women use when they want to look as if they've been to Florida."

"Pancake make-up. It won't show." He wondered why, up here where the police would not be looking for him.

Antony was silent for a little time. "We're going to see a man. You don't know him and he doesn't know you, but the next time you see him, we don't want anybody remembering things like bandages."

Ricci said nothing.

They took the road to Genoa, the hills rising on their right, the sea to the left, below. *I drove along here last night with Belle,* Ricci thought; *and it all seemed plain and clear then. She was on her way, and I had helped her, or thought I had.* He flayed himself

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with the knowledge that because of his carelessness, she, who had not wanted to put him in the middle, was now in the middle herself. *Pete, don't let me down. Don't let her down.* It was almost a prayer in his mind.

"Did they call you Gabby when you were a kid?" Antony said.

Ricci made himself smile a little at that. He said nothing, but he tried to push the other thoughts aside and concentrate on here and now. Randall had been right, of course; it was almost impossible to think clearly, to be always on balance, poised, ready to react quickly and in the right way, when other matters, other responsibilities nagged at you. And with Antony you were allowed no mistakes.

"What do you know about junk?" Antony said. "Heroin? Anything?" He spoke without looking at Ricci.

"A little," Ricci said. *I know pretty much everything there is to know about it,* he thought; *how the opium is grown, and where, how it's extracted from the plants, how it's refined into heroin, how it's peddled and why, and what its effect is on people who use it. Do you know that part, Antony? Have you seen its effect? You or Lucca?* "Not much."

"It's heavy," Antony said. "It doesn't take up much space. A half-million dollars' of it doesn't take much space at all."

"Handy," Ricci said. He kept his voice toneless, but there was no way to stifle the sense of excitement, anticipation, the knowledge that he was, at last, after more than a year and despite his mistakes, getting close to his goal. It had to be that way; Antony would not have talked like this otherwise. And the sense of luck running strong began again; he told himself to mistrust it this time, to be careful, wary. "Makes life easier."

Antony said nothing.

"But," Ricci said, "there's a lot of water between here and the States."

"Lots of water," Antony said. And he thought, in this moment, strangely enough, of something Lucca had said about his, Antony's, having wanted once to be President, or maybe boss man of something big, General Motors, U.S. Steel, that kind of big. *And maybe I could have,* he told himself, *instead of what I am.* The thought

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was bitter; but the real regret, the deep gnawing regret, lay in the conclusion of the thought—*But now I'll never know how far I might have gone, what I might have accomplished; I'll never know what might have been.* And it passed through his mind that this was the thinking of an old man, a man approaching death, turning his face to the wall and thinking back on nothing but waste. He said, "But there are ways." There was even a small measure of pride in his voice. He looked at Ricci. "I've figured one out."

They were into the city, and Luigi drove with sure knowledge. They were above the harbor on the slope of the hills. They pulled into a curving drive, stopped under a marquee. Luigi got out and came around to open the door. Anthony got out first. Ricci followed. He straightened, looked around. A small brass plaque fastened to the stone front of the building said: Hotel Metropole. He stared at it with a small sense of shock, thinking of the man who called himself Renaldo upstairs in room 407, maybe alone, maybe not. And he thought again of Belle. His face showed nothing as he followed Antony inside, across the lobby, into the bar.

The bar was almost deserted. In one corner a couple smiled at one another and whispered over their drinks. A man sat alone on a bar stool. Against the wall at a table for four, a young man in a U.S. Air Force uniform, with sergeant's stripes on his sleeves, sat alone with a bottle of beer. Antony headed straight for him, and Ricci followed, the sense of excitement high now, hard to control.

"You're Sergeant Smith?" Antony said in the quiet, detached voice.

"Why, yes, sir." And the face that looked up at them was young, uncomplicated, shy, and yet eager; and the voice held a slow, drawling twang. "You're Mr. Antony, I reckon."

Antony nodded. He pulled out a chair, sat down. Ricci joined him. "This is Ricci," Antony said.

The sergeant said, "Funny name." And then, "No offense, sir. Eyetalian?"

"Close enough," Antony said. He looked up. The barman was approaching. "Coffee," he said. And he looked at Ricci. "Beer?"

Ricci nodded. There was no more talk until the drinks were served.

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Then, "I hear, sergeant—" Antony began.

"Call me Bud, sir," the boy said. "Everybody does." And Ricci, watching the young face, decided that the shyness and the eagerness, the appearance of ingenuousness were as much a mask as his own attitude of outward calm, as Antony's gambler's face. Unaccountably, he felt better.

Antony was speaking, saying something about money, and Bud listened politely, and nodded. "A man likes to make a few bucks, sir. A little here, a little there. You know how it is."

"Particularly now that black markets aren't operating," Antony said.

"Why, sir, they never proved nothing about that." Smiling, easy.

"You fly to the States," Antony said.

"Yes, sir. Sort of a ferry, you might say, back and forth like across a river."

And Ricci watched, and listened, and thought how simple it was, if you kept it simple, if your mind, like Antony's, went straight to the core of the matter, considered and rejected ships which had to dock and go through customs, passenger airlines that were subject to the same limitations. *The military,* he thought; *we'd catch it only after it had been used two, three times, and evidence began to point in that direction. But he won't use it two or three times, only once; and then he'll find another way, and each time he'll make it a big shipment, because there's no more risk in that than in a little one.* His respect for Antony grew.

"It's easy to bring back little things," the boy said. "A Swiss watch somebody wants, maybe a bottle of perfume, French perfume, nobody pays much attention." And he paused. "If it's something big, now—"

"Not big," Antony said. "Not big at all. Heavy—"

"Heavy?" the boy said, and his face took on a thoughtful look. "How heavy would that be, sir? In an airplane they watch weight."

"Maybe ten pounds," Antony said.

Ten pounds of gold, Ricci thought, ten pounds of platinum, nothing compared to ten pounds of refined heroin; cut, and cut again, and again—how many hypodermic syringes would that fill? How many people would that——

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"Why, ten pounds isn't much, sir. I thought you were talking maybe about—"

"All right," Antony said. "You can handle it then." And he was silent for a moment, watching the boy's face. "Now, money."

The boy seemed to settle in his chair. "Well, sir, that would depend. It's valuable, I reckon—"

"Not to you," Antony said. "It's not worth a nickel to you." There was a small edge to his voice. "Because you can't sell it. To anybody."

"Only get sent to jail if I'm caught with it, is that it, sir?"

Antony was silent.

"Why," the boy said, "a thousand dollars, I reckon, wouldn't be too much. Maybe even fifteen hundred." His eyes were bright, shining. And then, thoughtful again, "There's a frontier, sir, between here and the base, and—"

"No," Antony said. "It'll be delivered to you in France, in Nice." He nodded his head sideways at Ricci. "He'll bring it." And then, "I'll pay your price. But don't get ideas."

"I'm honest as the day is long, sir. Always was."

Antony ignored it. "Five hundred in Nice. A thousand when you deliver it in New York."

"Why, that's fair, sir."

Antony watched him steadily. "You're a bright boy. Keep it that way." And this time the edge to his voice was plain, and the menace that lay behind it.

Tina stayed in the car. Jenner got out. He crossed the sidewalk, went into the hotel lobby. He felt large and conspicuous; and a measure of his resentment had returned. He told himself that he cut a poor figure mounted on a white horse dashing in to rescue a female in some sort of distress. *Because another female doesn't see me as a heroic, he thought, I put my feet in the gallops and stirrup off to show her she's wrong.* And he decided that he was being idiotic, adolescent, and more than a little ridiculous.

He walked past the porter's desk. There were potted plants scattered around the lobby, and a fountain tinkled in its center. There were people, but none of them blonde, not the way Lucca's blonde

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had been blonde. Walking slowly, covering all points of the lobby, he told himself again that it was people like Ricci, yes, and the girl in the car outside, who, by taking life with a seriousness it did not deserve, spoiled the enjoyment of everyone around them. He was approaching the porter's desk again.

So the girl wasn't here. He wondered if he had really believed that she would be here, because the entire operation had about it the quality of melodrama. On the other hand, he felt a small measure of disappointment. He had stepped out on the stage, been pushed, really, from the shelter of the wings; and he had braced himself for lights and the buzz and hum of the audience, gone through the anticipatory shakes he understood were a part of opening night—and the theater was empty. It was an unpleasant shock, somehow ignominious. *Damn it, Ricci, Johnny, whatever you want to call yourself,* he thought, *leave me out of your games after this. Go play your cops and robbers—*

He saw her then. She was in a straight-backed chair, in a corner, wearing a coat, a suitcase on the floor at her feet. And he watched her profile as he approached her, and saw in it the strain, and the tension, the expression of trying to look in all directions at once like a child in the dark amidst sounds that were strange and menacing. His resentment was gone as if it had never existed.

He spoke to her, his voice was quiet, even gentle. "It sounds like a bad entrance cue, I know, but Ricci sent me to find you." And he saw the way her face changed as she looked up at him, the way her entire body seemed to relax—the sight of this, he decided, was justification enough for everything. "The cavalry has arrived." He had her suitcase in one hand, her arm in the other. He urged her up from the chair. "From here on, you're—" And he hesitated, wondering even before he spoke them that he should choose these words; choose them, and mean them. "—among friends. Come on, Blondie."

They were out of the hotel, and across the sidewalk. Tina had already slid to the center of the car seat; she held the door open. Jenner handed Belle in, put her suitcase in the back, closed the door again. He looked about. Nobody was watching. As he walked around and got in under the wheel, he wondered why he had been

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nervous in the first place. It had been easy; he wondered if it had been too easy. As he started the car he dug into his pocket, got out the note, passed it across Tina to Belle. "He said to show you this, and to say that it's Lucca, whatever that means."

Belle glanced down at the note. She was sitting straight, and she looked at neither of them. She was silent for a few moments. Then, "It means I—goofed," she said, in a strange, tight voice. "And so did he."

Jenner said, "And now?"

Belle shook her head in silence.

"I guess we'd better not just sit here," Jenner said. He drove slowly away from the curb.

I fouled it up from the beginning, Belle thought. *He warned me, told me that I was poison, but I wouldn't believe it until it was too late.* If Lucca was here, then Lucca knew about the two of them—Ricci and herself. And what happened to her didn't matter, because she had known from the beginning, and merely refused to admit, that you asked for what you got, and always in the end the bill was presented. *But I pulled him into it, too.* And this was the bitter part.

Tina said, "You ran away from your—husband."

Belle gathered herself, reached deep into reserves of strength, pride. "Sounds like a tabloid story, doesn't it?"

"I don't know," Tina said.

Driving slowly, Jenner opened his mouth then shut it again in silence. It was as if there were only the two women in the car, as if he and the rest of the world were shut out; he felt almost as if he were eavesdropping at somebody's transom.

"Husband," Belle said; that was all.

Tina said, "And he—Ricci, helped you." Then, seeing clearly how it must have been, "You drove up here with Ricci. In this car."

"Yes." She looked at Tina. "We stopped at an inn, if that's what you're asking."

"I wasn't."

