

**Brett Halliday**

# **The Corpse That Never Was**

## **CHAPTER ONE**

At ten-thirty that evening, Michael Shayne was as completely and utterly relaxed as he had ever been in his life... and Shayne was a man who believed in relaxation. It was the end of June, and the hectic Miami "season" was over for the summer. He hadn't a case on hand, and hadn't even bothered to go into the office for the past three days.

He didn't anticipate any cases for the next month or two or three. Native Miamians and the class of tourists who came down to take advantage of the cheaper rates during the off-season were not the sort of people who kept a private detective busy. It was a period for somnolent relaxation, for enjoying the good things of life, and Shayne had trained himself over the years to take full advantage of those few months each year.

Right now he was slouched comfortably at the end of the sofa in Lucy Hamilton's living room with a tray on the low coffee table in front of him holding a bucket of ice cubes, an open bottle of his favorite cognac, a four-ounce glass half-full of amber fluid and a highball glass of ice water.

Lucy had cooked dinner for the two of them that evening, and now she was in the small kitchen at his right contentedly humming while she washed up the dinner dishes they had used. He listened to Lucy's humming and to the small sounds she made in the kitchen as she did her domestic chores, and he told himself happily that he was undoubtedly one of the luckiest guys on the face of the earth.

Because Lucy was a superlative cook. She was probably a better cook than she was a secretary, he told himself indulgently. Though that was hardly true or fair. She was also a superlative secretary.

But he had an idea the world was full of superlatively efficient secretaries. You just discovered one and paid her a decent salary, and she ran your office the way you wanted it run forevermore; and that's all there was to it.

But how many secretaries could cook the way Lucy cooked? Tonight, she had fried chicken for the two of them in her small apartment. Okay. Fried chicken is something anyone can do. Or can they? Sure. Anyone can fry a chicken. But what do you get at the end of it? Something that is edible. Sure.

But Lucy's fried chicken! Now, that was something different. Prepared with loving care and garnished with imagination. To begin with, it had to be plump, freshly killed chicken, purchased at a particular poultry market where the proprietor knew Lucy and would sell her nothing but the best. Only drumsticks, thighs and wings, of course. No other portion of the fowl was worthy of the attention it was to receive at Lucy's hands.

Lightly dusted with flour and with certain herbs which were Lucy's secret (Shayne suspected she changed them each time she fried chicken, although nutmeg always remained basic) then dropped into very hot sweet butter with two whole garlic cloves floating in it, swiftly browned on all sides, the garlic removed, heat reduced to simmer and loving, careful attention for at least another hour (turning frequently) uncovered so the crispness could not go away. Then removed to a hot baking dish and put into a low oven while the gravy and the rice received proper attention.

Lucy Hamilton was from New Orleans, and she cooked rice as Michael Shayne had never known rice could be cooked. He wasn't exactly sure how she managed it, but it had to do with a very small amount of water in a very heavy iron pan, cooked at low heat without stirring during the entire time. It was a rather wasteful way of cooking rice because it ended with a crust of hard, inedible rice in the bottom of the pan which had to be soaked out overnight before it could be cleaned... but each of the grains you scraped off the top of the burned crust was plump and juicy, stood alone, and begged to be drenched with the chicken gravy Lucy was making in the sweet butter in which the garlicked chicken had been fried.

Now, like rice, chicken gravy is something any unimaginative housewife can manage (and most of them do). But Lucy Hamilton was not unimaginative, nor was she a housewife. She was Michael Shayne's secretary, and she devoted as much time and attention to her chicken gravy as most suburban housewives devote to the dry martinis with which they stupefy their guests to prepare them to enjoy the dry, tough, and overdone steaks which their husbands have ruined over an outdoor barbecue pit.

Let us not attempt to describe Lucy's way with chicken gravy. Shayne knew not what she did nor how she did it. He didn't care. He really didn't want to know. Just ladling it over her rice and sinking his teeth into her tender, juicy, crusty chicken was enough for any man.

So, that was the sort of dinner Michael Shayne had just finished at ten o'clock that evening in his secretary's apartment. With a vegetable, of course. Oh yes! Lucy was hell-bent on serving a vegetable with her dinners. She had long ago given up on serving Michael Shayne a salad. Try as she would and use all the imagination she possessed, he always dawdled with a salad and pushed it aside. Even when she went to the extremes of substituting brandy for vinegar in the salad dressing (which she had tried once in order to tempt him). He simply ate all the dressing off the salad greens, and left them on his plate, limp and sad.

Tonight she had given him thinly sliced radishes with chopped scallions. Gently sauteed together with sweet butter and with nutmeg added. Even non-vegetarians can be enticed by that combination and Shayne had been so enticed.

No dessert. Lucy served a light-chilled Rose with her dinner and strong black coffee afterward.

And now she was in the kitchen contentedly humming to herself while she washed up the dishes, and her employer's rangy frame was contentedly relaxed on the sofa of her living room with his long legs stretched out in front of him, sipping cognac and washing it down with ice water, while he told himself that he was probably the luckiest guy in the world.

At the same time, 'way down deep inside him, Shayne was vaguely conscious of guilt feelings. He'd had these twinges off and on during all the years Lucy Hamilton had been his secretary, but he'd always managed to push them aside in the past, to sublimate them, as it were.

Tonight, somehow, they came to him very forcibly as he sat with his cognac in Lucy's living room and listened to the pleasant sounds that came from her kitchen as she cleaned up after their most excellent dinner.

Lucy Hamilton, his guilt feelings told him, was definitely a domestic type of girl. She deserved something more than a typewriter in an office and a weekly salary paid to her for services rendered.

She deserved a husband who would appreciate her cooking, and children who would hang onto her apron strings and bask in the aura of love with which she would surround them.

Instead, she was wasting her life being an efficient secretary to Michael Shayne. He took a long and leisurely drink of cognac (emptying the glass) and his guilt feeling became stronger. It was his fault, by God. He knew Lucy was in love with him. She had never told him so, in so many words, but the fact was self-evident. She was a hell of an attractive woman. Men were always trying to date her... decent men, some of whom might even have matrimony in mind.

But Lucy remained aloof. She pretended she was satisfied with her life as it was. Shayne scowled down at the toes of his shoes stretched out in front of him and wondered for perhaps the thousandth time why he didn't ask Lucy to marry him.

This was a hell of a way, he told himself morosely, for the two of them to go on living. He leaned forward and poured more cognac into his glass, and then lit a cigarette. He heard a sound from his right and turned his red head to see Lucy framed in the doorway from the kitchen with a dish-towel in one hand and the other hand lightly cocked on her hip, smiling at him quizzically. "Everything all right, boss?"

He looked at her soberly and studiously, letting his gaze linger on the glints of light that glanced off her smooth brown hair, basking in the warmth of her brown eyes regarding him affectionately.

He said, "I've just come to the conclusion that things aren't all right at all."

She frowned, forming three tiny vertical lines on her smooth forehead between her eyebrows, and she said, "Oh?" uncertainly.

He lifted his glass and glared down at it, and asked her angrily, "Why do you go on putting up with me, Angel?"

She moved a step forward into the living room, rounding her eyes wonderingly, and said, "Why shouldn't I, Michael? What's on your mind tonight?"

"This," he told her roughly, waving a big hand around the living room of her apartment. "Everything, Angel. That dinner you just fed me. You deserve better than this, Lucy."

"Do I?" Her eyes rounded and widened further. "I don't think I understand you, Michael."

He said harshly, "You should be married, Lucy. You deserve a home... and children."

She stood very straight and still, regarding him un-blinkingly. She said tautly, "How nice of you to say so. I wasn't aware..."

He broke in on her, turning his head with a scowl that brought his ragged eyebrows together above his nose: "You know this isn't worth a damn, Angel. You're not getting any younger, goddamnit." He hesitated, shaking his head slowly, his gray eyes clouded with pain. "You know I'll never marry again, Lucy."

"I know," she told him steadily. "So...?"

"So," he said roughly, "you're throwing away your youth on a job."

"I'm not so young, Michael."

"Plenty young enough to grab a husband if you'd just go looking," he grated.

"Perhaps I don't want to go looking."

Michael Shayne had no answer for that simple statement. The warmth and sincerity of her tone precluded further discussion along that line. Shayne turned back and took a sip of cognac and allowed himself to enjoy it completely. He said indolently, "At the very least I could dry the dishes for you so you could come in and relax with a drink," but he made no move to get up, and Lucy told him lightly:

"We'll let God dry the dishes, and I will have a nightcap with you."

She disappeared into the kitchen and returned in a moment with a highball glass a quarter full of water. She put ice cubes in it and poured cognac from the bottle, and then settled herself on the sofa companionably beside her employer.

He lit cigarettes for both of them and they smoked silently.

Into this silence the dull, muffled sound of an explosion intruded. It sounded as though it came from inside the apartment house almost directly above them, and Lucy jerked tensely erect, spilling some of her drink and looking at Shayne with wide frightened eyes.

"What was that?"

He, too, sat erect, his face drawn, listening intently. "It sounded like some sort of small bomb." He got to his feet and moved slowly toward the door and opened it onto the hallway.

The silence held for a moment, and then they began to hear the excited babble of voices from the next floor above. Lucy was close behind him as he strode into the hall and began climbing the stairs.

Doors stood open along the next hallway, and half a dozen people were grouped in front of a closed door halfway down the hall. The men were in their shirtsleeves and two of the women wore lounging robes. They were knocking on the door and rattling the knob and talking excitedly:

“... know it came from in there.” “Why don’t they answer?” “Know they’re both in there.” “... saw him let her in about fifteen minutes ago.” “What do you suppose it *was*?”

Shayne pushed into the group and asked authoritatively, “Are you sure it came from this room?”

There were nods and positive affirmatives. “The door’s locked and there’s no answer.”

Shayne dropped to one knee in front of the door and put his head down to sniff at the small crack at the bottom of the door. His gaunt features tightened as he caught the unmistakably acrid smell of gunpowder.

He got to his feet and ordered, “Stand back, all of you,” drew back against the opposite wall and lowered his right shoulder, drove his hundred and ninety pounds against the door with all the force he could get in the narrow space.

There was the protesting screech of screws being torn from wood and the door gave inward, but only a few inches where it was held by a safety chain that was fastened inside.

The acrid odor came out more strongly now, and Shayne drew himself back and hit the door a second time.

The chain gave under the impact and the door crashed open, catapulting the redhead halfway into the room where he staggered to retain his balance.

They crowded into the doorway behind him, and he backed slowly toward them, grimly taking in the death scene that confronted him.

He turned and his gaunt cheeks were deeply trenched. He said, “Stand back, all of you.” And then, “Lucy!”

“Yes, Michael?” Her voice came from the outside of the group.

“Go down to your room and call police headquarters. Report a double homicide.”

She called back, “Right away,” and her running footsteps receded down the hall.

Shayne spread both his arms out and moved toward the excited and frightened group in the doorway. “It isn’t nice to look at,” he said harshly. “Go back to your own rooms and stay there. The police will have questions to ask all of you.” He closed the door firmly in their faces, disregarding their questions and protests.

## CHAPTER TWO

During the many years spent in the active practice of his profession, Michael Shayne had encountered violent death in various forms and manifestations. But never, in all those years, had his eyes encountered a more gruesome sight than the one which confronted him now as he stood with his back against the door.

The apartment was identical in design and decor with that of Lucy Hamilton’s on the floor below. The dead woman lay in the middle of the sitting room, her limbs rigid and contorted in the death spasm, her features twisted in a grimace of terrible anguish.