"Yes, you were," Belle said. Her voice was without malice or resentment; it merely stated a fact. "We stayed there together—

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for reasons." The roadblock and the police, these were nobody's business. "Nothing happened." Gently, "Make you feel better?"

Tina's head was high. There was color in her face. "I didn't ask."

"But you wanted to know. Why not be honest about it?"

Jenner blinked.

Tina said, "You're in love with him, aren't you?"

"No comment." Remembering the way he had looked, asleep, relaxed, almost boyish. "How about you?"

"I—" Tina stopped there. Slowly, she began to smile. "Maybe."

"Now that we have that settled," Jenner said, and he tried, and managed, to keep the disappointment and the hurt out of his voice. He looked at Belle. "He said to get you away, out of sight, somewhere, anywhere."

Belle said slowly, "No." Looking down at the note again, feeling the old fear, no longer panic, merely a sort of resignation, she thought, *Sooner or later, I'll have to stop running. And if I stop now, maybe, just maybe it will help*. She didn't pretend to understand how or why it might help, but the conviction was strong. *From the beginning it was my fault, all mine*. Maybe Lucca would accept that; he would have to accept it. She looked at them both. "I've had my fling. Now—" She spread her hands. She was smiling.

Tina's chin was set, square. Jenner kept his eyes on the road.

Belle said, "I took something when I left." She had her purse open on her lap. She took out two passports, opened them, handed one to Tina. "I didn't know anything about it. But you said it was there, and it was. I was going to give it to Ricci." She smiled again. "Slipped my mind, I guess."

"You were trying to help," Tina said. "Thank you." Her eyes fixed on the passport in her hands. "Drive back to the village, Pete."

"Come again?" He looked at her in some surprise.

"Pete."

He hesitated. "But the lady said—"

"Pete." Tina's voice was sharper this time. Her head came up, and she looked at Belle. "There is another hotel there. You can stay in it, out of sight. Don't argue with me. You owe him that much—at least to talk to him—Ricci, I mean."

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Slowly, reluctantly, watching the girl and seeing what was in her eyes, in her thoughts, Belle said, "I knew who you meant." And then, knowing that it was wrong, all wrong, but unable to resist, "Yes. I owe him that much."

Jenner said, "It's a special language females use; they leave out most of the words."

"Oh, shut up," Tina said.

They drove in silence.

Lucca sat alone in the hotel room. He detested waiting, inactivity. He wanted to stand up, prowl, but he made himself stay in the chair, thereby adding fuel to the flames of his anger. If you had a sore tooth you kept probing at it with your tongue, punishing yourself, tormenting yourself, for reasons that were dark and obscure and, somehow, always associated in his mind with priest talk and the hush of church like the hush of lonely night thoughts, with the clicking of beads of old women kneeling and the senseless sounds of their muttering, with death in all of its imagined horrors.

The telephone had rung only that once; and when he had answered there had been no voice on the other end of the line. He had called downstairs, but the switchboard had been able to tell him nothing.

He didn't know where in the whole vast city Belle was. Sooner or later he would catch up with her; this he knew as surely as he knew his own destiny; she would turn up and somebody would see her and pass the word along. But he wanted it sooner, not later. He could wait, if he had to; he had waited before—impatiently, it was true, but he had waited. And in the end—he touched the dimple scar with his finger, remembering—none of the satisfaction in revenge had been diminished.

And he thought of something else, too: Antony had been there that time, when the waiting had finally ended. And Antony had said to forget it; always Antony had cautioned, argued for the nonviolent course, because Antony was basically soft. Now Antony was here again, and it was because of Antony, because of Antony's urging, that Ricci, and Belle, in a car that he, Lucca, had provided——

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He stood up suddenly, finding the torment of inactivity grown too great. He crossed the room, re-crossed it. And there, beside the chair and the telephone again, he stopped, feeling the animal wariness stirring in his mind, a feeling, no more, a warning bell ringing softly. Antony, Ricci, Belle, and that daughter of Antony's, and the business at hand, the big shipment Antony had urged—as Niarhos and Kemel had urged, too, it was true, but still —and the girl's passport was gone, with Belle, and did that prove anything?

He sat down in the chair again as suddenly as he had stood up. The warning bell rang steadily, insistently in his mind; he felt the familiar smile spasms beginning, and he made himself ignore them. He picked up the telephone. Giulio, he thought. It would be well to have Giulio ready, just in case. He placed the call and sat there waiting.

There was pride, satisfaction in Antony's voice, although his face, the gambler's face staring straight ahead in the rear seat of the car, showed nothing. "You're a smart boy," he said to Ricci. "You got up here all right. You can get into France with the junk in the car. They don't search tourists' luggage much. Those are their orders. And you look like a boy scout—sometimes." He paused. "If they do want a look, make sure you open the right suitcase, that's all."

"There won't be any trouble," Ricci said. It was hard to hold down the sense of jubilation, almost of triumph, concentrate on rounding out the picture. "You think you can trust the Air Force kid?"

Antony looked at him. "Why not? He likes a buck, you heard him. And he's done it before, little things, watches, perfume. He's done it the other way, too, bringing things in here when the black market was working—cigarettes, nylons, fountain pens." He even smiled faintly. "How do I know?"

Ricci shook his head.

"Sometimes," Antony said, "you aren't as bright as you think you are." He paused. "How did Lucca find out about you?"

He should have seen it, Ricci told himself. "Tiny Presser." He

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nodded, remembering the grotesque fat man with his questions, and his own knowledge that the questions had to be answered right because Presser already knew the answers.

Antony was in a talkative mood. "Insurance companies do it. Banks and stores do it. They set up a sort of clearing house for information. That's why I set up Presser."

Ricci hoped that he showed the proper blend of admiration, respect. The respect, at least, was real.

"Organization," Antony said. "So don't worry about the Air Force kid. All the way from Niarhos and Kemel where the stuff starts, into Presser's hands, it's tight. Once you get it across the frontier into France."

"There won't be any trouble," Ricci said. And now he had it all, he told himself. Niarhos and Kemel—if the names meant anything, and it added up that they did; one was Greek and the other Turkish, and Greece and Turkey were main sources of supply for raw opium. Into Presser's hands—it would be, then, to the Tenth Street apartment that the Air Force boy would make delivery. *I know both ends, and I'm the middle, and if we can catch—when we catch Presser with the stuff in his hands*—— After more than a year of waiting, of tension, of fumbling and falling over his own feet, here it was, all of it, dropped right into his lap.

He wanted to laugh aloud, to shout. He sat quiet, silent, not looking at Antony, not trusting himself to look at Antony. His mask of outward calm was securely in place. "Nice day," he said. At last, relaxed only a trifle, he allowed his mind to return to Belle.

It was dark when they reached the village. His car, Ricci saw, had been moved. He tried not to wonder whether that meant that Jenner had been successful or not. He followed Antony into the hotel. From the dining room the clerk appeared, carrying his napkin, wiping wine from his lips. "A telephone call for you, *signor*," he said to Antony, and he produced a slip of paper with a number written on it.

Antony took it. He nodded. The clerk went back to his meal. Antony looked at Ricci, and Ricci turned away and went up the stairs. At the top he hesitated, hearing Antony begin the call. He told himself that it was unimportant, that there was no need to try

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to listen. He walked down the hall to Jenner's room, opened the door and went in without knocking.

Jenner was tying his necktie at the mirror over the washstand. He merely glanced around as the door opened and closed again. "The car keys are on the dresser."

"Well?" Ricci said. Then, softly, "Pete."

"I ran your errand," Jenner said. "I found the blonde—merchandise." He paused. "You're a hero. To both of them." He finished the knot, gave it a last minute adjustment, turned away from the mirror. He told himself that there was no reason to feel anger, and yet the anger was there, pushing at him, crowding him. "Lucca's female is here, at the other hotel, Room 5. She's waiting for you."

Ricci said slowly, "What's eating you?"

"Not a thing. What would be?"

"That's no answer."

"It's as good a one as you're going to get."

"Why?"

Jenner picked his coat off the bed. His back was half-turned. He put the coat on, shrugged it into place, his movements slow and deliberate, provocative. He said nothing.

"Pete," Ricci said.

"Go cuddle the blonde."

"Pete," in the soft voice this time.

"Go play at your heroics."

Slowly he made himself unwind. "So that's it."

"What is?" The anger, Jenner knew, was at himself, not at Ricci; it rose from a sense of his own ignominy; it was as if he stood off at a distance and looked at himself dispassionately, viewed himself as Tina obviously viewed him, and did not like what he saw. Empty wit, sideline capers, detachment, and the ability to see both sides of any argument, without the courage to feel strongly about either. In this moment, allowing the anger to rise uncontrolled, he disliked everything about himself, and it occurred to him to wonder that he had ever found admirable what was, really, only emptiness.

Ricci took the keys from the dresser. He dropped them in his pocket. "Thanks, Pete. I didn't think you'd let me down."

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"Not only heroic," Jenner said, "but noble, too. A nauseating quality, nobility."

"Maybe you're right," Ricci said. He turned to the door. Jenner's voice stopped him.

"Tina knows who you are, what you are. She guessed, but I didn't deny it." He could flay himself with this, too.

"All right," Ricci said. "It doesn't matter now, Pete. If she can keep it to herself for only a little while."

Jenner's smile was bitter, mocking. "Wild horses couldn't drag it out of her. You're the spirit of '76, fife, drum, bandage and all. And she's—" He stopped there. He said quietly, "Making quite a spectacle of myself, am I not?"

"For a fact," Ricci said almost in disgust. He walked out and closed the door firmly behind him.

He went to the head of the stairs. Antony was still on the telephone, his voice muffled, unclear. Ricci retraced his steps, past Jenner's room and his own. He went down the back stairs and out into the darkness. Belle was here, safe, waiting. Despite mistakes, he thought, his luck was still running strong.

It was a small room she had, with only a single window, curtained; she seemed to fill it with her presence, her smile. The old Belle, not subdued, the brashness recaptured. "The bad penny type," she said. "That's me."

Ricci sat down on the arm of the big chair. He, too, was smiling, Jenner and the embarrassed disgust at his self-abasement forgotten. "I told you you were my good-luck charm." It was clear in his mind; it had been clear since he had sat with Antony and the Air Force sergeant discussing plans. "Another roadblock coming up," he said. "You can go into your outraged American wife routine. Twice, as a matter of fact: once to the Italian frontier guards, and once to the French. And I'll buy you that drink you refused last night. A French drink, in Nice."

The brashness had faded. She sat quiet, her eyes on his face. "When?"

"In the morning." Even the details had fallen into place in his mind, the way plans did when they were right. "Antony doesn't

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know you're here." It was a question, although his voice had not supplied the question mark.

She shook her head slowly.

"Then early," Ricci said. "Take your suitcase and walk out of the village. Quarter of a mile or so. Wait there, by the road. I'll pick you up." He got up from the chair arm. "This time we won't leave any trail. Then I'll put you on a plane out of Nice."

She wore the faintest of smiles. "Why? Just for the record."

He had been moving toward the door. He stopped now. "You're looking that gift horse in the mouth again." And he wondered that he should feel annoyance at the question.

"That's an answer?"

"Let's say," Ricci said slowly, "that I like to finish what I start."

"That I can believe."

"All right."

"But that isn't all of it." Her eyes were wise eyes, even calm. "People like you don't come along very often—"

"Look," Ricci said, suddenly angry now. "Don't you say it, too. Don't you even think it. You hear? I'm no hero. I'm just a plain damn fool."

"Crowding your luck again," Belle said, "because that's the way you are."

"Cut it out. I told you."

She nodded slowly. "Yes. You've told me lots of things, in lots of ways." She paused. "I'll remember them all."

"Just remember about tomorrow morning."

"Yes." Then smiling again the faint smile, "I won't let you down. I promise." She watched him hesitate, nod, turn away. He was gone.

She sat where she was for a long time. Her purse was on the bed, within easy reach. She picked it up, opened it, took out her passport. The printing opposite her picture was clear and plain, upper case, Bertha Larson. She read it, and reread it. It was funny, she thought, the way things worked out. There were many forks to the road, and some of the signs were misleading; sometimes you couldn't tell until you had made your choice that the fork you took was the wrong one. Sometimes—but not always.

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She stood up slowly, put the passport back in the purse. She picked up her coat and put it on. This time she could see behind the misleading sign, the tempting one, and she wished that it were not so, but it was.

You made your bed and you lay in it; you took the rough with the smooth; you paid the bill when it was presented—all of the clichés repeated themselves in her mind. They were shabby from overuse, like singing commercials, the old sayings, but they were real nonetheless; and they were all she had, and if you lived by them then they were enough, and you could hold your head up and look anybody in the eye, anybody.

She crossed the room and took paper from the desk. Her hand was steady as she wrote the note, and the words came without effort. She signed it, and put it in an envelope, sealed it. And then, carrying her suitcase and her purse and the note, she walked to the door, carefully turned out the lights, and went out and down the hall, down the stairs to the desk.

She paid her bill. To the clerk she said, "At the other hotel there is a man, a young man, who will be driving away in the morning. An American—"

"Who was just here?"

"Yes," Belle said. She held out the note. "Can you see that he gets this?"

"Of course."

"In the morning. Not before."

The clerk smiled. "As you wish." The smile became a sort of smirk. "It is a matter of the heart, no?"

"It is a matter of the heart," Belle said. "Yes." She walked out, into the darkness. She turned right, up the narrow road toward the highway, walking neither slow nor fast.

On the highway there would be a bus to take her into Genoa. A bus, or a private car that would stop to give her a lift. She was not afraid; men in cars were no menace. The fear would begin only when she reached the city. Then would come the bad time, taking a taxi, driving to the Hotel Metropole, riding in the elevator up to Lucca's room, raising her hand for the knock on the door—the fear then would be the real thing, like bile in her throat, water

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in her spine. And over and over as she walked steadily, she repeated in her mind, *Nobody twisted your arm in the first place. Remember that. Nobody twisted your arm . . .*

Ricci climbed the back stairs of his hotel, let himself into his own room. He switched on the light as he closed the door, and then, for a moment, he merely stood there, looking. Tina sat in the chair by the window. "Not very—prudent," he said.

"He's downstairs, so it doesn't matter."

"He?"

Her eyes were steady; her head high. "My father. He's the only danger, isn't he?" Her tone said that she was pointing out the obvious.

He leaned against the wall, his hands deep in his pockets, studying her. "Go on."

"You're after him, aren't you? Whatever it is that he's doing, you're here to find it out, and stop it, see that he—never has a chance to do anything like it again. Isn't that it? . . . It has to be. He said that he was through, retired—but he isn't."

Ricci said, "You were with Jenner this afternoon." He watched her nod. "Thanks."

This time she shook her head. "A little thing. I—like her. Maybe I shouldn't. I don't know. But I do." And then, "You haven't answered my question."

"Tell me what you want," Ricci said.

"Yes." She looked down at her hands, and then, slowly, looked up again at his face. "You want to know where I stand." She drew a deep breath. "I told Pete. He asked me once if I thought—my blood was tainted because he's my father. Maybe I do. I'm ashamed—"

"Even though you had nothing to do with it, with him, with being his daughter."

"Yes. Can you understand that?"

Standing there, immobile still, he said slowly, "In a way." And then, "There's a lot of iron in you."

It brought a faint smile. "Maybe. I don't know. Pete said the same. He said I was a—hard woman. Is that wrong?"

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"Don't ask me. I don't know the answers."

"If you don't, then nobody—"

"Cut it out," Ricci said sharply. And there was a pause. "What do you want?"

"Can I—help? Whatever you're doing? Anything at all."

"Why?"

"I—told you."

"You've made up your mind he's no good, your father, he's like a bug to be stepped on. Only it's different because you wouldn't dislike a bug and you wouldn't step on him to make yourself feel better."

She was frowning now, puzzled.

So am I, Ricci thought; but the words and the thoughts, begun, could not be stopped. He said slowly, "In your book you write things down the way you would in a ledger—this is right, and this is wrong, and that's all there is to it. And if it's right, then it's good and you're happy with it; if it's wrong, it's bad, and if you aren't sore about it, you should be." He shook his head. "It doesn't work that way, all clear and sharp. Maybe the right thing is done for wrong reasons, bad reasons; maybe the wrong thing is done for right reasons, good reasons—" He stopped there, his shoulders hunched angrily. "I'm not a deep-type thinker."

"No," she said, "you're not." She stood up. "Is that what a policeman is supposed to do? Think about the reasons before he decides a man is a—thief?"

Here, at least, he thought, he was on sound footing. "A policeman," he said, "does what he has to do, his job. And he does it, or should do it, without malice. You're not a policeman—"

"I'm just malicious—is that it?"

He made himself relax; his voice came out gentle. "Think about it. Do you like him enough to hate him? Do you know him well enough? Or are you just trying to prove that you're better than he is?"

"For a non-thinker you come up with odd ideas."

He nodded slowly. "I guess I do." He stood aside, held the door for her. He watched her walk out, tall, straight, proud—and angry. He closed the door again. *Face it,* he told himself; *you like Antony,*

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no matter what he's done, what he's doing. And he was glad that Randall had not been in this room to hear what he had said to the girl.

It was after dinner. Ricci stood on the loggia. There were stars and the soft blackness of the water. He watched them, and his own thoughts. He was not aware of Antony's presence until the quiet, uninflected voice said, "Lucca is here, in the city."

He was glad that it was dark; he had time to compose his mind and voice. "Is he?"

"That was my phone call," Antony said. "He wanted to know if everything was all right, ready." He was silent for a moment. "I told him it was, is."

"The—junk?"

"It will be here before morning."

"Okay," Ricci said, feeling again the excitement rising, the sense of triumph.

"Everything is fine," Antony said, "if you don't—foul it up."

He half-turned. "I don't get it."

"Sometimes you're smart," Antony said, "and sometimes you aren't. This time, tomorrow, you'd better be smart." And again he paused. "You'd better keep your mind on what you're doing."

Ricci was silent.

"You heard me?"

"Yes," Ricci said.

"Then remember it." And the footsteps moved away.

Ricci waited for a time, impatient now. No one else came out onto the loggia. He walked its length, and down the steps, strolled out into the village square. Out for a walk, to stretch his legs before bed, no more than this, if anyone asked. No one did. There was a telephone at the far end of the square. He used it, and the call went through quickly, and Randall, as always, was there at the other end. It did not take long, and he came out again, unseen, and resumed his strolling, feeling the satisfaction and the triumph beating high, strong.

Niarhos and Kemel—Randall had taken the names with quiet eagerness; the Turkish government, and the Greek, would co-oper-

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ate, and that source, at least, would be plugged. Tiny Presser waiting in New York—there had been no mistaking the satisfaction in Randall's voice at that; the Air Force boy would be followed, unmolested, because it was Presser they were after, and had been after, for a long, long time. *Both ends,* Ricci thought, *and I'm the middle;* it was like a high, fierce chant in his mind.

He strolled on, past one of the cafés. He stopped. Laughter was flowing out, deep, pleasant laughter. He turned toward it, went inside.

Gino was there, leaning against the bar, a glass of wine in one great hand. He saw Ricci, and he seized him by the arm and almost lifted him to a place by his side. He hammered on the bar top. "Wine. For my good friend. He is from America."

Here he could relax, smile. "You are happy, big one."

"I am always happy."

"True."

"But here—" The deep voice changed, became solemn. "—there—" He gestured with one enormous arm. "I am near my own country, Ricci. I am almost home."

"We will drink to that, big one." And to luck, he thought, luck running strong, and to tomorrow.

Gino said, "You are happy, too, eh, Ricci? I have never seen you so—free."

He was up early. He took the bandage from his face, washed the bruise Leclerc's foot had given him. He studied the cheek carefully, lathered his face and shaved with some pain. His hands were steady, but his mind was keyed high, tense. When he had finished with his face, with the pancake make-up painstakingly applied, the bruised area appeared almost normal. It was a good omen, he thought. He dressed and packed his suitcase, let himself out of the room and went downstairs. Antony was already there. A second suitcase stood by the door. Ricci put his own beside it. "Breakfast," Antony said.

They sat together over coffee and rolls. "The suitcase has a false bottom," Antony said. "You'll find it when you look. On top it's

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packed with stuff of mine, clothes, shoes, in case you have to open it. Here's the key." And he leaned back in his chair, his face expressionless. "Now it's up to you."

"No sweat," Ricci said.

Antony nodded. "Not if you keep your mind on what you're doing."

"Meaning what?"

"Just what I said." In the detached voice. He took out his billfold. "Here's the money for the kid. Five hundred. You'll tell him where to deliver the junk and collect the rest. You know where Tiny's apartment is."

"It's a nice place."

"Yeah," Antony said. And then, "You should have seen the place I had." And for only a moment the loneliness of the man, and his regrets, showed through. Then, "Sometimes it's hard to get used to the fact that I can't go back."

Strangely enough, Ricci thought of Gino and his happiness at being almost home. He thought, too, of Tina, angry, uncompromising. He picked up his coffee and finished it. He stood up. "I'll be back early."

"Yeah," Antony said again. He nodded. He said slowly, "Last night, on the phone, I kept Lucca off your back." He raised one hand to command silence. "You know why. We talked about it. Her." He paused. "Keep your mind on what you're doing. Good luck."

Ricci walked out to the car carrying both suitcases. He tossed them into the back seat where they would be in plain sight. He got in and started the engine. Randall was wrong, he thought, and Antony was wrong in the same way; when a man's luck was running he could do two things at once, let his mind look in two directions, and get away with it. It was a beautiful morning, bright and clear. It would be good to have Belle with him again, just sitting there, someone to talk to, company.

A man had passed close by the car. Ricci did not recognize him. And he sat for a moment, staring, uncomprehending, at the envelope that had fluttered through the window and onto his lap. The man had not even stopped walking. Ricci put the car in gear,

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let out the clutch, started up the narrow road toward the highway. Around the first turn he stopped, picked up the envelope, opened it.