She appeared to be in her middle thirties, with a svelte and well-fleshed figure, dressed in an expensive-looking cocktail gown of Nile-green silk, and Shayne had a feeling that she had probably been an attractive woman in life. There were diamond rings on her fingers, a choker of what looked like real pearls about her throat, her reddish brown hair was carefully done, and her fingernails were manicured to a dull sheen.

With an effort, Shayne transferred his somber gaze to what was left of the man slumped half-in and half-out of a deep upholstered chair a few feet beyond the woman’s body and close to the window.

A twelve gauge shotgun lay on the floor beside the chair. Shayne had seen enough suicides in the past to know that the muzzle of the gun must have been in the man’s mouth when the trigger was pulled. The terrific force of exploding gases from the shotgun blast had literally blown the man’s head from his shoulders. There was not enough left of his features to determine whether he was young or old, blond or brunette.

He wore yellow silk pajamas and a brocade dressing gown, and was barefooted. There was a

great deal of blood and bits of skull and brains were spattered on the wall behind him.

Michael Shayne stood against the door for a long moment without moving. The bedroom door stood open and a window in that room was evidently open because a light breeze was blowing into the sitting room, slowly dissipating the acrid smell of gunpowder which had been strong when he first crashed the door in.

An overturned cocktail glass lay on the rug a couple of feet from the woman's body. There was no damp stain on the rug beside it, indicating that the glass had been empty when she dropped it there. Another cocktail glass lay overturned just this side of the open kitchen door. A large area of wetness on the rug in front of the glass was evidence that it had been full, or nearly full, when it was dropped.

On a low table at Shayne's left near the front door were a neatly folded pair of lady's dark silk gloves and a wide-brimmed hat.

When every detail of the scene of double death was indelibly implanted in Michael Shayne's memory, he moved forward slowly, skirting the woman's body, stopping beside the low coffee table in front of the sofa and looking down at two sheets of paper lying there, both carrying scrawled messages in ink.

Shayne sat on the sofa and leaned forward to read them, careful not to touch or disturb anything.

Both were in the same cramped handwriting, but one was shorter than the other. It said:

"To whom it may concern:

"When you read this Elsa and I will be together in death. I have prepared the drinks as we agreed and am waiting for her now to arrive to drink deeply of nepenthe with me.

"We believe God will forgive us because there is no other course open to us. We cannot continue to live without each other, and my wife's religion makes it impossible for us to be together in life.

"After we quaff our final cocktail, we will be together, on another plane, for eternity.

"May God have mercy on the two of us.

"Robert Lambert"

The second note was longer and the handwriting appeared to be more agitated, racing across the sheet with little space between words, more disordered and slightly more incoherent:

"What a horrible, horrible thing I have done. My beloved Elsa lies before me, stricken instantly by the deadly potion which she tossed off boldly and happily as we had planned to drink them together.

"And I still live. Craven being that I am. Disgusting coward that I have discovered myself to be. I did not plan it so. I swear upon my honor that I did not plan it so.

"It was not the spirit that failed me when the moment of reckoning came. It was the flesh that weakened. We toasted death in our two drinks, gladly welcoming oblivion as we lifted them to our lips.

"To my utter shame and without my planning, my flesh rebelled as the glass touched my lips and it fell to the floor in front of me while I stood aghast and could not find the strength to cry out and halt Elsa in time.

"That moment was an eternity as I watched my dearly beloved sway and stagger and knew in my wretched heart what had come to pass. I knelt and cradled her head in my arms and sobbed out my love to her while she passed on into the vale of All-Knowingness.

"There is no cyanide left with which to mix another draft to allow me to join my beloved Elsa. But there is another way for me. My shotgun is in the closet. It will suffice.

"Be patient, Elsa. Do not despair or doubt me. Your resolution has strengthened mine. I shall not bungle it again. I cannot remain alive knowing that you await me in death.

"I am coming to join you.

"Robert Lambert"

Michael Shayne sighed deeply and leaned back on the sofa to tug at his left earlobe when he finished reading the second of the macabre messages from the dead.

Poor, goddamned, suffering, stupid, human wretches! To choose this way out of whatever sort of mess they had allowed their two lives to get into. Such a tragic waste.

Two corpses lying in front of him in the neat apartment that was a replica of the apartment one floor below where he and Lucy had spent such a completely happy evening together. While he and she were eating Lucy's dinner and sharing an after-dinner drink, these two, just one floor above, were engaged in carrying out their bizarre suicide pact.

The shrill keening of a police siren in the distance told him that Lucy had gotten through to headquarters. He drew himself erect from the sofa and thrust both hands into his pockets as a reminder that Gentry would be happier if Shayne hadn't touched anything before the police arrived.

He went into the kitchen and found it immaculate and shining, with only a tray of half-melted ice cubes standing on the sink, and a bottle of dark rum and one of creme de menthe, both uncorked, standing beside it.

He paused for a moment, looking at the two bottles and wondering what kind of mixture the unhappy couple had chosen as a vehicle for the cyanide in their final, suicidal drink, and the police siren wailed down to silence in front of the apartment house, and Shayne turned away from the kitchen to walk back through the living room and be standing near the front door when the advance guard of officialdom arrived.

This proved to be a very young and very fresh-faced officer from a radio patrol car, who shoved the sagging door open impetuously and saw Shayne standing there, waiting for him. He had his service revolver ready in his hand, and he trained it on the detective instinctively and snarled, "Put 'em up, you. We got a homicide report from here."

Shayne casually lifted both hands shoulder-high in front of him and nodded in the direction of the two bodies. "That's right. There they are."

Keeping his revolver trained on the detective, the young officer risked a sidewise glance at the interior of the sitting room, and he stiffened while his face lost its fresh coloring. The muzzle of his revolver dipped unsteadily and he swallowed several times in rapid succession and pulled his gaze back to Shayne and stuttered, "Yeh. Yeh, I see."

A burly sergeant came through the door at that point, glanced at Shayne and the younger man, and then at the two dead persons in the room. He said paternally, "All right, Rogers. The bathroom is on your left. Don't touch anything... even to flush it." And to Shayne, he said resignedly, "You knock the two of them off, Mike?"

Shayne grinned bleakly. "I was downstairs, spending a quiet evening with my secretary, when I heard the shotgun blast up here. I smashed the door in," he went on, "and that's all I know about it. So far as I'm concerned, it's all yours, Sergeant O'Hara."

The sound of retching came from the bathroom into which the patrolman had disappeared. O'Hara scowled in that direction and observed sourly, "One of Mike Shayne's quiet evenings with his secretary, the good God save us." He cocked his head to listen to sounds from below coming through the open door, and went on, "That'll be the Homicide boys. Just stand right there where you are, Shamus, and tell it to them." He moved swiftly toward the bathroom, calling out in a conspiratorial voice, "Finish up fast, Rogers, and get out here, if you'll not be disgracin' the uniform you wear."

The Miami Homicide Squad arrived in force and took their photographs and collected fingerprints and made their diagrams, and a deputy medical examiner made a superficial examination of the two bodies and ordered them removed to the morgue; detectives were sent up and down the hall taking statements from all the tenants who were in, and Shayne told the lieutenant in charge briefly about hearing the shotgun blast and coming up to break in the locked and chained door.

All in all it was nearly half an hour before the redhead got away from the scene and started down the stairs where he knew Lucy would be anxiously waiting for him.

Half-way down the flight of stairs he met Timothy Rourke panting his way up. The top reporter for the *News* stopped short when he recognized Shayne, and asked, "What's up, Mike? I didn't realize this was Lucy's building when I got the flash. Double murder, is it?"

“Double suicide,” Shayne corrected him. “You’re a little late, Tim. They’re about cleaned up in there. Why not come down and let Lucy give us a drink, and I’ll fill you in. You can get a complete report from headquarters in time to write your story.”

Rourke said, “Sure,” and turned to go back down the stairs with Shayne and into Lucy’s apartment.

When she saw the elongated reporter with Shayne, she hurried to the kitchen and brought back a bottle of bourbon for him which she set on the table beside the cognac. “What happened, Michael? You said a double homicide.”

“Suicide pact.” He poured himself three ounces of cognac and settled down on the sofa. “Damned messy.” He spoke to both of them while Rourke made himself a bourbon highball. “The woman drank off her cyanide cocktail like a man...He paused and frowned. “Why do I say that? Like a woman, damn it. And he goofed on his. Dropped his glass on the floor and watched her die in front of his eyes. But then he fixed everything up real nice by putting the muzzle of a twelve gauge shotgun in his mouth and triggering it with his toe. You know what *that* does, Tim.”

Rourke nodded with a grimace. “Bits and pieces left,” he muttered. “How were they able to reconstruct all that, Mike? I gather there weren’t any witnesses.”

“He left two suicide notes,” Shayne explained. “One had been written prior to her arrival.” He took a sip of cognac and a swallow of ice water, and quoted from the first note.

“He evidently had the two drinks prepared when she got there, and he’d used up all his cyanide. He got cold feet and dropped his on the floor while she tossed hers off. He watched her die in front of him, and then wrote another note explaining why he was forced to use the shotgun to keep up his end. The messes people get themselves into,” he ended angrily.

“Who was he, Michael?” asked Lucy. “Do I know him?”

“Robert Lambert. He seems to be a comparatively new tenant in the building and none of the people on his floor know much about him. A medium-sized, pleasant-faced fellow, they say, with a dark mustache and wearing very lightly tinted blue glasses.” He paused, regarding Lucy questioningly, and she said:

“I think... I may have passed him in the hall once or twice. But I never spoke to him.”

“Apparently no one else did either... except one lady directly across the hall. She described him as pleasant, but aloof. It’s her impression that he actually used the apartment only on weekends... to entertain a woman visitor who invariably arrived about ten o’clock and stayed until the lady across the hall gave up her vigil and went to sleep.”

Lucy laughed lightly and said, “That would be Mrs. Conrad. She can be trusted to know pretty much everything that goes on in this building.” Her face tightened momentarily and then she relaxed with a rueful grimace.

“Soon after I moved in here, Mrs. Conrad took it upon herself to admonish me that a single young lady would do her reputation no good by having gentlemen visitors who stayed until midnight or after. Meaning you, Michael. And I was forced to tell Mrs. Conrad that my reputation was my own affair, and none of hers. We haven’t been exactly chummy since that encounter.”

Shayne grinned and said, “Well, she just *happened* to have her door cracked open tonight at ten o’clock and saw her neighbor across the hall admit his regular weekly woman visitor... at least one wearing the same floppy-brimmed hat she has noted in the past.” He shrugged and took another sip of cognac.

“At the moment that’s all anyone seems to know about Robert Lambert. No wallet or identifying papers of any sort. One small overnight bag in the place, toilet articles and a couple of shirts and changes of underwear. Not even an extra suit or pair of slacks. Just the suit he was wearing... which he had removed incidentally... and put on pajamas and dressing gown to receive his visitor.”

Rourke said, “That sounds very much as though the apartment was just a convenience... to keep weekend dates.”

Shayne nodded. “That’s the way it looks.” He paused. “The woman is a different kettle of fish. Her handbag was there on a table... underneath her hat. I wonder if you’ll recognize her name,

Tim. Mrs. Elsa Nathan... from Miami Beach.”

Rourke scowled down into his highball glass, swirling the dark brown contents around and around. “Nathan?” He shook his head slowly. “Seems it should strike a chord, but it doesn’t.”

“Nee Armbruster,” Shayne told him.