The note was brief. "I said I wouldn't put you in the middle for me. Not you. Not with Lucca. And tomorrow does come—it's here. Nobody twisted my arm, I just stopped running, and I'm going back; it's the best I can do. Hope it helps. Luck, and thanks." And then the signature—Bertha.

There was only silence. In the trees around him no breeze stirred, no bird sang, there was nothing. Sitting there, looking at the note, he told himself that it was all a mistake, that maybe she had meant what the note said when she wrote it, but that now, thinking about it, she would have changed her mind, lost her nerve; that a little farther along the road—a quarter of a mile, he had told her—she would be waiting, standing there, smiling at his approach. And he knew that she would not be.

"I won't let you down," she had said, and this was what she had meant, and he blamed himself that he had not seen, and understood what had been in her mind. *My fault,* he thought, *all my fault*. And the sense of triumph and jubilation was gone, leaving only a bitter sourness in his mind.

She had sat there on the bed last night, looking at him, smiling at him, as once before at Lucca's house she had done. *My fault;* and he had walked out, feeling proud of himself, satisfied, telling himself that his luck was running strong—a big, smart fellow, Ricci, a tower of strength, seeing all and knowing all and looking down on people like Jenner and Tina, feeling superior to them, a real gone guy, out-thinking everybody, out-maneuvering everybody, playing God . . .

It had been bad before, reproaching himself with Leclerc's death. It was infinitely worse now. *I told her she was poison, and she never forgot that; I never really let her forget it.* But that was not the worst. *I convinced her that I was the smart one, that I knew all the answers; I gave her hope where she knew there was no hope, led her along, step by step like the Judas goat leading the flock to the slaughterhouse.* She had been wiser than he, braver than he, stronger than he; and now, to protect him—he saw this as clear

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and plain as if it were spelled out in front of him—she had stopped running, and gone back to Lucca.

He sat quiet, thinking this, tasting the bitterness of this. Lucca. Lucca. And he brought a picture of the man into his mind and stared at it, hated it, allowing his anger to rise until it almost choked him, sitting there, hammering softly with his fist on the steering wheel—*wasting time,* he told himself; *sitting here and wasting time!*

He put the note beside him on the seat. The suitcase was in the back. The Air Force boy was waiting. *Two ends plugged,* he thought, *and I'm the one who has to set everything in motion.* And only last night, drinking wine with Gino, that thought had been jubilant. Only a few minutes ago, sitting with Antony, the knowledge of success had been warm, and prideful. Now—

He started the car up the narrow road again. Even now, against knowledge and logic, he searched the sides of the road, the trees, the rocks; they were empty. He reached the highway, turned on to it. And now he began to drive faster, faster.

There was no choice. Like an echo, the thought repeated itself in his mind, *No choice, no choice, nochoicenochoice . . . I'm the one who has to start the wheels turning and there's no choice.*

Faster, pushing the car now, extending it, hunched over the wheel, his elbows tucked tight against his sides. You did what you had to do, because you were what you were—as everybody was: Antony, Tina, Jenner, himself, Belle, and Lucca, everybody. *But I'll be back, Lucca.* He tried to project the thought, launch it into space that it might be heard everywhere. *I'll be back.* It was a high fierce chant in his mind.

"You came back crawling," Lucca said. The dimple scar came and went as he smiled in spasms barely controlled. The soft brown eyes held a shine, a polish, like gloss on silk. His voice was low, this too, held tight in modulation. "I told you that if you tried to walk out on me, if you even thought about walking out on me, you'd wish you'd never been born. You will. You hear me?"

There was no answer, none.

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Antony was still at his coffee, sitting quiet, his face composed. It was done, he told himself, and it had not been hard. He felt no sense of achievement, merely a need to wait. He had set in motion forces reaching from the far end of the Mediterranean across the broad ocean into New York; there was no longer doubt in his mind that this was so. He could not foresee the final result of the forces moving; he told himself this, too; and he wondered if it was from this sense of ignorance that a vague uneasiness arose. Lacking knowledge, exact knowledge, of the organization of which he was now sure Ricci was a part, he had been handicapped from the beginning, unable to foretell all moves and counter-moves. Like a general without communications, he was operating at least partly in the dark. And yet what else could he have done?

Talking with Lucca on the phone last night, telling him that everything was set and ready, convincing him that it had to be Ricci to carry the junk into France because Ricci was the only one the Air Force kid knew and would accept, arguing with Lucca, beating him down with quiet logic, winning, as he had won before, time and time again, he had, nevertheless, felt the uneasiness beginning then, and he had tried, and failed, to isolate its causes. Lucca had been sullen, even vaguely menacing, like the tiger in the cage prowling slowly, softly, looking out through the bars, waiting. And, as in the tiger, there was, there had always been in Lucca an animal intuition not to be forgotten.

He could go no farther than this in his search for explanations, Antony told himself, because he knew too little. And the sense of waiting remained, and the vague uneasiness that was not quite, but almost, fear.

He was still at the table, his coffee long finished, when Jenner came down from his room. "Nice day," Jenner said. He sat down, gave his order to the waiter. "Tina's not up yet?"

"Sleeping, I suppose," Antony said. There was a change in Jenner this morning, subtle but unmistakable. His air of amusement was gone, and he seemed almost subdued.

"Ricci?" Jenner began.

"He left early," Antony said. "He had something to do." He dismissed it. "Slept well?"

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"Yes," Jenner said. "No." And, briefly, the air of amusement returned. "The change of venue takes a little getting used to." He sipped his coffee.

It was this waiting that was bad, Antony thought, the waiting and the knowledge that there was nothing he could do. You planned, you arranged, you gave the starting signal, and after that you could only sit and hope that everything would come out the right way. He thought of Ricci—young, smart, cocky, walking out to the car with the two suitcases. "No sweat," Ricci had said. But there was sweat, and the uneasiness tugged at his mind like a panhandler nagging on the street. "Change of venue—funny way to put it."

"Figure of speech," Jenner said. He watched his fingers break a roll.

Antony said quietly, "You're good for the girl." And he saw Jenner's head come up at that and saw, with a little surprise, an expression that was almost anger in Jenner's eyes, in the set of his mouth.

"Am I?"

"With you she's relaxed, normal, I guess." He paused, even smiled faintly. "Though I wouldn't know what normal is—for her."

"What would you expect it to be?" Jenner said.

Antony's smile was gone. In the quiet, detached voice he said, "Explain that."

It was none of his business, Jenner told himself. And yet, in a sense, it was. As Ricci had pointed out urgently, he, Jenner, had cut himself in. That was one way to put it. "Joe Antony's daughter," he said, the words almost speaking themselves. And he watched Antony's face, and waited.

"That's the way she sees it?" Antony said. He nodded, answering his own question with another. "How else?"

The coffee tasted bitter, matching Jenner's thoughts. It was easy to be judge and jury for someone else. You sat on a pedestal, and you looked down and saw and understood motives and actions, hopes and regrets—of other people; sometimes they amused you, and sometimes, like now, they did not; but always you saw them

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stripped of sham and pretense, naked and plain. It was only when you tried to look at yourself that your vision was distorted. Now, relentlessly, he said, "What else did you expect?"

"Maybe a miracle." The faint smile showing again. He stood up suddenly. "I've got some—things to do." It was not true; he had nothing to do, but wait. But the uneasiness was strong and would not be denied. "I'll be back after lunch sometime."

Jenner nodded.

"When she comes down," Antony said, and his voice now held almost a pleading note, "take her for a walk. Or there's a beach, and you can swim—"

"Yes," Jenner said.

Antony hesitated. "I'm—sorry. I don't think anybody'd believe that—from me—but—" And he left it there, unable to finish the sentence aloud, wearing still the faint smile like a mask.

"I'll tell her," Jenner said. So easy to look at others, see into their thoughts; they were so transparent. *Take another look at yourself, boy,* he thought; *that's the real trick.* He sat alone, sipping the bitter coffee.

The frontier was close, and Ricci began to slow the car. He worked his shoulders gently, relieving the stiffness and the muscular tension. He saw the sign indicating Customs inspection, and then the striped barrier across the road; and he braked to a full stop and got out, car papers and passport in his hand.

He felt no particular nervousness, only a sense of urgency pushing at his mind, and he set himself against this, knowing that there could be no hurry, that any attempt at haste would only end in delay. He made himself smile as he walked into the building, and he asked directions in halting, American-accented Italian, gesturing with the green passport.

It did not take long: the page from the car papers torn out, the new page stamped, his passport glanced at and stamped. He came back out to the car. Two border guards were looking at it idly. He smiled at them, and they nodded and touched their caps politely. He made himself hesitate, wave passport and papers; and then he

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opened the door of the car and reached inside, took out his own suitcase, held it up and made opening gestures, his face a question mark.

The nearer guard shook his head. He gestured toward the road ahead. The other guard raised the barrier. Ricci drove through. There was no more to it than that. And the French side of the frontier would be, if anything, easier. *Hurry, hurry!* his mind said, but he could not hurry, not yet. "No sweat," he had told Antony; he remembered this now. *God!*

"Just sit tight," Lucca said. "We'll see."

"Get it over with, whatever it is." Belle held her hands tight together in her lap, but there was no way to keep the tremble out of her voice. "I—came back."

"Sure you did." Smiling, showing the dimple, deep. It was funny, he no longer minded waiting now. You looked forward to something, could hardly hold out until it happened, and then, when the time came at last, you wanted to postpone the actual moment lest it slip by too quickly. "You came back."

Belle was silent.

"You think that fixes everything?" Lucca said. "You say, 'So sorry' and that's it?"

She had known it was going to be bad, but not like this—not cat and mouse.

"You know what happens some places when somebody runs off with somebody else's wife?"

"Wife," Belle said. And then, "He didn't. I told you. I hitched a ride, was all. He didn't know. It was my fault." Over and over again she had said it, but after a time even truth, like a word too often repeated, seemed to lose its meaning.

"So now we wait and see."

"Wait for what?"

"He knows where you are. He'll come after you."

She closed her eyes. *Oh, no!*

"Just sit tight, like I said." This was part of his enjoyment, watching her squirm.

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Jenner had finished the bitter coffee, and the roll. He had smoked two cigarettes. He got up slowly from the table. The sun was high, the morning quietly gone. He strolled out on the loggia. The Mediterranean was flat, blue, sparkling—like in the travel posters. And on the shingle beach men and women in rope-soled shoes worked at the eternal job of mending nets. There was an unreality about their movements, and he told himself that it was because he could not escape the feeling that somewhere hidden travelogue cameras were grinding away, and presently, when the scene was done, the men in the rope-soled shoes and their women would line up for pay and the whole thing would be exposed as fake.

But there was unreality, too, about his standing here watching, and about all that had happened within the last few days, and about the people involved—Ricci, Antony, Lucca's blonde female, Tina upstairs, himself, particularly about himself—and this sense of unreality he could not explain away.

He left the loggia, and went back through the dining room. It was empty. The lobby—why did Europeans call it the *hall?*—was empty, too. He climbed the stairs. He had waited long enough, he thought; and he mocked himself for the rationalization. *Little Lord Lovelorn, wanting to see if his Lady Fair will smile at him this morning. Or even look at him.* He felt better. Mockery, he told himself, was his *forte;* amusement his strength; and if he kept it that way, he could not be hurt.

He knocked on Tina's door. "Rise, sloth. Wiggle out."

There was no answer.

He knocked again, louder this time; and again, frowning, puzzled, the amusement suddenly fled. He tried the door. It was unlocked. He hesitated, and then, slowly, he pushed it open, called her name. There was still no answer, and he pushed the door wide, and then just stood there.

Her suitcase was there, open, on the luggage stand. And the pair of shoes he had admired—only yesterday?—stood prim beside a chair. The bed was turned down, but its pillow was unwrinkled, its sheets and single blanket undisturbed. The girl was gone.

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It was a joke, of course; he tried to tell himself this. Or she had, somehow, gone with Antony. Or—or—

He had no explanation, only a feeling of emptiness that was almost nausea. He backed out of the room and closed the door. He tried to think, tried to drive himself to thought, all detached amusement gone now; but it was no good. He knew too little. He was involved, but he didn't know in what.

And, walking back down the stairs slowly, helplessly, not knowing which way to turn or even how to start looking, he wished that Ricci would come back, or Antony—somebody—*to tell him what to do.* And now, at last, he felt that he was looking at himself clearly, all sham and pretense stripped away.

The Air Force sergeant had a rented car, and in the front seat of this they had opened the suitcase and taken out the two packages hidden in the false bottom. Ricci closed and re-locked the case. The sergeant said, in some surprise, "This is all of it? This little bit?"

"That's all," Ricci said.

"Not much bigger than a couple of pounds of butter." And he shook his young head, smiling. "When I think of all the trouble I used to have finding room for cartons of cigarettes."

"That's how it goes," Ricci said. "Some people get in the wrong business." He took out the money Antony had given him—ten fifty dollar bills. "Here you are. Count it."

"Why, I trust you," the sergeant said, smiling still. His fingers were busy riffling the money. He folded it and tucked it in his pocket. "You tell Mr. Antony that I'm happy to oblige him, and for him not to worry one little bit."

"You've got the address on Tenth Street? And the name—Presser?"

"I'm right good at numbers and names."

Hurry, hurry! he thought, but he made himself take his time, play the scene all the way through, make it right, and convincing. "We wouldn't want anything to happen to these." He touched the two packages on the seat between them, but his eyes did not leave

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the sergeant's face. "It wouldn't be good if anything did." His voice was soft.

"I'll treat them like they were my own kin. Tell Mr. Antony—"

"No," Ricci said, softly still. "I'm telling you. You're a delivery boy. Don't get ideas of being anything else. Play it straight, and everything's fine. Get cute and—"

"I don't like people pushing at me, mister."

"Good. Keep it that way and nobody'll push at you, or go looking for you."

"I'm not hard to find, if that's what you mean."

"It is," Ricci said. "You're not at all hard to find. Just remember that."

"And I don't scare easy."

"No," Ricci said. "I don't think you do." He paused. "But this time you'd better be scared, good and scared, if you're smart." And he saw the change in the boy's eyes, subtle, but there. He was satisfied.

He opened the door and got out, the suitcase in his hand. Instinctively he looked around. It was a lonely road; no one was in sight. He closed the door. Through the window he said, "Nice and friendly, that's the way we like it. You'll remember that."

The sergeant nodded. "You don't have to worry. Tell Mr. Antony that."

"Sure," Ricci said. He turned away to his own car. And now, at last, he was free. *Hurry, hurry!* And, walking back to the car, tossing the suitcase in, getting in himself and starting the engine, the job done and the wheels started on their turning, his mind could answer, *Yes. Now I can hurry. I'm coming, Lucca.* And then, *Belle.*

Tina lay on her side, her hands and her feet tied behind her. It was dark and stuffy, and the smells were strange smells, not easily identifiable. She did not know where she was; she did not know how she had come there, or why. And it was this sense of not knowing, not understanding, that was worst of all—worse, by far, than the discomfort, even the pain of constriction at wrist and ankle.

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I haven't done anything. It was a senseless thought, but it repeated itself over and over in her mind like a jingle or a snatch of song that would not be forgotten. *I haven't done anything.* As pointless, as ridiculous as that other wail of despair, *They can't do this to me.* But no matter how she tried, the cycle of impotence continued, rolling endlessly, its tail in its mouth, no beginning and no end.

Lying there in the dark, trying to remember, trying to understand, and failing in both, she began to cry, not noisily as a child cries, but soundlessly, breathing through her mouth as the tears increased, tasting their salt bitterness, and their frustration. And the chant in her mind would not stop. *I haven't done anything. I haven't . . .*

He had come back through both frontier stations; and the officials and the guards, witnessing his return after so brief a time, had stared at him curiously, even, this time, looked at his suitcases and into the trunk of the car for they knew not what. Then, resigned, they had dismissed him, wearing on their faces the peculiar expression reserved by Europeans for American tourists who were, clearly, incomprehensible—always rushing here and rushing there.

He should, of course, have stayed overnight in France in order to escape this close attention; but whether the frontier people remembered him or not no longer mattered because the wheels were already turning and the long masquerade was at an end, or almost.

He drove as fast as the little car would go, pushing it recklessly around the sweeping turns of the road. He did not question the sense of urgency that crowded him, drove him. What he began, he had told Belle, he liked to finish. But it was more than that, much more.

It was relief that the end of the job had begun—not finished, of course, because Lucca and Antony were still to be tied in with the shipment now on its way, and how that was to be accomplished, he had no clear idea, yet.

But it was more than relief, too. It was anger, hatred, even, strong and bitter in his thoughts, against Lucca, and the power that Lucca controlled, but mostly against Lucca himself. The man was

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simple, uncomplicated, so simple and so uncomplicated that he was frightening. What he wanted, he took; what he had, he kept. Everyone had something to hold him back, some scruples, some inner obedience to the rules of conduct that enabled men to live together. Lucca had none, and there, really, was the root of the hatred; the realization that a man like Lucca could not live amongst other men, could not be allowed to live amongst other men. But it was more, even, than hatred.

It was Belle who was the heart and focus of his urgency. *I let her down. All the way along. I've let her down.* And he found himself remembering what, in his omniscience, he had said last night about motives and actions, and he applied it to himself. *I meant well; everything I did in letting her down was wrong, but for the right reasons.* And this, at the bottom, was worst of all.

She bore him no malice; he almost wished that she did. Instead, in her own way, out of her own wisdom, which was a strange word to apply to Belle and yet it was the only word, she understood and accepted, and made no complaint, looked things in the eye and saw them as they were, not as she might have wished them to be. There was a gallantry to her—he had seen this before—and in the presence of her gallantry he felt humble and ashamed, and determined.

Yet it was more than this, too, more than humility, shame, determination. He had, for the final motive, the basic motive, underlying all of the others, no one word, only a name—*Belle*.

Antony's voice had altered, lost its quiet uninflected detachment. Facing Jenner here on the loggia, he had seemed to grow, and then, suddenly, unaccountably, to shrink. "Go upstairs to her room and look?" he said. "Why? What good?" He seemed old, tired.

"Tell me what to do," Jenner said, "because I don't know."

Antony merely looked at him.

"I don't know enough even to guess," Jenner said. "And maybe that's my fault, and maybe it isn't, it doesn't matter." In a way, out of the waiting for Antony's return, out of the sense of helpless impotence, he had achieved a sort of equilibrium, a coming to

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terms with himself, a recognition of his own limitations. He felt calmer. "I thought of calling the police—"

"No police," Antony said. He roused himself, made the effort to throw off the feeling of age, of fatigue, the sense of failure. He might have heeded the vague uneasiness this morning, and he blamed himself that he had not, but he had ignored it, and that was that. But he doubted if anything he could have done would have altered matters by the smallest margin. From the beginning, there had been an inexorability to the pattern of events, one step leading inevitably to the next as if each action and each motive had been foreordained, *written,* as the Moslems had it; and nothing that anyone could have done would have changed it. What would be, would be. Struggle was futile, but it, too, was *written,* and so it had to be continued, even though his heart was no longer in it. "No police," he said again.

"I'm over my depth," Jenner said. "I admit it."

And Antony nodded. "Find your niche, and then stay in it. I didn't. That was my original mistake." And, in the customary uninflected voice, "Stay here." He turned away.

Jenner said, "Will you tell me where you're going?" He watched Antony hesitate, and then, incongruously, smile faintly with no amusement, only regret, acceptance.

"I'm going to—arbitrate," Antony said.

He walked out to the car. He beckoned to Luigi. He got into the rear seat and settled himself. The girl's passport had been taken; that had been the first warning that she was to be the lever for Lucca to use. Now the girl herself was gone, and he had no doubts of the meaning of that. She was a hostage against the safe delivery of the shipment Ricci had carried in the suitcase; and he thought of the wheels already turning, and he doubted that they could be stopped. Struggle was futile, he knew this; and arbitration would fail. Still——

Something else came into his mind then, dropped into his consciousness as if it had been waiting all this time for this moment, one more small action, long since forgotten, which, at the time, had seemed to be unrelated to anything else, merely dictated by immediate circumstance. But it had been related; and now, of course,

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it reappeared in the fabric, part of the pattern—and the sense of inexorability was strong, too strong to be ignored.

He put his hand down beside him on the seat, felt the smooth material with his fingertips. *All right,* he told himself; *if that's the way it is, that's the way it is.* And, aloud, to Luigi behind the wheel, "The Hotel Metropole in the city."

Lucca said, "I don't forget things. Not ever. Some people do. I don't."

Belle sat quiet. There was no mastering the fear, no stifling the sour taste in her throat and the tightness in her chest, no controlling the trembling of her hands pressed tight together. But the paralysis was gone; this she had managed to overpower. She told herself that she did not know whether Ricci would come. And then, scorning the self-deception, *He will come and you know it. Because that's the kind of man he is. And you knew it when you left the note; you tried to hedge your bet, all the time telling yourself that you were being noble. There are names for people like you.*

"You heard what I said?" Lucca said.

"I heard."

"Getting twitchy, are you? Remembering what happened to you last time you got out of line?" And then, "You haven't seen anything yet."

"You're wrong." She had no idea where the strength to keep her voice steady came from. "I've seen a lot of things. Maybe I never looked at them before." *He will come. And I've got to help, if I can.* The determination gathered strength. *Maybe together we can—*

"Like what things?" Lucca said softly.

"Like you." She faced him squarely. She lifted one leg, shucked off her shoe. It wasn't much as a weapon, but the sharp heel just might do some good. She shucked off the other shoe. She left them on the floor in easy reach. "My feet hurt, if that's what you're wondering."

He ignored it. "Like what, about me?"