“Good God!” Rourke sat up tensely, excitement glittering in his deep-set eyes. “Elsa Armbruster! Only daughter and sole heir of old Eli Armbruster. Been married to a man named Nathan about a year. Society with a capital S. Sneaking off to a dump like this. Sorry, Lucy,” he added quickly. “It’s not really a dump, but... for a woman like Elsa Armbruster...”

Lucy nodded indulgently. “You don’t have to dot your I’s, Tim. Goodness! She could buy and sell every person living in this building fifty times over. What on earth would she be doing here?”

“Take Tim’s capital S and put it in front of e-x,” Shayne suggested with a cynical lift of one red eyebrow, “and I think you’ll have the answer. Society millionairesses are apparently just as susceptible as parlor maids.”

“But... but...” sputtered Lucy. “Think of a woman like that committing *suicide*. With all the money in the world. Everything to live for. It’s incredible.”

Shayne said somberly, “Apparently there was one thing that all the money in the world couldn’t buy for her. The man she wanted. His note said that his wife had religious convictions which made it impossible for him to get a divorce. Love,” he said angrily, “is a many-barrelled as well as many-splendored thing. The damned mess it can make of some people’s lives! By God, Lucy. Let’s be thankful that you and I have remained sensible and refused to get caught in a trap like that.”

She looked at him wonderingly for a moment, and Timothy Rourke chuckled and said drily, “Yeh. Keep on being sensible, you two.” He finished his bourbon and unfolded his emaciated frame. “I’ll be on my way. Thanks for the drink, Lucy.” He moved toward the door and said softly over his shoulder, “And God bless you, my children.”

They sat very still until the door closed behind him, and then Lucy turned with a soft little cry of, “Oh, Michael,” and threw her arms about his neck and buried her face against his shoulder.

Shayne held her tightly and banished the memory of the upstairs room from his mind.

## CHAPTER THREE

Although the next day was Saturday, Shayne had promised Lucy the night before that he would go to the office that morning to sign some checks she had ready, so he was up before nine o’clock.

He put water on to heat for the dripolator, then got the morning paper from in front of his door and opened it out on the center table in the sitting room.

The headline across the front page said: SLEUTH SMASHES DOOR ON SUICIDE PAIR.

He left the paper there and went back into the kitchen to put coffee in the drip pot, pouring boiling water on top of it, and then he scrambled three eggs and made toast while the water dripped through.

Carrying his breakfast in to the table, he ate with relish and sipped strong, black coffee while glancing through the front-page story. Actually, there was less printed about the case than he already knew. Neither of the suicide notes was quoted, and it wasn’t clearly explained why both poison and a shotgun had been used in the two deaths. Robert Lambert was referred to as the “mystery man,” and the identity of his paramour had been handled as discreetly as possible, with the name of “Armbruster” not even appearing, though there was a picture of the dead woman wearing the same floppy black hat Shayne had seen on the table in the death room.

The story was continued on the second page, and there they had a picture of the cuckolded husband as he was leaving the morgue after identifying his wife’s body. He was an open-faced young man, wearing a scowl as he faced the camera, his sport jacket and shirt open at the throat.

Shayne put the paper aside, took his empty plate into the kitchen where he ran hot water over it, poured another cup of coffee and reinforced it with cognac.



He was sitting back and sipping this pleurably when his telephone rang. Lucy Hamilton answered when he picked it up. "Are you coming in this morning, Boss?"

"Sure. In about half an hour."

"Mr. Armbruster is here to see you," she told him briskly, and he knew the man must be standing beside her desk. "Mr. Eli Armbruster. He is very anxious to see you."

Shayne said, "Tell him fifteen minutes, Angel," and hung up with a frown. He had never met Eli Armbruster, but the name was well-known to anyone who had lived in Miami for any length of time. In the early twenties he had come to Miami as a young man and bought extensive holdings on the ocean side of Biscayne Bay which was then barren scrubland. Through the boom-and-bust of the twenties, he had simply sat back and held onto his property, neither buying nor selling during the period of frenzied speculation, and by sitting tight and holding on he had eventually become one of the wealthiest men on the peninsula when prosperity returned to the area in the late thirties.

He was a widower and had only one child, his daughter Elsa. He was prominent in civic affairs and charity drives, but had never entered politics, though he probably wielded more behind-the-scenes influence on Dade County politics than any other single individual.

Michael Shayne sighed deeply and finished off his coffee royal. He did not look forward to meeting Eli Armbruster this morning. The memory of the twisted body and contorted features of the old man's daughter was still vivid in Shayne's mind. What do you do, what can you say, to comfort a father who has lost his child under these circumstances?

Shayne shaved and dressed swiftly, and entered his office fifteen minutes after Lucy's telephone call. She was typing at her desk beyond the low railing across the reception room, and she looked fresh and young and vital as she smiled at him and said demurely, "Mr. Armbruster is waiting in your office, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne nodded and dropped his hat on a hook near the door, and crossed to the open door of his private office.

A tall, slender, elderly man sat stiffly erect in a leather chair at one corner of the wide, bare desk. His feet were planted firmly together on the floor in front of him, blue-veined hands were placed precisely on his knees. He had scanty, white hair and a bristling, white military mustache, and a pair of the clearest, most penetrating blue eyes that Shayne had ever encountered.

He didn't rise as Shayne came in and closed the door behind him, but inclined his head slightly and said, "Mr. Shayne," and lifted his right hand to offer it to the detective. "I am Eli Armbruster," he said precisely, "and I am pleased to meet you, although I could wish the circumstances of our meeting were different."

Shayne took his hand and felt his own gripped in a surprisingly firm grasp. He looked down into the bright, blue eyes and said, "I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am, Mr. Armbruster." He hesitated, but looking down into those blue eyes, knew this was not a man with whom to mince words, "Suicides are hell," he said flatly, "for those who remain behind. One can *never* understand..."

"Nonsense, Mr. Shayne," snapped Armbruster. "This isn't suicide we're faced with. It is murder."

Shayne released his hand and walked around the desk to seat himself in the swivel chair. He got out a cigarette and lit it thoughtfully. He said, "I realize that's a natural reaction from a father. But I'm afraid we have to face the facts in this case."

"That's what I suggest you do, Sir." His visitor's voice was firm and placid. "The simple fact is that my daughter, Elsa, did not take her own life. It is unthinkable... impossible. I know my daughter, Mr. Shayne. She could no more take her own life than... than I could. She was a strong woman. Headstrong and willful. She might, now I grant you, she *might* decide to have an affair with another man. If she did so decide, she would have entered into the arrangement in a calm and practical manner. Elsa was not one to throw her cap over the windmill, to lose her head over any man. I know that girl, Mr. Shayne. It would have been utterly impossible for her to commit suicide. She carried my blood in her veins. An Armbruster could never take that way out." He spoke with quiet, unshakable conviction which was very impressive.

Shayne tugged at his left earlobe and asked, "Have you talked to the police, Mr. Armbruster?"

"I came directly here from Chief Gentry's office. I know Will Gentry, Mr. Shayne. I respect him as a conscientious and fairly efficient public servant. On the other hand, he is a dolt. Two and two *always* make four to Will Gentry. He does not possess a mind capable of conceiving that two and two may sometimes add up to three or to five."

Shayne tried not to smile at this characterization of Chief Will Gentry. It was a perfect summing up of Will's character, but the hell of it was that two and two *did* add up to four.

He said mildly, "There were the suicide notes, Mr. Armbruster. Did you read those?"

"Gentry showed them to me. Written by whom? Signed by whom, Shayne? Not by my daughter. You will observe that *she* left no notes behind her."

"Not in that apartment," Shayne agreed. "Possibly she left one at home for her husband."

"He says not."

"In cases like this," Shayne argued, "a husband often denies the existence of such a note. It's a defensive reaction... a refusal to wash dirty linen in public."

"If there were such a note from Elsa, Mr. Shayne, I assure you that Paul Nathan would be the first to offer it as evidence. Don't make the mistake of looking upon him as a grieving and bitter husband. I tell you, Sir, he is laughing at all of us behind our backs this morning. He has committed the perfect crime. He has rid himself of an unwanted wife and become heir to a multi-million-dollar estate in one stroke."

The vehemence of his assertion shook Shayne a trifle, but he countered doggedly, "I'm afraid you are attributing superhuman powers to Paul Nathan. I don't know anything about his relationship with his wife or how much he may have desired her death, but the fact remains that I have never in my life seen a more positively cut-and-dried double suicide set-up than the one I crashed into last night."

"That is it exactly." The ramrod-stiff old man leaped on Shayne's statement avidly. "That is precisely the point I made to Will Gentry. Positively cut-and-dried. No possible question about it. A two and a two as plain as the nose on your face which *must* add up to four. So there is no real investigation. Naturally. What is there to investigate? Play it down and hush it up to save old Eli Armbruster's feelings. Now tell me, Mr. Shayne. I understand you were there on the scene? How much painstaking and real investigation was there? What sort of search was made for clues that might possibly... just *possibly* ... prove it to be something different from the cut-and-dried appearance of double suicide on the surface?"

"Come now," he demanded urgently as Shayne hesitated, marshalling his thoughts. "You've been in the middle of plenty of homicide investigations in the past. Just let your imagination have a little bit of freedom. Allow yourself to assume... just for instance... that there hadn't been those two suicide notes in evidence. Then it *wouldn't* have been cut-and-dried. There would have been certain questions for which the police would have sought the answers. I know Gentry has an efficient police laboratory. Were those technicians called in to subject that apartment to the sort of painstaking analysis it would have received under less cut-and-dried circumstances?"

Shayne had to say thoughtfully, "No. Under the circumstances that sort of procedure didn't seem called for."

"Exactly. Under the circumstances. Now... who is this man who signed his name Robert Lambert?"

"I don't know what success the police have had in tracing him."

"None," said Armbruster triumphantly, pointing a lean forefinger at Shayne. "Up to this point they have not discovered one single clue leading to his identity. Why not? I'll tell you why not. Because they don't really care. What difference does it make after all? The case is closed. A man named Robert Lambert is dead and my daughter is dead. Do they know it was Lambert himself who wrote those notes? Suppose they were clever forgeries? Do they *know* my daughter had been meeting him there frequently? Perhaps she was just lured there last night."

"And induced to drink a cyanide cocktail against her will?" Shayne tried to keep the sarcasm out of his voice because he liked the old man and admired the indomitable spirit which refused to

accept the obvious, but he didn't quite succeed because Armbruster flushed slightly and his penetrating blue eyes glittered with anger.

"I expected better of you, Shayne. You've gotten a lot of publicity in Miami and there's been a public image built up of you as a man of imagination and of unorthodox methods which have produced results in the past and solved crimes which the police considered insoluble. I believe there is even a fiction writer who has made a small fortune writing up your cases in book form and selling millions of copies of them. Yes, goddamn it, Mr. Shayne. It is not inconceivable to me that Elsa was lured to that apartment last night and induced to drink a cocktail containing cyanide against her will. Without her knowledge, at least. My daughter had a peculiar taste in drinks. Her favorite potion was equal parts of heavy, dark rum and creme de menthe. Have you ever tasted that particular mixture?"

Shayne couldn't repress a faint shudder as he confessed, "Not that I recall."

"I suggest you try it so you'll know what I'm talking about. I think you will then agree with me that a lethal dose of cyanide or any other poison could be introduced into that concoction without the drinker's knowledge. Now, do you begin to see what I'm getting at, Shayne? If you can throw away all your preconceptions, do you see how each physical fact in that seemingly cut-and-dried suicide set-up might be interpreted differently?"

Shayne took a long pull on his cigarette and tried to readjust his thinking to fit Eli Armbruster's ideas. It was very difficult. He had *seen* it, damn it. Armbruster hadn't. He said slowly:

"I'm sorry, but as you probably already know, I was just downstairs one flight when it happened. I heard the blast of the shotgun, Mr. Armbruster. I ran upstairs and broke in the locked and chained door."

"I know you did. That's one of the reasons I have come to you. Stop just a moment and think, Shayne. How much time elapsed between the time you heard the gun go off and the moment you burst into the room?"

Shayne considered his reply carefully. "Probably three or four minutes. Not more than five, certainly."

"Ah." Eli Armbruster grunted his satisfaction. "So, by your own admission, from three to five minutes went by between the time the shotgun was fired and anyone entered that apartment?"

"The door was locked and chained on the inside," Shayne reminded him.

"*Mr.* Shayne. Does that building have fire escapes as required by the building code?"

"Yes."

"Can they be reached through each separate apartment?"

"Yes. Through the bedroom windows mostly."

"Were the bedroom windows of that particular apartment locked on the inside last night?"

Michael Shayne hesitated, scowling heavily. He recalled standing there with his back to the door looking down at the two bodies, and the acrid smell of discharged gunpowder in the room. And he distinctly recalled the light breeze blowing in from the bedroom which dissipated the odor.

He said, "As a matter of fact, Mr. Armbruster, I'm quite certain that the bedroom window was open at the time."

"Aha! But no one... including you, Shayne... thought that significant?"

"Frankly, no. We had no reason to suspect..."

"Exactly what I have been trying to point out to you," crowed Eli Armbruster triumphantly. "It was all so cut-and-dried. Thinking back over it now, you can't be positive there wasn't a third person in that apartment when the shotgun went off, can you? A third person who went out the bedroom window onto the fire escape while you were running up the stairs and breaking down the locked door?"

Shayne shook his red head and confessed, "No. I can't be positive. On the other hand..."

"Wait a minute," ordered Armbruster peremptorily. "Stop right there, Shayne. This is all I asked in the beginning. That you allow a tiny iota of doubt to enter your mind. No more than that. Only that two and two do not *have* to always equal four. Will you take the case?"

"I still don't admit there is a case, Armbruster. I think you'll be wasting your money..."

“Whose money is it?” bristled the erect old man. “I’ve got millions to waste if I see fit, Shayne. All I want from you is your promise to suspend judgment and make a thorough investigation of this affair, putting aside any preconceived ideas of what may or may not have happened before you broke the door into that apartment. I want to know who Robert Lambert was, how he met my daughter, and what he meant to her. I don’t expect you to whitewash Elsa, Shayne. I want the truth... so far as you can ascertain what the truth is. For this, I will pay you a retainer of ten thousand dollars. This is not contingent on anything... except that you will take the case and investigate it to the best of your ability.”

Shayne said, “I’m afraid you’ll be wasting your money, Mr. Armbruster.”

“Will you allow me to be the judge of that?”

Michael Shayne hesitated, and then shrugged his wide shoulders. “It’s difficult to turn down a fee like that,” he conceded. “You’ve hired yourself a private detective, Mr. Armbruster.”

“Splendid. But that is only one part of my proposition, Shayne.” The old man leaned forward and his voice became deadly serious. “I will pay... happily... an additional fifty thousand dollars for evidence that will convict Paul Nathan of my daughter’s murder.”

Shayne blinked at this. He shook his red head slightly, as though to reassure himself that he had heard correctly. “You’re not trying to tempt me, are you?”

“Tempt you, Sir?”

“To manufacture evidence,” Shayne said evenly.

“Certainly not,” snapped Armbruster. “I’m convinced in my own mind that Paul Nathan engineered my daughter’s death somehow.”

“In the name of God, *how?*”

“You’re the detective, Shayne. That is for you to discover. I know the man is a wastrel and a scoundrel. A thoroughly evil man, Shayne. I am convinced that he married my daughter only because she was a wealthy woman, and when he discovered that she was also a strong-willed woman who had no intention of turning her fortune over to him, I am certain in my own mind that he plotted her death.”

Shayne said, “That is a strong accusation.”

“I mean it to be. I would gladly make it publicly if that would accomplish anything. I warned Elsa. I begged her months ago to give the man a divorce and a cash settlement that would take him out of her life forever. She refused. Elsa was a peculiar woman, Shayne. There was a lot of Armbruster in her. She had a feeling for property. What she bought, she held onto. In her own mind, I am convinced that she realized full well that she had bought a husband when she married Paul Nathan. She was perfectly willing to pay the price but she had no intention of relinquishing her purchase.”

“Did she love him?”

“Love?” Eli Armbruster’s voice sneered at the word. “I’m not at all sure that Elsa was capable of love. You see, as I told you at the beginning of this interview, I knew my own daughter, Shayne. For years, I have had no illusions about Elsa. Love? I simply don’t know. She wanted Paul Nathan as a husband. She bought him. She was prepared to pay a high price for keeping him. This is one of the reasons why it is so difficult for me to accept the premise that she had fallen head over heels with some stranger named Robert Lambert... was visiting him in that dingy apartment on the sly... and had got in so deep that she was prepared to take her own life for the sake of... love? No. There is some other answer. One of the things you should know, for instance, is that Nathan asked her for a divorce some months ago, having the effrontery to demand a cash settlement of a quarter of a million dollars to remove himself from her life. Being Elsa, she refused... although I advised her to rid herself of the fellow even on those terms.

“Thus, she was fully aware that if she ever gave him grounds for divorce, he would sue immediately. There are many cases in which Florida courts have awarded alimony or substantial cash settlements to impecunious husbands who have proved adultery against their wives in a divorce court. If for no other reason in the world, Elsa would *never* have laid herself open to such charges which could be proved.”

Shayne said, "People do all sorts of irrational things when driven by love... or sex... whichever you prefer to call it."

"People, yes," agreed Armbruster. "But not Elsa. I tell you, Shayne..."

"I know," said Shayne, holding up a big hand to cut the man off. "You've made your point. Don't try to over-sell it. At this point, I have an open mind about your daughter. I'll want differing viewpoints from yours to round out my picture of her."

Armbruster said stiffly, "Of course. You know your business best and I'm sure you have your own methods. Bear in mind, however, that my offer stands. A retainer of ten thousand for you to handle the case. An additional fifty thousand the day Paul Nathan is convicted of my daughter's murder."

"I shan't forget," Shayne told him easily. "I'll have my secretary draw up a brief memorandum on that basis, and will mail it to you for your signature."

"Do that, Shayne." Eli Armbruster arose to his feet with the agility of a middle-aged athlete. "In the meantime, I will leave my check at her desk on my way out."

"There's no need for that," Shayne protested arising behind his desk. "You can pay me when..."

"I wish to make the initial payment now, if you don't mind. I want you to be thoroughly convinced that it is in no way contingent upon what you discover. I am buying only an honest and thorough investigation. Please report to me as soon as you have learned anything of interest." With that, he turned his back and marched out of Michael Shayne's office.

The detective sank back into his swivel chair and lit a cigarette, scowling morosely. He liked the old man, and he didn't like the case one little bit. For that kind of money, he didn't have to like the case, he reminded himself. He wondered what sort of woman Elsa Armbruster had been in life, what kind of unpleasant truths concerning his daughter Armbruster was destined to hear before Shayne had earned his fee.

He was puffing on his cigarette and still scowling when Lucy tripped in lightly through the open door, her face beaming while she waved a slip of green paper in the air.

"Shame on you, Michael," she exclaimed in a voice that completely belied her words. "What did you tell the old boy to hypnotize him into *this*? Ten thousand whole dollars! He didn't even say what it was for. Just got a blank check out of his wallet and wrote it out... then tossed it over to me as though he were buying a couple of movie tickets, and walked out."

Shayne said, "That's a down payment on my integrity, Angel."

She looked at him blankly and said, "Oh?"

"That's right. There's fifty grand more if I can conjure up evidence to convict his son-in-law of murder."

"You mean... last night? But you said that was suicide, Michael."

"It is... officially." Shayne shrugged and said, "Sit down and take a letter of agreement. If Paul Nathan is the louse Armbruster thinks he is, maybe I will hang a murder rap on him."

"Whether he's guilty or not?" Lucy asked matter-of-factly as she sat down across the desk from him and opened her shorthand pad.

"Hell," said Shayne harshly, "we *know* he isn't guilty. Start it out: Mr. Eli Armbruster, and get his address on the Beach. Dear Sir: Confirming our conversation of this morning..."

## CHAPTER FOUR

When Michael Shayne entered Will Gentry's private office at police headquarters a short time later, the Miami Chief of Police was seated behind his desk with the well-chewed stub of a black cigar in his mouth, studying some typed reports in front of him. He was a burly, red-faced man, and he lifted a beefy hand to welcome the redhead, muttering absently, "Just a minute, Mike, while I finish this."

He continued to scowl down at the sheet in front of him, working his lips to move the soggy cigar from one side of his mouth to the other.

Shayne pulled a straight chair a little closer to his desk and eased his rangy body down into it. He got out a cigarette and lit it in silence, leaned back comfortably to let thin, grayish smoke roil slowly out of both nostrils.

Will Gentry grunted and pushed the paper aside. "I see you were Johnny-On-The-Spot again last night, Mike. How the hell do you manage it?"

"I know the right people. Go visiting them at the right time."

"Yeh," snorted Gentry. "That apartment house of Lucy's! What's she got that attracts violence?"

Shayne grinned and said, "Don't blame her. She doesn't even know the guy."

"Neither does anyone else it seems." Gentry slammed the flat of a big hand down on the papers in front of him. "A name, that's all we've got."

Shayne looked at him alertly. "You haven't been able to trace Robert Lambert at all?"

"Nary a trace. No wallet. No identification. No papers. Every stitch of clothes in the apartment is practically new, without a laundry mark or dry cleaner's tag."

"Fingerprints?"

"Nothing on file here. We've sent them to Washington... should have a preliminary report this afternoon. No Robert Lambert listed in the directories here and none in Jacksonville where he gave a phony street address when he rented the apartment."

"And no bereaved wife turned up to claim the body?"

"That's what we're waiting for... if Lambert is his name. You interested, Mike?" Gentry asked the question casually, removing the cigar from his mouth and studying it intently as though he didn't know how it had got there.

Shayne said, "I'm interested. To the extent of a whopping retainer."

"Old Eli, huh? He threw his weight around here and threatened, by God, if the police force couldn't do anything he'd go to the one man in Miami who could." Gentry permitted himself a sour smile. "So it's your headache, Mike."

"The old man is dead-set on making out a case against his son-in-law."

"He's dead-set on hanging a frame around the poor guy's neck," Gentry retorted angrily. "You going to do his dirty work?"

Shayne leaned back and stretched his long legs out in front of him, tugging thoughtfully at his earlobe. "I'm in business for hire, Will. Right now I've been retained by Eli Armbruster to make a thorough, complete and unbiased investigation of the circumstances in which his daughter met her death last night. Any objection to that?" His voice was slightly edged, challenging.

"Hell, no. Go to it. The only thing that old Eli couldn't get through his thick head is that this department has other things to occupy its time and attention. I'm treating it exactly as though Mrs. John Smith had died last night, and *that* Eli didn't like one little bit."

"Then you'll give me whatever you've got?"