"You don't play with a full deck of cards," Belle said. "I just didn't see it before." And she saw the backhand blow coming, and made no move to avoid it. It knocked her sideways in the

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chair. She clung to the arm until the first shock passed. Then she sat up straight again, her hands together once more in her lap. "Feel better?" she said.

Ricci's drive was done. He parked the little car, rolled up the windows, took time to lock the suitcase in the trunk against petty theft—doing these things quickly, automatically, his mind clear and sharp now, skipping no details.

There was a back entrance to the Hotel Metropole. He walked to it and went inside. Nobody stopped him. And there were back stairs, as he had been sure there would be. He went up them two at a time, counting the floors as he passed each landing, reminding himself that the fourth floor was actually the fifth because Europeans did not count the ground floor.

He opened the door of the landing, and looked down the hallway. Nobody was in sight. He stepped through, walking steadily, without obvious haste, watching the numbers on the doors. A few days ago he had done this, heading for Leclerc's room, but that time he had been reluctant; this time he was not. He knocked at the door of 407.

When the door opened, he was ready, tensed, poised, his mind prepared. He hit the door hard with his shoulder, felt it strike something, and then swing free. And he went into the room in a rush, the eagerness unrestrained now, the entire tableau open before him: Lucca, caught in the moment of regaining his balance, his movements frozen, and his face caught in the act of surprise; Belle, in her stocking feet, a shoe raised, its heel pointing downwards looking not at Lucca but at Ricci, beyond him—and she was frozen, too.

"No!" Belle said, loud and sharp. "No! Ricci!"

He managed to stop himself. He did not know how, but it was unimportant. He stood quiet, understanding, tasting the bitterness of one more failure, one more mistake. And he felt the hard pressure of the gun in the small of his back, although the pressure was not really necessary.

Lucca said in Italian, "Close the door." The sound of its closing seemed loud in the quiet room.

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There were heavy drapes at the windows, and the furniture was dark, massive, carved; the carpet on the floor was thick; on the marble mantel an ormolu clock ticked with an unbalanced sound. All of this Ricci saw, and heard, while he waited, although his eyes did not leave Lucca's face.

"You're supposed to be a smart boy," Lucca said. He smiled, showing the scar dimple. "But I don't think you are. We've been waiting for you. Marco's been in the room across the hall, just in case." Smiling still he walked up to Ricci, raised his hand, hit him twice with brutal force, backhand, forehand, across the face. "It figured that you'd come—like a tomcat on a back fence."

Ricci raised his hand slowly. He touched his cheek, looked down at his fingers. There was blood from the opened bruise. He made no other move. The gun no longer pressed against his back; but it was there behind him, he was conscious of that.

Lucca looked at Belle, at the shoe still in her hand. "Feet still hurt, baby?"

Her head was up, high. "I hurt somewhere else. Just looking at you gives me a pain you know where." And, looking at Ricci, "I'm sorry."

He shook his head in slow wonderment. "*You're* sorry?"

"That's what I said." She had a smile for him, faint, but steady.

It was then, in the silence, that the phone rang, and Lucca said in Italian, "Watch them," as he walked to a table and picked the phone up, answered it. He listened. Then, "You're alone?" And, "Okay." He hung up the phone, turned back into the room. "Sit over there, both of you." The smile appeared, disappeared, came again, the spasms tugging at his cheek. "You can hold hands." And in Italian once more, "A man is coming. I'll open the door. You stand there, keep your eyes on everybody."

For the first time now Ricci could see the man with the gun, Marco. He was small, almost dainty, with shiny black hair and tiny feet in shoes that were pointed and built up at the heel. He moved daintily, too, like a dancer, his body motionless from the waist up, as he took his position against the wall between the sofa and the door. His eyes were light gray, and as they swung from side to side

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covering the entire room, they did not blink. In his small hand, the stubby gun was steady as a rock.

Lucca said, in English now, "It's Antony." His eyes watched Ricci. "You know what he wants?" There was a curious inflection in his voice.

"How would I know?" Ricci said.

"I asked the question."

Ricci shrugged. He sat down on the sofa beside Belle. The mice feet were scampering again, up and down his spine, tingling into the roots of his hair, and it was an effort to maintain the outward attitude of calm. Belle said softly, "The man told you to hold my hand."

"Did he?"

"That was the way I heard it."

Watching her, close to her now, he felt some of the tension easing within him, as if the mere fact of her presence was a balm. He made himself smile. "Which one?"

"They're both here." She held them out, fingers spread.

"No rings," Ricci said.

"No, I took them off. I—threw them away. And then I washed my hands." She added, almost hesitantly, "They're—clean."

"I think," Ricci said, "that they always were." He took both hands in one of his own, held them, feeling their trembling and their warmth. Then there was nothing to do but wait, and the ormolu clock on the mantel ticked on in its unbalanced monotony. Until the knock came at the door.

Lucca opened it, standing well back. He nodded, and stood aside. Antony came in without haste, neat as always, quiet, his face expressionless and composed. He looked around, at Marco and the gun, at Ricci and Belle, back again to Lucca who had closed the door and now crossed the room in his light prowling walk to stand by the mantel and face them all. "Well?" Lucca said.

Antony's voice held nothing. "A party, Angelo?"

"My business."

"Maybe," Antony said. "Maybe not." The pattern changed, he thought; it arranged and rearranged its component parts. He had not thought to find either Ricci or Belle here, but here they were

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and he altered his intentions accordingly. What would be, would be, he was convinced of this now, and the conviction carried with it the cold feeling that they were, all of them, like players following a prepared script—himself, for the moment, playing the lead. He spoke the first cue with the sure knowledge of what the next lines would be, and the next. "My daughter has disappeared, Angelo." In the quiet uninflected voice.

"Too bad," Lucca said. He controlled his anger, allowed only a small part of it to show in the smile, the dimple that came and went.

"You didn't trust me, is that it, Angelo?"

"Trust," Lucca said. And then, "You get fancy sometimes, Joe, maybe too fancy. Words, lots of them." His voice was beginning to rise. "So many words that maybe I begin to wonder." He jerked his head toward Ricci. "He falls over his own feet and the cops are looking for him, so you say get him out of town, give him a car, send him up here—"

"Yes," Antony said. "I did that, Angelo."

"And what happens? He runs off with her, sneaks her—"

"Does that break your heart?" Antony said quietly.

"No!" It was almost a shout. Lucca paused. He gathered himself. His voice came down, but the smile continued and the brown eyes seemed to smolder. "She belonged to me. I owned her. And nobody takes anything from me." And he paused again. "He's the only one who can carry the junk into France, because he's the only one the Air Force punk will recognize—"

"Yes," Antony said, still quiet, still composed.

"And that was your idea, too. You arranged it that way."

"I did," Antony said. He looked at Ricci. "You delivered the stuff?"

Sitting there, holding Belle's hands in one of his, listening, he was puzzled and he could not have said why. There was nothing in Antony's voice, or manner, and yet there should have been, if the girl was gone; knowing Antony and what he felt toward the girl, he was sure of this. He said merely, "Yes. It's on its way."

Antony looked at Lucca again. Now the next cue. "The girl—"

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"You'll get her back," Lucca said, "when the junk is delivered, when I hear from Tiny. Not before."

Ricci's hand tightened on Belle's, and he waited, partially understanding now, not wanting to interfere.

"Suppose," Antony said without inflection, "it isn't delivered, Angelo? Or suppose something happens when it is?"

"So it's like that," Lucca said, and all the loudness was gone now; his voice was quite soft.

"Ask him," Antony said. Then, to Ricci, before Lucca could speak, "Can you stop it? What you've started?"

Ricci was silent.

"His name," Antony said, "is Bellanca, not Morelli. The narcotics people sent him over here—"

"And you've known it all along," Lucca said.

"No."

"I say yes."

Everything that had been said had been leading up to this, Antony thought; and now, watching Lucca's face, studying it and seeing the conviction that was in it, conviction that no amount of argument or logic would ever be able to shake, he told himself that he had known from the moment he entered the room that this was what he would have to deal with. He said quietly, "I have proof, Angelo." The logical voice, the patient voice, distinct and unhurried. To Ricci, "You left something in the car the night I drove you to the garage. Do you remember?"

"No."

"Think," Antony said. "You're a smart boy. Just before you got out you left it, and maybe you meant to get it back, but you didn't."

Ricci searched his memory, searched it again. There was only one thing he had left in the car, left, actually, in Antony's hand, and until now, occupied with other things, other thoughts, he had forgotten all about it. Belle had been behind them in a taxi that night, but neither he nor Antony had known that; it might have been the police, and Antony had said in the same quiet voice he used now, that it would not be good for the police to pick Ricci up and find a gun on him, and so he had given the gun to Antony.

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It was the gun he was talking about, as if he were giving clues on a quiz program.

"It's been in the car all along," Antony said. "I found it today. I have it here." He put his hand in his pocket.

"I remember," Ricci said, and he hoped that the tension he felt did not show. His hand still held Belle's, squeezed them. Marco was close, and Marco's attention was on Antony. And Lucca was clear across the room. Ricci still did not understand completely, but he told himself that it made no difference. He was conscious that Belle watched him, and Antony; Lucca's eyes, brown and shining, were fixed on his face. Ricci took a deep breath. He let his shoulders slump. "All right," he said sullenly. "You win. Show it to him."

"It's very interesting, Angelo," Antony's voice began quietly, and Ricci waited to hear no more.

It was impossible to jump from the sitting position on the sofa. Instead, he dove, launching himself at Marco, concentrating on this and only on this. He saw Marco's head swing around, the gray eyes unblinking. And the gun moved without hesitation. Behind him, he heard Belle's sudden, indrawn breath, but that was the only sound in the room. And the gun was almost around, almost pointing at his face.

He grabbed, caught the gun and the hand that held the gun in his own hand, halted their movement, or at least slowed it. And then his shoulder crashed into the little man's stomach, drove him back against the wall. And from his knees, using the full force of his body, Ricci threw his head upwards against the chin he sensed was there, felt skull and chin strike with crunching force. And he snatched the gun from the small limp hand and rolled clear, and rolled again, came up to his knees facing out into the room. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Marco falling, his entire body unhinged. But that was not where his attention lay.

Antony's back was to him, and Antony's hand was clear of his pocket, and the gun he held was in front of his body, hidden. But it was there; Lucca's face proved that. Anthony's voice said, "All right?"

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"All right," Ricci said. He stood up slowly, wary still. On the sofa Belle sat motionless.

Antony turned slowly. He looked at Ricci. He looked down at the gun in his own hand. He shook his head. Step by step, he thought, and each step deeper into impotence—*because it had to be; there was no other way*. He felt old, and tired, looking again at Ricci, at the blood on Ricci's face, at his youth and his strength —his sureness. *I'll never know what might have been, what I might have been. Waste*. And he said, "So."

Ricci said slowly, "You knew how much?" It no longer mattered; the masquerade was done.

"About you? What difference? What I didn't know I guessed."

"You asked me if I could stop what I started."

"Yes. You have it all, or should have—Niarhos and Kemel the source, Tiny Presser the end—"

"And you gave me the job in the middle so I could be sure." He wanted it plain, clear, spelled out.