"Sure I'll give you everything we've got. Haven't I always cooperated, Mike? But the truth is, you know more about it right now than I do. You saw the couple in that room. Read the suicide notes, didn't you? I wasn't visiting my pretty secretary on the floor below when it happened."

"I got out as fast as I could," Shayne soothed him, "and only know what I saw when I broke the door down."

"That was enough, wasn't it?"

"For me, yes. Until I got a sizable check from Eli this morning. Now I've got a job to do. What about fingerprints in the apartment?"

Gentry shuffled papers on his desk, picked one up to glance at it. "Pretty clean. The woman's were on the empty cocktail glass beside her, Lambert's on the other one. His were on the shotgun barrel in the right position for holding it up to put the muzzle in his mouth with his bare toe on the trigger."

He paused and Shayne asked, "No other fingerprints turn up in the entire place?"

"Nothing mentioned here. Hell, I don't suppose Deitch dusted the whole goddamn place. Why should he?"

“No reason,” agreed Shayne lightly. “Except maybe to prove that no one else had been around.”

“I know. Eli tried to feed me that theory too. That Paul Nathan was there at the time and engineered the whole thing and ducked down the fire escape while you were busting in. For God’s sake, Mike. You can’t buy *that*?”

“I’m not buying anything. Mind if I borrow Deitch on his time off to give it a real going-over? He’s a good man.”

“I don’t care what he does in his spare time. Look, Mike, I’m not putting any roadblocks in your way. Go ahead and earn your fee. But I’m warning you right now, Eli Armbruster isn’t going to be satisfied with anything less than a murder rap against Paul Nathan. He hates that guy who married his only daughter.”

“I gathered that much,” Shayne agreed equably. “But I don’t hate him, Will.” He met the chief’s cold stare with equal coldness, and then relaxed with a shrug. “Know what killed her?”

“They did a simple stomach analysis. Potassium ferricyanide. Enough of it mixed with rum and creme de menthe to kill a couple of mules.”

“Potassium ferricyanide?”

“One of the fastest acting cyanides known,” Gentry informed him, “and one of the easiest to get hold of. Photographers use it for something.”

Shayne asked, “Was Lambert a photographer?”

“We don’t know what Lambert was.”

“Or Paul Nathan?” pursued Shayne.

Chief Gentry snorted eloquently.

“What do we know about Lambert?” persisted Shayne. “You say he gave a phony address in Jax when he rented the apartment?”

Gentry nodded, shuffling the papers and looking down. “A little less than a month ago. He came directly to the manager of the building in answer to a newspaper ad. Took a quick look at the apartment and rented it for a month. Cash in advance. Hundred forty bucks.” He read slowly from a typed report in front of him. “Quiet, pleasant type. Medium height. Medium weight. Medium everything. Small dark mustache and lightly tinted blue glasses. Left-handed, the manager recalls, but that’s about all he does recall. When he signed the lease.”

“Those suicide notes?”

Gentry looked up and nodded. “Written by a left-handed man according to our expert.”

“Did you compare the signatures with the lease?”

Gentry scowled and studied the report in front of him. “I guess not. Why in hell would they? It was open and shut. You saw it yourself.”

“That’s what Eli pointed out,” Shayne muttered, staring across the room. He turned his head to smile placatingly at Gentry. “Let’s not get off on that tangent again. What else did the manager remember about Lambert?”

“Not much. It was a month ago. Something about him being a salesman with his territory recently enlarged to include Miami so he needed a headquarters while in town. The inference being that he would only be occupying the apartment occasionally. And that seems to be just what he did. From what my men picked up, it was a weekend hangout... more-or-less.”

Shayne nodded. “A convenient place for Mrs. Nathan to visit him every Friday night.”

“That’s what it sounds like. There’s a Mrs. Conrad across the hall...”

Shayne grimaced. “I heard her on the subject last night. She just happened to have her door cracked open every Friday evening... but, hell, Lucy knows her and says the old biddy can be trusted to know what goes on in the building. So...?” He leaned back and spread out both hands expressively. “That’s all we’ve got. You read those notes, Will. Did they sound authentic to you? The sort of thing a man would write under those circumstances?”

“How in hell would I know? I’m not a psychiatrist. And we don’t know what kind of man Lambert was.”

Shayne scowled and leaned forward to rub out his cigarette in a big ashtray. “That’s right. We

don't. Where was Paul Nathan last night?"

"On the town. His regular Friday night out... so he says. Drifting around here and on the Beach donating his wife's money to the gambling tables. He made out a list of the joints he'd been to in the course of the night, with approximate times at each place. It looks pretty good for an alibi from eight o'clock on. Want to see it?"

Chief Gentry selected a sheet and slid it over to Shayne. The redhead glanced down at the list of nightspots, and asked, "Did you check this itinerary out?"

"For God's sake, Mike! On Saturday morning?" Will Gentry gritted his teeth together so hard that they bit through the chewed end of the cigar and a portion of it fell to the desk in front of him. He glared down at it, picked it up with stubby fingers and threw it toward a spittoon in the corner, spitting the fragment from his mouth after it. Then he rested both elbows on the desk and nestled his blunt chin against his palms.

"No," he grated. "We didn't check Paul Nathan's alibi for the time of his wife's suicide. Eli Armbruster didn't pay us for that particular little chore."

Shayne nodded imperturbably, folding the sheet of paper. "Mind if I keep this?"

"Hell, no. You're welcome to it. Anything else you want?"

"I'd like to take one of the suicide notes, Will. Preferably the first one."

"How about this one to go along with them?" Will Gentry scabbled among the papers in front of him, pulled out a square sheet of heavy white notepaper folded into four thicknesses. The creases were deep and it showed signs of much handling. Shayne unfolded it slowly and saw that the handwriting looked similar to that of the suicide notes he had read last night. The letter was dated a month previously, and the salutation was: "Elsa, My own sweet."

He sucked in a deep breath and three vertical creases formed above his nose as he settled back to read it.

"I cannot endure to continue existing as we are at present. My body cries out for your body, and my need for you is not fulfilled during the fleeting and fragmentary moments we are able to steal together.

"I am going to make different arrangements, darling, so we will have hours instead of moments lying in each other's arms. I will find a private place known only to us where we can meet freely and happily.

"I will telephone you next Friday at the regular time.

"I love you more blissfully each passing day and can scarcely wait to hold you in my arms again.

"Your own

"Bobbie-Boy"

Shayne put the letter down and demanded, "Where the devil did you get this?"

"In a zippered side compartment inside Mrs. Nathan's purse, along with a couple of credit cards. And here are the two suicide notes."

"Did you show this letter to Eli Armbruster this morning?"

"No," Gentry admitted sourly. "I hated to hit him with that, too. He's so damned certain that his daughter couldn't have been carrying on that sort of affair. This clinches it, seems to me."

Shayne shrugged. "I've still been paid to do a job. He'll never be happy until he has absolute proof that Paul Nathan couldn't have had anything to do with it. That's why I'm going to go over his alibi with a finetoothed comb."

Gentry exhaled a long breath and nodded slowly, rubbing his chin with the back of his left hand. "Guys like Armbruster rub me the wrong way," he rumbled. "Just because it's *his* daughter. An Armbruster, by God. Like I said before... if it was Mrs. John Smith..."

"The basic difference is," Shayne told him cheerfully, "that Mrs. John Smith's daddy couldn't afford to write a check the size Armbruster wrote this morning." He got to his feet slowly, folding the papers in his big hands. "Can I get into the apartment?"

"No reason why you can't. See Lieutenant Hawkins down the hall. He's got the keys and all the dope. Keep me up-to-date, huh?"



Shayne said, "Sure," and went out with a wave of his big hand, and down the hall to the office of Homicide Lieutenant Hawkins where he was given the key to the apartment above Lucy Hamilton's. He also ascertained that Sergeant Deitch, the department fingerprint expert, who had answered the call the night before, was off duty until four o'clock that afternoon, and got his telephone number at home. Garroway, the lab technician, who had accompanied the Homicide Squad, was on duty in the police laboratory at the end of the hall, and Shayne found him alone and idle when he walked in a few minutes later.

Garroway was young and alert and serious and college-trained. He knew the redheaded private detective by sight, and got to his feet quickly. "It's Michael Shayne, isn't it? I saw you at that apartment last night." He studied Shayne with frank curiosity from behind thick-lensed, horn-rimmed glasses.

Shayne nodded casually. "When do you go off duty?"

"At noon."

"Want to do a little job for me? Over-time rates," Shayne added with a grin.

"Sure. What is it?"

"A follow-up on that suicide last night. I know you gave it a superficial once-over last night, but I want the works."

A faint flush crept into the young man's cheeks and he answered guardedly, "I think we checked it out pretty well. It was perfectly obvious..."

"Let's forget the obvious. Did you analyze, for instance, that wet spot on the carpet near the kitchen door beside the empty cocktail glass?"

"No. But the glass contained traces of the same poison mixture as the other glass beside the woman. Potassium ferricyanide. The second suicide note explained clearly..."

Shayne shook his head with a grin that was intended to take the sting out of his words. "That's the sort of thing I mean. I know the lieutenant pushed you through last night, but this time I want everything. Could you meet me there with your equipment about twelve-thirty? I'll have Deitch, too. A hundred bucks for an hour's work."

"Well... sure. But you don't need to pay me. That is... if you think I overlooked anything..."

Shayne said, "My client can afford to pay you. Fine. Twelve-thirty."

He left police headquarters by a side door, glancing at his watch as he went to his parked car at the curb. Not quite eleven o'clock. The *News* was an afternoon paper and Timothy Rourke might be at his desk in the City Room.

And he hadn't yet telephoned Deitch at home to enlist the fingerprint expert for the job that had to be done. He'd call him from Rourke's office. And then he had to get hold of Robert Lambert's signature from the apartment house manager...

## CHAPTER FIVE

The elongated reporter was slouched at his desk with a cigarette dangling from a corner of his mouth, languidly tapping out copy with one nicotine-stained forefinger when Shayne pulled up a chair beside him. He stopped his typing and leaned back with a wide yawn.

"Just the man I want to see. I'm finishing off the Armbruster story. You got anything new from last night?"

"Is the *News* going to make it the Armbruster story? It was Mrs. Paul Nathan who died."

"Who's Paul Nathan to our readers? Armbruster makes it front-page. Did you know the old goat is screaming it can't be suicide. It's gotta be murder. Any comment on that?"

Shayne said, "Not for publication, Tim." His gray eyes were alight with interest. "Who's he screaming that to?"

"City Editor. Had him on the phone at eight o'clock this morning to lay down exactly how he wanted the story handled... loaded with innuendos, mostly directed at his son-in-law."

"You handling it that way?"

Rourke snorted his disgust. "There are libel laws in this country. I'm writing it just like you

gave it to me last night... unless you've changed your mind this morning?"

"I've changed it only to the extent that I can be influenced by a big fee."

Rourke sat up straighter and shook cigarette ash down the front of his jacket. "You mean the old man's retained you to clear the smirch from the family name?"

"Something like that. He's hell-bent on hanging it on Paul Nathan somehow... anyhow, I guess."

"That's an angle," Rourke said alertly. "Real newsworthy. Let's see..." He cleared his throat, frowning down at the half-typed sheet in front of him. "Displeased with the apathy displayed by the local police department in the investigation of his daughter's unseemly demise, we are confidentially informed, as we go to press, that the grieving father has retained the famous private detective, Michael Shayne, to search for evidence proving that Elsa Armbruster did *not* take her own life last night. In an exclusive interview obtained by your reporter this morning, the redheaded private eye expressed his personal conviction..."

Shayne said, "Cut it out, Tim. I haven't got any personal convictions. Not at this point."

"So you're *not* convinced it's suicide," said Rourke triumphantly. "That'll do for a sub-head."

Shayne shook his head from side to side. "Nothing like that." He hesitated, getting out a cigarette and narrowing his eyes, thinking it out as he spoke: "But it might stir something up if you'd drop in a simple statement at the end of your story to the effect that I have been retained by Armbruster to make an investigation, and that I will welcome any information about Lambert or the movements of any of the principals last evening."

"Including Paul Nathan," suggested Rourke briskly.

"Don't stress it. If I get information that builds an alibi for him, I'll be glad to have it."

"Papa won't like."

"I don't give a damn what papa likes," said Shayne amiably. "I'm being paid to do a job. What do you know about Nathan?"

"Not much. We may have some stuff in the morgue. He made news when he married Elsa Armbruster."

"Nothing since then? No rumors about marital rifts... infidelity on either side?"

"The *News*," said Rourke stiffly, "does not print rumors."

"I know. Nose around anyhow, huh, Tim? Society editor? I'd like to back-track the guy."

"Why not get it from the horse's mouth?"

"I will. First, I want to get a few things straight in my own mind before I tackle Nathan. Use your phone?" He stretched a long arm out for it and got a slip of paper from his pocket.

Rourke said, "Sure," and pushed a button that gave him an outside line. Shayne dialed a number while Rourke listened curiously. A man's voice answered the ring, and Shayne asked, "Sergeant Deitch?"

"Speaking."

"Mike Shayne, Sergeant. I was up at that apartment last night..."

"I remember. You found them, didn't you?"

"That's right. I've just come from Will Gentry's office, Sergeant, and he said okay if I asked you for some off-the-record help."

"What kind of help?"

"A complete and thorough fingerprint job on the apartment for one thing. I've got a client who'll pay for your expert help. Can you meet me there about twelve-thirty?"

"Wait a minute, Shayne." Deitch's voice was harshly defensive. "I dusted for prints last night. The Chief's got my report. If you think I slipped on the job..."

"I don't think you slipped at all," Shayne said patiently. "I wouldn't be asking you now if I didn't know you're the best man in Miami. You got what the lieutenant wanted last night. But I want everything... proof, if we can get it, that no one except those two were in that place last night."

Deitch said cheerfully, "Okay. I don't mind picking up an extra buck. Twelve-thirty?"

"See you there." Shayne hung up with satisfaction and stood up. Timothy Rourke leaned back in his chair grinning up at him. "Mind if I join you at twelve-thirty? See how a real, honest-to-God detective works?"

Shayne said, "Come along. Bring anything you can get on Nathan, huh?" He went out through the City Room and down to his car.

The building in which Lucy Hamilton lived was a short distance from the newspaper office. Shayne parked in front where he had parked many times in the past, went into the small foyer and found a button "Manager. Gnd. Flr." He pushed the button and in a moment the front door release clicked. He opened it and went across a bare, unoccupied lobby toward the self-service elevator which he never used when visiting Lucy in her second-floor apartment, and found a sign that said "Manager" with an arrow pointing down a narrow corridor to the left.

There was an open door at the end of the hall showing a rather plump girl wearing horn-rimmed glasses busily typing in front of a small switchboard which she could handle without moving out of her chair.

She looked up to greet him with a pleasant smile, and he asked, "Is the manager in?"

"Certainly." She nodded her head toward a closed door on her right. "Go right in. I don't think Mr. Barstow is particularly busy."

Shayne thanked her and opened the door she had indicated. It was a large, pleasant office with sunlight streaming in a wide window, and with a bald-headed, chubby-faced man leaning back in a swivel chair behind the clean desk and caught square in the middle of a wide yawn by Shayne's unannounced entrance.

He cut off the yawn in mid-stride, wriggled himself erect in the chair and put on an eager smile. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"I'm a detective, Mr. Barstow... is it?" Shayne sat in front of the desk and lit a cigarette.

"A detective? I see. In regard to that most unfortunate affair upstairs last night, no doubt." Barstow frowned portentously and rubbed his pink, bald scalp with a pink palm. "A terrible thing. *Most* unfortunate. I talked to a lieutenant last night, you know. I'm afraid I wasn't very much help because, you see, I scarcely knew the tenant. Lambert? Yes. A self-effacing sort, I remember thinking at the time he rented the apartment. Quiet and conservatively dressed. The type of renter one *hopes* to get for a bachelor apartment. With a man like that one doesn't expect difficulties, you see. The sort of thing... ah... exactly the sort of thing that *did* occur last night. I consider myself a fair judge of human nature, and I simply never would have *dreamed* that Lambert was the sort to have an affair with a married woman."

"You never can tell by appearances," Shayne agreed sympathetically. "Speaking of appearances, Mr. Barstow, what do you recall about the man? I know you described him last night, but I thought perhaps you'd given the matter further thought and could add something to your description this morning."

"Indeed I have given it further thought. Yes, indeed. My gracious, it's the first time anything like this has ever occurred in a building under my management. On the other hand, I'm afraid there's not much I can add to the description I gave your lieutenant last night. Just sort of *medium*." He spread out both his plump palms in exasperation. "I did remember noticing that he signed the rental agreement with his left hand. The lieutenant said that might be very important."

"And it probably is," Shayne told him. "You see, our handwriting expert says the suicide notes were written by a left-handed man. He had a dark mustache, I believe, and wore tinted glasses."

"Lightly tinted. Blue. So light the color was scarcely noticeable."

"And he just dropped in cold, looking for an apartment? No one referred him to you?"

"In answer to an advertisement. He was very easily pleased and appeared satisfied with the price, remarking that he would not be occupying the apartment a great deal and would require no maid service. I do recall that he particularly required a telephone and was delighted that our transient apartments have telephones served by a switchboard."

Shayne nodded thoughtfully. This was the first time he had known the building had its own

telephones. Lucy, of course, had her own private line, but that was on a year's lease...

He said, "I understand he gave you a home address in Jacksonville?"

"Yes. I gave it to the lieutenant. He explained that his home office was there, but that he was trying to build up this territory and would be in Miami possibly two or three days each week."

"The Jacksonville address was a phony," Shayne told him. "Non-existent."

"Dear me. Then do you suppose...?"

"Right now," said Shayne evenly, "it looks as though he used your building simply as a trysting place. We don't even know if Lambert was his name. You didn't ask for references, I suppose?"

"N-no. Not in the case of a month-to-month rental. He paid the first month in advance, you see."

"In cash, I understand?" Shayne made his voice hard and raised ragged, red eyebrows in disapproval. "Didn't you think that was quite unusual? Don't most tenants pay by check?"

"They do, of course," the manager agreed stiffly. "On the other hand, he said something about not wanting to ask me to take an out-of-town check since he desired immediate occupancy."

"That was less than a month ago?"

"Three weeks ago yesterday. I checked the date this morning. I'm sorry I can't help you more, but I must reiterate that I saw the man only that one time. He had his own key to the front door and we have a self-service elevator. We try not to intrude on our tenants' privacy so long as they give us no reason for doing so."

"This company he worked for? He said he was a salesman?"

"Yes. That is, I believe it was definitely implied. He mentioned his territory being enlarged recently to include Miami."

"Did he mention the name of the company? What sort of product he handled?"

"I don't... believe... I, I'm just not sure. It may have been mentioned casually, but I simply don't recollect."

"Could it have been something to do with photography? Photographic supplies?"

Barstow blinked rapidly and then pressed fingertips to his eyes in an attitude of deep thought. His face brightened when he removed them. "I do believe that was it. I do, indeed. Is that important?"

"It may be. Now, I understand he signed some sort of rental agreement? I'd like to take that with me, Mr. Barstow."

"It's a very simple form. Miss Mayhew will get it for you. Ah... I understand the police put a padlock on the door after it was broken in last night. Do you know when they will be through... when his possessions will be removed? I understand it will require a thorough cleaning before it will be available for rental again."

"It will require that," Shayne agreed somberly. "A couple of days, I imagine. I'm going up now to make another check. I'm expecting a couple of men from headquarters in about half an hour. Will you see they are let in the front?"

"Certainly." Barstow got to his feet as Shayne did, and came around the desk. "I'll speak to Miss Mayhew."

Shayne stood aside and followed him out of the office where he spoke to the typist and she twisted around in her chair to pull out a drawer of a filing cabinet and find a cardboard folder which she opened and laid before him. It contained only a single page of fine print, headed RENTAL AGREEMENT at the top and signed at the bottom, "Robert Lambert," in what appeared to Shayne to be the same handwriting as the suicide notes in his pocket.

He took it from the folder and folded it up with the other papers Gentry had given him, and told Barstow, "You can have this back after we've compared signatures."

"No hurry at all. I'm sorry I haven't been of more assistance."

Shayne smiled and shrugged. "I'm sure you've done your best. I assume you've discussed Lambert with Miss Mayhew and she has nothing to add to your description?"

She said, "I was at home ill the day he rented the apartment. So far as I know I didn't even see

him at all.”

Shayne was about to turn away when he had a sudden thought. He turned back and asked, “The telephone. Are tenants charged for their calls?”

Mr. Barstow and Miss Mayhew nodded in unison. Barstow said, “They are billed at the end of each month.”

“Then you keep track of each apartment,” Shayne said to the girl.

“On the outgoing calls, yes. It’s twenty cents for each call. I simply make a notation on each card.”

“And don’t keep a record of the numbers,” Shayne guessed.

“Not on local calls. On long distance, of course.” She turned to her desk and a circular index file. She flipped it expertly to the letter L, and Shayne leaned over her shoulder to look at the card headed, LAMBERT, Robert.

The first date on the card was that same Friday, three weeks before, on which Lambert had rented the apartment. He had made a call to Miami Beach at 9:20 p.m. and the number was written down. Beneath that in a lightly penciled scrawl was jotted down a local telephone number.

Shayne put his finger beneath it, saying, “I thought you didn’t list local numbers.”

“We don’t normally. That number was probably busy, and Nina wrote it down and told the party she would keep trying.”

On the following Friday evening at 9:15 Lambert had called the same Miami Beach telephone number as before, and last night he had again called that same Beach number at 9:25.

Shayne picked up a scratch pad and pencil from her desk and made a note of the only two numbers that had been called from the Lambert apartment. He asked, “Is there any chance that you overheard anything that was said on these calls? You or the other operator?”

She shook her head strongly. “We don’t eavesdrop.”

“Mightn’t you just hold on long enough to hear the answer... enough to know whether it was a man or woman he called?”

She hesitated, giving the appearance of trying to give an honest answer. “Sometimes, I suppose... I just might. If I weren’t too busy. But I don’t remember any of his calls.”

“Not even last night?” persisted Shayne. “Stop and think. You can’t be very busy at nine-thirty in the evening. You *were* on last night, weren’t you?”

“Happens I was. Nina... that’s the girl usually takes the switchboard at five to midnight... had a heavy date and I took over for her. Last night?”

She puckered her brow and thought deeply. “I think... maybe... a woman answered. And he said, ‘Darling’ or something like that. And then I cut out. Because I *don’t ever* try to eavesdrop,” she ended strongly with a glance at Mr. Barstow.

Shayne thanked them both for their cooperation and promised to keep them informed of developments. He then went out to the elevator and up to the third floor.