Antony said, "Would you have believed me if I'd just told you?"

Ricci was silent.

"I—tried," Antony said. "But you couldn't see it. Whatever I said, I was still—" He paused. "—Joe Antony." And, lest there be misunderstanding, "I didn't blame you. I don't now."

"The wrong things for the right reasons," Ricci said. Or maybe it was the other way around. He didn't know. With something of a shock, it came to him that he didn't much care. *I'm not God to pass judgment on anybody*. "All right," he said. His eyes had never really left Lucca, and now, seeing the tenseness in the man, he said softly, "Try something. I wish you would." Then, "Where's the girl? Where's Tina?"

"I can't hear you," Lucca said. The soft brown eyes held their gloss, like silk, and the scar dimple was plain.

Antony made a small vague gesture. His voice, when it came, was no longer uninflected, and its detachment was gone. "She hasn't done anything, Angelo."

"Too bad. I told you when you'd get her back."

Antony looked at Ricci. "I asked you once. Can you stop what you started?"

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"No."

Antony said, "The Air Force kid is on his way, and they—your people—are waiting for him at the other end, but they won't touch him until he gets to Presser, puts the stuff in Presser's hands, is paid." Quietly, hopelessly, recapitulating the facts, the circumstances.

"Yes," Ricci said. "But I can't stop it."

And from the sofa Belle said gently, "Would you stop it if you could?"

Ricci looked at her then, still not letting Lucca out of his vision. He took his time, although he knew the answer without thought or hesitation. *No choice, no choice,* the chant seemed to begin again in his mind. "No," he said.

"A tough kid," Antony said. "I called you that. You are." And he turned to Lucca again. "Angelo—"

"Can't hear a word you're saying, Joe." Smiling still. There was silence, only the sound of the clock ticking on the mantel.

Antony said, "You've lost, Angelo—"

"Have I? Prove it."

"What good does the girl—"

"What girl?" And there was silence again.

Ricci took a deep breath. The anger was there, the hatred, and he fought them down, mastered them. "I could beat it out of you."

"Could you?"

"Or maybe I couldn't. I don't know."

"Make up your mind. You're a bright boy, almost as bright as Joe here."

Belle said slowly, "How did he know I was here? That I wanted to sell some jewelry?"

Ricci looked at her, stared at her.

"Does that help?" Belle said. "Or maybe it doesn't."

"It does," Ricci said, and he blamed himself that he had not thought of it. He looked at Antony. "I'll find her." And he saw the relief in Antony's face.

"You know where she is?"

"I can find out. Keep him away from the telephone."

Antony hesitated, nodded. He seemed to gather himself. "Yes."

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"I'll call you here," Ricci said. He glanced around, looked down at Marco. The little man had made no move. "He won't bother you," Ricci said, and he turned then, and started for the door.

Antony stopped him. "Take Belle with you."

"Why?"

It was the quiet, uninflected voice again. "Just take her. I don't want her here."

And Ricci looked at Belle, and nodded, watched her pick up her shoes, put them on, rise and walk toward him. "The bad penny," she said. "Or the stray kitten that won't go away."

Ricci said nothing. He opened the door, looked out. The hall was empty. He held the door for Belle, glanced back into the room. Antony was still standing there, and Lucca, the two of them facing one another. Lucca was smiling as Ricci closed the door.

Ricci led the way down the back stairs, out the service entrance. Nobody stopped them. They drove away from the hotel, down the hill, headed out of town toward the village.

"You didn't want me," Belle said, "and I can't say I blame you." She made it as light as she could, and she thought, *He wanted me once, and I can remember that; I can be proud of that.*

"You've got it wrong," Ricci said. "It was just—"

"You don't have to explain. Poison was the word, remember?"

"Cut it out," Ricci said.

"You were doing a job."

"Yes." He remembered her question there in the hotel room. Would he have stopped the wheels that were turning if he could; would he have traded with Lucca? And he remembered his answer.

"What you begin," Belle said, "you like to finish."

"If I can."

"That was why you came back."

"I told you once—" he began, angry again, and not understanding the reason.

"That you weren't a hero. Yes. I remember. But—"

"Knock it off," Ricci said sharply. All along, he was thinking, he had stumbled and fumbled and, somehow, come out right so far. And he had no way of knowing whether he was right this time, or wrong again. And he didn't like the idea of Antony and Lucca

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alone in that hotel room, and he didn't really know the reason for that, either. He thought of Tina, who had no part in all of this, and yet who was, actually, the fulcrum on which the forces balanced one another, and so she was involved despite herself. And Belle, too, sitting quiet on her side of the seat, Belle, whom he had called once his good-luck charm. He turned to look at her. "I'm sorry," he said. "Forget it. I didn't mean to snap at you."

She smiled. "It didn't hurt." *Much,* she added silently. They spoke no more until they reached the village, pulled to a stop in front of the hotel. Jenner was on the loggia. He came down the steps two at a time on his long legs.

"Where's Antony?"

"He's all right," Ricci said. He got out of the car. He worked his shoulders.

"And what happened to your face?"

"I ran into something. Forget it." Belle was out, too, and Ricci looked at her. "You stay here. With Pete."

"Look," Jenner said. "Tina's—"

Belle touched his arm. "He knows." Her voice was quiet. She watched Ricci turn, walk across the square, middle-sized, solid, purposeful. "That's why he's here," she said. She put her hand on Jenner's arm. "We wait," she said.

"But—"

"Waiting," Belle said, "is the hard part. And he knows that, too."

Jenner looked down at her. "Is that it? You're trying to build me up? It's that plain that I've sprung some seams?"

"Beating yourself over the head," Belle said, "because you're not what—he is?"

Jenner was silent.

"Maybe he isn't what you are, had you thought of that?" And she watched his eyes widen a trifle. "The same way," she said, "that I'm not what—Antony's daughter is." And she smiled. "It takes a little getting used to."

"What does?"

"That you can't be everything. Nobody can."

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In the hotel room it was quiet, only the mantel clock ticking with its unbalanced sound. Antony had taken a chair. Lucca still stood. Marco had opened his eyes, and with one small hand he brushed absently, and with a vague movement, at his hair; beyond this he was still, half-sitting, half-leaning against the wall.

"You with a gun," Lucca said. "That's a laugh, Joe."

"Is it?" He felt no fear, or even tension, merely a sort of resignation, an odd sense of destiny. What would be, would be. What was *written* would come to pass. The conviction that this was true was so strong now that it seemed to be not he, but some stranger, some automaton who sat in his chair. "You can't touch me, Angelo. Say what you want."

" 'Sticks and stones,' you mean, Joe? That it? That's a laugh, too. Because you always cared, too much, what people thought about you. The old people, remember, Joe? Your old man, my old man—"

"I remember," Antony said. In a way, it was pleasant to look back, to remember what once had been.

"You were going to be a big man," Lucca said.

Antony nodded. "I was." Strangely, even the regrets had faded now, lost their force. The telephone would ring—it was for this that he waited—and he was ready.

"You're not talking much," Lucca said. "What's the matter, Joe? The cat got your tongue? Your lawyer tongue?" He had been confident when the door had closed after Ricci, who was a tough kid, and toughness he could respect. Now he was not so sure. He couldn't seem to get through to Antony, and it was this that baffled him. Antony arguing, Antony even pleading, Antony proud, Antony sensitive, Antony thinking, always thinking—these facets of Antony he knew, and was accustomed to. But Antony seemed to have retired into a shell, impenetrable as armor. Antony no longer seemed to care, and this Lucca did not understand. "Joe."

"I'm right here, Angelo. I can hear you."

Lucca took two steps from the mantel, stopped, turned, went back. "You outsmarted me," he said.

"I always could," Antony said.

Lucca shook his head. His cheek was beginning its small smiling

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spasms again, and he tried to control it and could not. "You got it wrong, Joe. I used you, put your brain to work for me—so who outsmarted who?"

"Maybe you're right. It doesn't matter."

His smile came and went, came and went, would not be stilled. He raised his hand suddenly and pressed the fingers hard against his cheek. Antony watched him, unmoving, expressionless. "What do you want, Joe?" Lucca said, and his voice was beginning its rise.

"Nothing I can ever have."

"That doesn't make sense." He took three steps from the mantel this time, and returned. There was a table across the room, and in the drawer of the table was a gun. And his cheek might jump, and the anger and frustration he felt might rise, almost choke him, but he would reach the gun—of this much he was still confident. "You want something. You get it. Then you look for something else to want, and get. Don't give me that, Joe."

"I've stopped wanting."

"Nobody does. Ever."

"I have, Angelo." It was no more than simple truth. The man in the chair, himself, held the gun and spoke only the truth, without frills or fancy work, and kept his eyes on Lucca, and understood what was in Lucca's mind as easily as if it were written on his forehead—and waited.

"You can't touch me, Joe."

Antony said nothing.

"So you stopped a shipment. You even got to my suppliers. And Tiny. You can't touch me, Joe. You know that." Four steps this time, almost reaching the table, before he turned back. He had forgotten his cheek now, or almost. *Let it jump; it doesn't mean a thing*. "You hear me? You can't touch me, and you can't stop me. I'll never stop doing whatever I want to do."

"Wrong, Angelo. There's a way." He wished that the telephone would ring, but he was not impatient. After a whole lifetime, a little waiting was not important. It would ring, he knew that—and he was content.

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"What way?" And he moved again from the mantel, one step, two, three, four—

"Why, you know, Angelo." Sitting there, the automaton watched Lucca, and understood; and the disembodied intelligence, himself, thought of the pattern of events, and wondered at its richness, its complications that yet did nothing to mar its basic simplicity. Whoever planned such things, planned them well, missing no smallest detail; the hand that *wrote* was a sure hand.

"You shouldn't have done it, Joe," Lucca said. "You know that." One more step, and he had reached the table now. Strangely, at this moment, his cheek ceased its spasms and the choking feeling of anger suddenly ceased. "I'm no punk, Joe. You should have remembered that."

"I know, Angelo. I didn't forget it. Ever." And he saw the sudden movement of Lucca's hands, the drawer opening, the gun coming out, Lucca turning, spinning away from the table . . . He had only a mild regret that the telephone had not rung.

Ricci had gone into the first bar, and the second. He walked now into the third. He felt only determination, deep and strong, and solid; all else was wiped from his mind. Here in the bar it was dim, quiet. He saw Gino leaning against the counter, and Gino turned, saw him, smiled his broad, happy smile. "Ricci." And then, "Your face."

"Nothing, big one." He saw the man beyond Gino, and the man, Giulio, watched him, unsmiling, silent. So the search was over.

"A glass of wine, Ricci?" Gino said.

"Not now."

"This is Giulio," Gino said. "He—"

"I know, big one." He had not stopped walking, steady, unhurried steps. It was strange that he felt neither eagerness nor compunction, nothing but the determination and the sense that this thing had to be done. "I know Giulio." And he had reached the man now, and the sharp, cunning eyes beneath the cap watched him, and the heavy shoulders moved faintly. Ricci swung low, with his left hand, pivoted his body into the punch. He crossed his right hand as the man grunted and bent suddenly. He hooked again with

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his left, high this time, and Giulio went backwards against the bar, seemed to hang there and then slowly went down to his hands and knees. "Where is the girl?" Ricci said.