## CHAPTER SIX

The police had put a new hasp and a padlock on the outside of the door that Shayne had crashed in the preceding night, and as he stopped in front of it to fit the key Lieutenant Hawkins had given him into the lock, he noticed out of the corner of his eye that the door directly opposite stood slightly ajar. The muted sound of a TV set or a radio came from inside the room, and he hesitated a moment as the padlock came open, wondering whether to try to talk to Mrs. Conrad now or wait until later.

She solved the problem for him by opening the door wider and poking her head out and saying happily, “Well there, now. It’s Mr. Michael Shayne, isn’t it. I recognize you from last night, you know. My! The way you did slam yourself against that door when all the rest of us were just standing around wondering how to get in. I said right then that you were just about the strongest man I ever did see, and after seeing you in action I know how you go about solving your cases all right. I said that very thing to Mr. Carmichael down the hall last night, and he sneered and said,

‘More brute force than brains,’ and I said, ‘Well, he’s got to have brains too, you bet your sweet life,’ to have achieved the national reputation *you’ve* achieved, and that shut him up all right.”

Shayne turned with a smile and said, “You’re Mrs. Conrad, aren’t you? The only one who was able to give the police any worthwhile information about your neighbor. It’s lucky you’re so observant.”

“I keep my eyes open and my wits about me.” She tossed her head importantly. She was a tall, thin-faced woman, with a long, sharp nose and beady eyes. “Not that I ever thought I’d be giving information to the police, you understand. Not about something like what happened in *there*, last night. But you never can tell these days. Goodness! Such goings-on in a respectable apartment building like this. From the very first time I saw that woman come traipsing up to the room late at night, I said to myself, I said: ‘Oh-oh. Monkey business, I bet.’ You could tell right off. There was something sneaky about her.”

Shayne glanced at his watch and said, “I wonder if you’d mind telling me all about it again, Mrs. Conrad. I’m expecting a couple of men from headquarters in about twenty minutes. If we could leave your door open so I’ll know when they come...?”

“You come right in and wait,” she invited him happily. “Course we’ll leave the door open a little. I always do, you know. To make the air-conditioner work better. It says right on it that a window or door should be left open across the room for most efficient operation. And a good thing too, if you ask me. No one else around here sees very much that goes on.”

Shayne followed her into a starched, polished and hygienic sitting room, the same size and shape as Lucy’s on the floor below, but managing to look completely un-lived-in. There were no books, magazines or newspapers visible. There were stiffly starched white doilies on every table, and immaculate white antimacassars on the back of the sofa and the two upholstered chairs. A large TV set dominated one end of the room with a picture flickering across it and the sound turned low, vying with the hum of an air-conditioner opposite the front door.

Shayne sat down gingerly in one of the chairs, with the feeling that she would probably leap at it with a vacuum cleaner as soon as he got up. She seated herself in the other chair and leaned forward to tell him:

“I tried to catch that nice Miss Hamilton downstairs early this morning to tell her how wonderful you were to take charge in such a masterful way last night, but she had left before I got down to her room. Such a dear, sweet girl. I’ve often told her how lucky she is to have such an exciting job working as your secretary and right in the middle of important crimes all the time.” Shayne repressed a grin, remembering what Lucy had told him about Mrs. Conrad last night, and said, “No one seems to know anything about the man across the hall, Mrs. Conrad. Except you. I’ve just been talking to the manager and his secretary downstairs. It seems the manager only saw him the one time when he rented the apartment, and the girl not at all. Did you ever speak to him?”

“I tried to. The first day he moved in. In the friendliest way possible. To welcome him as a new neighbor, you know. That was about a month ago. Less than a month, I guess.” She pursed up her thin lips and nodded. “Yes. It was a Friday, I know. Three weeks ago, it’d be. Because I saw him again that next Friday, and then last night. Just three times in all since he’s been here. And entertaining that same woman every one of those Friday nights until heaven knows what hour in the morning. You can take my word for it he was using that room for nothing but a love nest. And with a rich married woman in society and all on the Beach to boot. You could have knocked me over with a feather when I heard on the early news this morning that she was an Armbruster. Worth millions in her own name, they say. Well! What she saw in a man like him...”

“Let’s try to take it in order,” Shayne suggested desperately. “You saw him when he first looked at the apartment and rented it?” He got out a cigarette and fumbled for matches, then hesitated and looked around uncomfortably, aware that there was not a single ashtray in sight.

“Well, no,” Mrs. Conrad admitted. “Not when Mr. Barstow first showed him the apartment. That was in the afternoon and I wasn’t in. But that evening when he brought his suitcase up. You see, I didn’t even know the apartment had been rented. It had been vacant for more than a week, and I was wondering how long it’d be before someone grabbed it. Apartments don’t stay vacant in this

building very long as a rule. The rates are reasonable and it's in a very convenient location, and *very* well kept up." She appeared not to notice the cigarette Shayne was holding half-way to his mouth, and he reluctantly replaced it in his shirt pocket.

He said, "That was the first Friday evening. What time, Mrs. Conrad?"

"Between eight and nine, I'd say. My door was open a crack like always and I just happened to notice this man set a suitcase down in front of the door there and fumble with a key in the lock, so I just peeked my head out to say a good evening and welcome to him, to make him feel at home, you know, and he just glanced sideways at me across the hall in a *most* unfriendly way, and then he muttered something and got the door open and picked up the suitcase and went in, and I won't say he exactly slammed the door shut, but I will say he closed it *very* firmly right in my face."

"What was your impression of him?"

"Well! That he wasn't such-a-much, if you know what I mean. With those funny blue glasses and a little mustache. Nothing about him to make you look twice if you met him on the street. I couldn't see what he had to be so high-and-mighty about, practically insulting me when I offered him a pleasant good evening, but that was before I saw *her* slipping up to his door, and then I said to myself, 'Ah-ha. So that's your game, is it?' Because I realized right away why he was so standoffish. He didn't want anybody being friendly and paying any attention to what he did. Having that woman up to visit him all hours."

"How did you know it wasn't his wife?" asked Shayne.

"You could just *tell* she wasn't any wife. Not his wife, at any rate. Call it a woman's intuition, if you like. Something sneaky and mysterious about her. I just knew it right off when I saw her that first night. Sidling up the hallway in high heels and trying not to clack in them. With that floppy black hat pulled down so you could hardly see her face."

"What time was that? How much after you saw him go in?"

"Half an hour or so. Nine-thirty or ten, I'd guess. I saw her coming up the hall looking at numbers, and I just stepped up close inside my own door to see if I'd guessed right, and sure enough she stopped and knocked, not very loud... sort of secret-like... and he must have been expecting her and waiting because he opened it right off and she slipped inside like she didn't want to be seen."

"The same woman you saw last night?"

She nodded vigorously. "And the Friday before, too. Well, I couldn't swear to it on the witness stand because I never did see her face hardly, those first two times, but dressed the same all three times, with that same black hat. I could swear to the hat. You don't see many like that nowadays. They used to be stylish, but they're old-fashioned right now. You have to have a lot of money to wear one like that and not care what people think."

"You say you hardly saw her the first two times," Shayne reminded her. "Does that mean you did see her face last night?"

"Yes. I thought it was funny at the time, because she turned and looked right at me across the hall after she knocked on the door. I recognized her picture right away when I saw it in the paper this morning. There was something funny about her eyes. She didn't look frightened, exactly. More like she was defying me. I didn't know then why she didn't mind if I saw her face last night. My goodness, how could I guess she'd come here all prepared to drink poison? You can see that, can't you?"

"You mean because she didn't try to slip in secretly as she'd done before?"

"Yes. I can see it now. She didn't care who saw her. So she just glared right at me and went in."

"Back to the first night. You didn't see her leave?"

"Not that night nor the next Friday either. The door stayed shut till after midnight both nights when I gave up and went to bed. And I never saw either of them go out the next day on Saturday either, when I was home from work and would have noticed them if they had."

"And you didn't see him come or go during the week?"

"Just on Friday evenings. It was the same all three times, including last night. He'd show up

around nine o'clock or maybe a little after, and she'd turn up about ten on the dot."

"Did you speak to him again?"

"I did not. Not after that first time. I left him strictly alone. I'm like that, Mr. Shayne. I'm not one to push in where I'm not wanted. If he wanted to carry on with a woman across the hall it wasn't for me to interfere. Of course, if I'd known what I know now, maybe I could've... but you just never know, do you? Things like that going on right under your nose. My goodness! If I'd ever guessed. And when I heard that shotgun go off last night..."

"No one ever does know," Shayne agreed, getting to his feet thankfully and taking out a cigarette as he heard the elevator stop at that floor and the tramp of feet down the hall toward them. "I think that will be my men now. Thank you for your help, Mrs. Conrad. You've cleared up a lot of confusing points."

"Glad to do it," she assured him, hurrying to the door behind him and peering out like a bright-eyed magpie at the two men from headquarters and the gangling reporter from the *News* as they stopped to greet Shayne in front of the other door. "What are you going to do in there now?" she asked avidly. "If you want I should come in, maybe I could..."

"I think not, Mrs. Conrad," Shayne told her firmly, opening the door and motioning the others in. "This room will have to remain sealed until the police are completely through with it." He followed the trio in and shut the door behind him, not exactly *slamming* it, he thought to himself with a grin, but unmistakably closing it very firmly in her face.

Sergeant Deitch and Garroway both carried their kits with them, looking like doctors' emergency bags, and Rourke strolled forward into the living room with his hands in his pockets. Deitch was a middle-aged stubby man, with a cheerful, unlined face. He set his bag down and faced Shayne with a shade of truculence in his manner. "I still don't know exactly what you want us to do here, Shayne. Like I said over the phone..."

Shayne said quickly, "What we're going to do right now is to pretend there weren't any suicide notes to conveniently solve the case for us. Both of you were here last night and saw the two bodies. Naturally, all of us reconstructed the events leading up to death in the light of what the notes told us. But suppose we'd come on them cold. There are a lot of things you two would have done that the lieutenant didn't bother to do last night.

"Sergeant, I want you to check everything in this entire apartment for prints. The place was vacant for a week before Lambert moved into it, and probably had a thorough cleaning during that vacancy. He hasn't had any maid so far as I know. So any prints other than those of the two corpses may be important."

"There were half a dozen of us milling around in here last night," Deitch pointed out stiffly.

"That's why I wanted you for the job. You were here and know just about what they may have handled. Besides, you've got a record of all their prints right at headquarters. It shouldn't be difficult to check them out. I want to know if anyone else has been in here during the past three weeks... particularly last night. That window in the bedroom for instance, that was open last night when I broke in. And the fire escape outside."

"It rained about two o'clock this morning," Deitch reminded him. "We won't get anything from the fire escape."

Rourke chuckled from where he stood a few feet away, listening. "Mike figures there was somebody in here with them who persuaded the woman to drink poison and then rammed the shotgun barrel into Lambert's mouth and pulled the trigger."

"Listen," said Deitch hotly. "I checked that gun last night. Fingerprints on the barrel. Angle it was held at. Even to a smidgen of a big toe print on the trigger. You can't tell me..."

"No one is trying to tell you anything," said Shayne patiently. "Just get me what I want, Sarge. And you, Garroway. There are a dozen things they taught you to do in police school that you didn't waste time on last night. I mentioned that stain on the rug where Lambert evidently spilled his drink. I want to be sure it had the same amount of cyanide in it as the drink she swallowed. And the bedroom. Make every test in the book on the bedding and the clothes Lambert left behind. Those he was wearing before he got into his pajamas, and everything in the drawers and the closet.



Lint and dust in the pockets and cuffs. *Anything* that will tell us who and what Lambert was. Where he came from. What he did for a living. You know what I want better than I do.”