Gino said, "Ricci—"

"My affair, big one." He turned his head for only a moment, but the moment was enough, too much.

Giulio came off the floor as if his legs were springs. He drove with his head, jarring Ricci off balance. His hand moved quickly, very quickly, and there was no time to block its thrust, only to deflect it by the smallest amount.

Giulio jumped back then, crouching, the knife held low in his hand, its blade red, and he circled slowly, and Ricci turned to face him and tried to lift his left arm and could not. There was no pain, merely numbness in his shoulder, and a weakness that began to spread, robbing his legs of their spring, tangling the movements of his feet. Still he turned, watching Giulio slowly circling. It was an effort to move, even to stand. "Big one—"

"I hear, Ricci." And a hand caught his good arm and lifted him aside as if he were nothing, moved him to the support of the counter. He leaned against it, and with his right hand gathered the material of his coat and pressed it tight against his left shoulder. The pain began then, but he ignored it, or tried to, leaning against the counter, supporting himself.

"The other time," Gino was saying, "you would not allow me to help you, Ricci." He spoke as he moved, his hands half extended, fingers spread, nimble, even graceful for all of his bulk. "But this is my work." He said it with simple pride.

"Aside," Giulio said. "Aside, big fat one. Our affair." And he lunged, a feint, no more.

One of the great reaching hands seemed to flick, as at a fly in the air, a mosquito. Giulio screamed, and the knife flew from his fingers and clattered across the room.

"Now," Gino said, "you no longer have a claw, little cat."

It was hard to cling to the counter, but Ricci would not let himself fall. He concentrated on forcing down the dizziness and the pain, pressing hard against the wound with his good hand. He was dimly aware of movement, the shuffling of feet, and of sounds,

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ugly sounds, as of a rug being beaten. And then the sounds ceased.

Gino's voice said, "A glass of brandy," in a tone of command. And then there was the burning taste of the liquor and Gino's hand, gentle as a woman's, urging more.

Ricci swallowed, swallowed again, coughed. "Enough, big one." The burning in his throat drove some of the dizziness away, leaving only the pain and this could be ignored. "The girl," he said. "He has the girl. It has to be." Strangely, his mind was clear and sharp, sure.

"I will ask him, Ricci." The big man moved away. He was gone only briefly. "It is true. She is in the cellar of the hotel." He took Ricci's good arm in his hand. "Come. We will get her." And then, "I do not understand, Ricci, but it is unimportant." Half-supporting, half-carrying, across the dusty square.

Luigi drove the big car. Antony sat alone in the rear seat. The drive seemed long, but it would end. He had been wrong, he told himself; he had not told the simple unvarnished truth. He did want something. Maybe he could have it. There was at least hope.

A long lifetime—he wondered if every lifetime seemed long—and what was *written* did come to pass. Regrets, then, were futile, even though they could not be subdued, and yet— He felt on the verge of a great discovery, in the presence of a great truth, but its shape was indistinct, almost formless; he was like a blind man trying to identify something large and unfamiliar. Hadn't he read once about three blind philosophers trying to describe an elephant by touch?

"We are here, *signor*," Luigi said. He was out of the car. He opened the door.

Antony nodded. Beyond Luigi he saw the hotel, and Belle on the steps staring, and then Ricci, and Gino, and the three of them came down to him. Ricci leaned on Gino; his face seemed pale, but his eyes were bright, clear, and, looking at Antony, he answered the question before it was asked. "We have her. She's all right. I telephoned, but there was no answer." And then, to Belle, and his voice was suddenly sharp, "Get her. Quick!" His voice drove her back up the steps running.

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"I decided not to—wait," Antony said.

"I know." Ricci's voice was quiet, gentle. All of the pieces fitted now, everything was plain. Watching Antony's face, seeing its grayness, trying not to look at the great stain spreading on Antony's coat, knowing with an odd, sure clarity that the man was beyond help, he said now, "You meant to kill him. That was why you sent Belle with me. You knew when you took that gun out of your pocket that that was what you had to do."

"You're a bright boy," Antony said. "Sometimes." It was the quiet, uninflected voice, and there was the faintest of smiles tugging at the corners of his eyes. "He should have been—destroyed —a long time ago." His eyes moved, went beyond Ricci to Tina coming down the steps, running down the steps.

Antony made no move as she leaned into the car, far into the car. He said, as if he were speaking to Lucca, almost apologizing to Lucca, "I did want—" And he stopped there. He seemed to wait.

The girl said slowly, quietly, finding no pain in the saying, only the one word, "Father."

And it was as if a curtain were lifted, he thought, and he was no longer blind, and the great truth was exposed in all of its grandeur and simplicity. "The best I could," he said.

The hotel seemed quiet. It was morning, bright, clear; the hills rising out of the sea seemed sharp in their outline. Jenner, sitting at his coffee, said, "Will the medal be gold, with maybe a diamond or two stuck in it somewhere?" And then, hearing the words aloud and finding them somehow—juvenile—"That isn't really very funny, is it? I'm sorry."

Ricci said slowly. "It doesn't matter, Pete." It had been a job, he thought, and now it was done, and he was tired, empty-feeling inside. His shoulder was stiff, sore, but the pain had ended; he kept his hand in the pocket of his coat. He had telephoned Randall, reported Lucca's death, and Antony's, verified the delivery of the packages to the Air Force boy; and in Randall's voice there had been as much satisfaction as Randall ever allowed himself to express. Ricci told himself that he should feel pride, even triumph;

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and he did not. Triumph was a Dead Sea fruit, tasteless as ashes; achievement was nothing, satisfaction lay only in the striving—funny thoughts; they needed Antony's quiet voice, his detachment, to give them meaning.

I killed him, Ricci thought. *I left him there with Lucca, and so I killed him just as surely as I killed Leclerc. My fault.*

Jenner stood up quite suddenly. He smiled at Tina, held a chair for her, sat down again. The girl looked at them both and said, "I'm going into Genoa. There'll be a ship."

Ricci said nothing. Jenner shook his head. "No ship."

"Then an airplane. There are flights—"

"No airplane. No water wings."

She was frowning now.

"You want to go off and forget," Jenner said. "You want to go back and pretend nothing ever happened."

They both watched him in silence.

"Even I know better than that," Jenner said.

Ricci opened his mouth and closed it again. Inwardly he smiled, a quiet smile, Antony's smile.

"Responsibility," Jenner said. He seemed almost embarrassed. "Funny word."

"I have no responsibility," the girl said. "What do you want me to do? There's nothing—" She stopped there. She looked from one face to the other.

Ricci was silent, expressionless.

"Damn it," Jenner said. "You're a big girl. You don't just—walk out." And he wore the embarrassed expression again. "I seem to be reading somebody else's lines." He paused. He shook his head stubbornly. "It doesn't make any difference how you get on stage, maybe somebody pushes you out from the wings, but you're there, and you stay there until your part is finished." He looked at Ricci. "Am I blushing?"

Ricci allowed the inward smile to show. He nodded. His voice was quiet, uninflected, detached—Antony's voice. "You are."

"Well," Jenner said. "That's all." And he started to rise.

Tina said, "Will you tell me what to do, Pete?" It was a strange voice, a small voice, and her head was bent, her face hidden.

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"All right," Jenner said. "First, you telephone your aunt, tell her what's happened, all of it, and why. He told us that once he was her favorite, remember? And then you make arrangements, funeral—"

Her head had lifted, and she watched him steadily. She said, "That wasn't what I meant, Pete. Not exactly."

"I—" And he sat there, uncertain, wearing still the embarrassed expression. "You—" And again he stopped.

Ricci stood up. Neither of them seemed to notice. He turned away.

Jenner's voice said quietly, "Yes. I'll tell you what to do." There was a sureness in it, and a strength, new, different, unlike its sound before. "Will you—"

"I'll listen," the girl said, "and obey."

Ricci walked out onto the loggia. It was there that Belle found him.

She wore a light dress molded to her body. She wore her faint smile. "The dining room is occupied. Like a park bench in the moonlight."

"Yes."

"How's your shoulder?"

"Fine."

Studying him, she said, "Tell mother."

"What?" He frowned, puzzled.

"What's chewing on you."

"There's nothing." *I killed him. My fault.* He was not aware that he said it aloud, and so her answer when it came startled him, almost shocked him.

"No, you didn't. He killed himself. What else could he do?"

"You read minds?"

"And palms." The slow smile spread, held for a moment, disappeared. "The bill came," she said, "and he looked at it, added it up and found that it wasn't padded. So he paid it."

"Just like that?" Ricci said.

She nodded.

He said slowly, wonderingly, "I lean on you."

"No charge. I leaned on you, practically rode on your back."

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And I can remember this moment, too, she thought; *I can tuck it away and bring it out all bright and shining from time to time and look at it, and remember.*

"Last night," Ricci said, "I had to lean on Gino. I couldn't finish what I'd started."

"Does that bother you?"

"I'm not sure."

"Because if it does, you've got it all wrong. Nobody's closed, like a glass ball, round and shiny and complete. You do the best you can, and if it isn't good enough you yell for help."

The empty feeling was gone, and he did not know when, or how. *Only why,* he thought. The knowledge was not sudden, and in its presence he felt no surprise, only a kind of awe, a bright wonder that anyone should have the power to soothe him, ease him, comfort him, warm him. He had been wrong, he told himself; there was satisfaction in striving, yes, but the real goal was not achievement, as he had once believed and found untrue; the real goal was something else, and he groped for the word and found it —*fulfillment*. He said it aloud, and he watched Belle's frown; he could even smile at it. "The best I can, alone, isn't good enough," he said.

Her frown disappeared. Slowly she shook her head, disbelieving.

"I'm yelling for help," Ricci said. And then, "Do I have to draw you a picture?"

She stood there, watching him, searching his face; and what she felt lay midway between laughter and tears, between wonder and fear. "I'm not very bright." She heard the words as if someone else spoke them. "I don't need a picture, but—"

"A token demonstration," Ricci said. "Yes. Like this." He reached for her then, and she came to him. "I have only one arm for the present."

Smiling up at him with her lips and her eyes, with all of her being, "We'll—make out."

Gino had a glass of wine in his hand. To Luigi he said, "You leave today, driving south again?"

"True." And then, "You are not coming?"

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Words, sometimes, were difficult things; it was necessary to choose them with care because words were, in effect, thoughts given life, and thoughts were rare and precious things, delicate, fragile, not to be harshly treated. "No," Gino said. "It is hard to explain, but I will try." He frowned in concentration. "A man must choose the things he wants most, and for each man the things may be different, and for each man the time of choice may be different, too." He paused. "In the end, I think, each man must find the place where he belongs, where he feels comfortable and at ease." He shook his big head helplessly. "I cannot explain more fully than that."

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