Both technicians nodded without further discussion, opened their kits and set to work.

Standing beside Rourke, Shayne noted that the black hat and the silk gloves still lay on the table near the door where he had first seen them the night before.

He turned away and wandered into the bedroom which he hadn't entered before, noted that the window was now tightly closed, and the double bed was neatly made up. Lying across the foot of it and neatly folded was a dark suit, white shirt and bow tie and a man's underwear, evidently discarded by the dead man when he donned his pajamas. He turned away to the open closet door and peered inside as Rourke joined him. The only articles of wearing apparel in the closet were a woman's nightgown of very sheer material, flame-red in color, with a matching peignoir on a hanger beside it. On the floor beneath was a pair of flimsy bedroom slippers of the same color; the type that can be folded up in a small plastic bag into a parcel not much bigger than a pack of cigarettes and carried in a woman's handbag.

Rourke whistled expressively as he looked at them with Shayne. “That wasn't in the police report. Would have been a nice touch of color for my story. I understand the guy was practically stripped for action. Why not her?”

Shayne shrugged. “He was waiting for her in pajamas and robe... and probably with the drinks already mixed. How the hell does anybody know how the mind of a suicide works?”

He went out of the bedroom and into the living room where he skirted around Garroway kneeling in front of the stain on the rug, hesitated and then went to the telephone table at the end of the sofa, leaned over and flipped open the directory to the Miami Beach section of the book. He turned to the N's and found, “Nathan, Paul,” with a pencil mark in front of it. His frown deepened as he took a slip of paper from his pocket and compared the telephone number with one of those Miss Mayhew had given him in her office downstairs.

It was the Miami Beach number that had been called three times. There was no doubt that the occupant of this room had telephoned the Nathan residence on the Beach each Friday evening since Robert Lambert had rented the place... just about half an hour before Elsa Nathan had been observed arriving at his door. Old Eli, Shayne thought with a grimace, wasn't going to like any of this one little bit. If the flaming nightgown and the slippers in the closet were identified as hers...

But, who the hell else did he think they belonged to? Eli's theory that she had been lured here last night to be murdered by her husband, somehow, had been screwy on the face of it. Too bad because it meant kissing goodbye to fifty grand, but there it was.

Timothy Rourke sauntered out of the bedroom as Shayne straightened up and closed the telephone book. He asked sardonically, “What progress is the great sleuth making?” and Shayne shrugged his shoulders without replying.

Sergeant Deitch came out of the kitchen as they stood there, and said pleasantly, “Nothing worth a damn in there. That guy Lambert was either one hell of a meticulous housekeeper, or else he didn't do any housekeeping here. No sign that a pot or pan, or a dish or piece of silverware has been touched. Some old prints... month or so... presumably female... probably the former maid.”

Shayne said absently, “I don't think Lambert rented this apartment with any idea of setting up housekeeping. Best bet right now is that he only came here for Friday nights.”

“And for a lot more interesting reason than cooking dinner,” observed Rourke with a leer. “You going to keep on sticking around, Mike?”

“For a little while. You go ahead if you want to.”

“Yeh,” said Rourke. “I could use a drink right about now. Come out and grab one with me?”

“Some stuff in the kitchen,” Sergeant Deitch informed them with a grin. “Dark rum and creme de menthe.”

Rourke repressed a shudder. “Any cyanide to make it interesting?”

“No cyanide,” the sergeant told him gravely. “But there is a bottle of bonded bourbon with a couple of good slugs left in it.”

Rourke said, “Ah,” and headed happily for the kitchen. Shayne started to follow him, checked

himself and asked Garroway, "Did you analyze the liquor in the bottles last night?"

"Yeh. All three of them. They're okay. The cyanide was added after the stuff was mixed in the glasses."

In the kitchen, Shayne found the reporter breaking ice cubes from a container and dropping them into a tall glass. The refrigerator door stood wide open and a glance inside showed the shelves to be completely bare.

On the drainboard at the left of the sink stood a fifth of dark rum and a squat tenth of creme de menthe.

Only a little liquor was gone from each bottle. In contrast, the bottle of bourbon on the other side of the drainboard which Rourke was uncorking held no more than six ounces of liquor.

Rourke splashed half of that on top of the ice cubes, and held the bottle out to his redheaded friend. "It's on the house."

Shayne shook his head, regarding the three bottles thoughtfully. "I think I'll take Eli's advice and see what that other combination tastes like."

"Rum and creme de menthe? For Christ's sake," sputtered Rourke.

Shayne grinned and put a couple of ice cubes in a glass, poured rum on top and then added a dollop of the sweet liqueur. He swirled the cubes around with his forefinger and then tasted it.

"Not bad," he reported. "Though I've a hunch that a bit of potassium ferricyanide would perk it up a bit."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The two men carried their drinks into the living room and sat on the couch out of the way of the two officers, and Shayne grimaced over the mixture in his glass and asked Rourke, "What about Paul Nathan? Did you dig up any dirt?"

"Not exactly. Hell! Let's be honest. Nothing, really. The only thing is... we don't have anything that goes back beyond the announcement of his engagement to Elsa Armbruster. He is vaguely described as an insurance executive on the Beach when he met Elsa... and that's about it. It was a brief engagement and a big society wedding, and they moved into a new home and he went into the Armbruster organization in some minor executive capacity. No rumors. No scandals. They apparently don't go out a great deal, and hardly ever entertain at home. Mrs. Nathan has remained active in a lot of charitable organizations and fund-raising activities, but her husband has stayed out of the news."

Shayne swallowed some more rum and creme de menthe and scowled across the room. "I suppose he'll inherit her estate."

"I suppose. Estimated at a couple of million at least."

"Why in hell," demanded Shayne angrily, "didn't she just give him the divorce he asked for? It would have been a lot cheaper... even at a quarter of a million."

"What's that?"

Shayne related what Eli had told him that morning. "Why hold onto her husband if she was in love with another man? It doesn't make sense."

"Haven't you ever noticed that rich people never do? Not to people like us, Mike. They *think* differently. They're conditioned to think differently from childhood. You and I say: What the hell is a quarter of a million? She'd still have one and three-quarters left. More than she can possibly spend in the rest of her life, no matter how she throws it around.

"But they don't see it that way, Mike. I've run into a lot of them in my work over the past twenty years. A buck is a buck, by God! Much more than it is to you or me. Particularly if it's an inherited buck."

Shayne muttered, "Yeh. Eli made somewhat the same point this morning. He emphasized that Elsa was an *Armbruster*. She had a 'feeling for property,' he explained to me. She wasn't about to give up a husband she had bought with her own money. All right. I can understand that under normal circumstances. If she enjoyed being married to the guy. But she evidently didn't. Here she

was, carrying on a passionate love affair with a married man that was building up to suicide. I can't see even a woman with a strong 'feeling for property' continuing to cling to her husband under those circumstances."

"Didn't Lambert say in his note that his wife's religion stood in the way of a divorce?"

"Sure. But once again... enough money can take care of that. Divorce evidence has been framed before... for a lousy thousand bucks or less."

Timothy Rourke drained his bourbon highball and sighed. "You always run into these unanswerable questions in suicides. There's never a logical answer, Mike. If they were logical people they wouldn't do it. Q.E.D."

Shayne said, "Yeh, I know," still sounding unconvinced, and looked up with eyebrows raised questioningly as the two officers reentered the room from the bedroom. Garroway carried a bundle of clothing which he put down on the rug, and said, "I'll take this suit he was wearing into the lab where I can do a thorough job. But I don't expect to get anything, Shayne. This is all new, department store stuff. Been worn once and never washed. And another thing: I don't think that bed linen has been disturbed for weeks... since it was made up fresh when he moved in. Certainly not for the purpose that couple were supposed to be using this apartment for. You know, there are always stains and indications you can test for."

"Maybe they did their romping on top of the bedspread," Rourke suggested.

"Maybe." Garroway was a deadly serious young man. "But I ran tests on that, too, without getting anything."

"How about you, Sarge?" Shayne asked the fingerprint man.

"I got some prints," he said. "I can't be positive until I run comparisons with the men who were up here last night, but I have a strong hunch they'll all check out. One thing I can tell you: I didn't find any of the woman's prints to indicate she'd spent any time here. A few faint smudges a week or so old that might or might not be. Only clear prints of hers were on a little plastic slipper bag I found on the shelf in the closet."

"A container for those red slippers on the floor?"

"They fit into it all right. The nightgown and peignoir have been worn by the way."

"What about Lambert's glasses?" Shayne asked suddenly. "He always wore blue tinted ones. I haven't seen a pair around."

"They're at the lab," Garroway told him. "We got them from on top the dresser in the bedroom last night. Took them in to see if they could be traced."

"Any luck?"

"No. They aren't prescription lenses. Could be picked up anywhere."

"And I suppose you took the shotgun in?"

"Yes. Standard single-shot, twelve gauge. Hasn't been used a great deal, but it's ten or twelve years old. No chance to trace it either."

"That damned gun bothers me," muttered Shayne. "What in the name of God was it doing here so conveniently? It isn't exactly the sort of thing a man brings along with him to keep a hot date."

"But the suicide was planned for last night," argued Rourke. "I understand the suicide note said so."

"It also said they'd planned to go out together with cyanide," Shayne told him caustically. "He lost his nerve and spilled his drink, and had to do the job with the gun. He hadn't planned *that*. So what was the gun doing here?"

"That's another one of those questions for which there is no logical answer," Rourke told him pleasantly. He stood up and yawned. "Are we all through here?"

"Yeh." Shayne looked at the men. "When can I have a report?"

"Couple of hours."

"Call my office," Shayne directed. "Or my secretary, Lucy Hamilton, if the office doesn't answer." He gave them Lucy's number and got up also, leaving half his drink still in the glass.

Rourke waited and watched him as he went into the bedroom. The reporter grinned when he

came back thrusting a small plastic container with the slippers into one side pocket, and ramming the flimsy red nightgown set into the other. "A present for Lucy?" he asked with a leer.

Shayne said coldly, "I'm taking these home where they belong."

"For the bereaved husband? I'm sure he'll love to have them as souvenirs."

Shayne shrugged; they went out together and he snapped the padlock on the outside of the door. "Let's walk down a flight," he suggested. "See if Lucy's back from the office. I could use a decent drink to wash the taste of that stuff out of my mouth."

They walked down a flight, but a knock on Lucy's door indicated that she hadn't returned. They went down to the ground floor where Rourke announced that he was late keeping a date for a free lunch, and drove off hastily.

Shayne drove back to a small restaurant on Eighth Street just off the boulevard where a double cognac washed the cloying taste from his mouth, and he ate a hasty steak sandwich.

His next stop, he decided, should be at the office of Harry Brandt, a nationally known expert on handwriting and the validation of questioned documents. Harry's office was only three blocks away, and after he left the handwriting samples with him, a trip across the bay to Miami Beach and an interview with Paul Nathan was indicated.

And that would about wind it up, Shayne told himself sourly. Thus far he hadn't accomplished a damned thing to earn Eli Armbruster's ten grand retainer. It was an easy way to pick up a hunk of cash, but Shayne didn't like to earn his money so easily. There was still Nathan's alibi to be checked, he reminded himself. Not that he expected to prove anything by it because there wasn't yet a single circumstance that pointed the finger of suspicion at the husband, but it was one more thing to do before he made his final report to his client.

Harry Brandt had the ground floor of an old Stucco residence on Fifth Street near the bay where he kept bachelor quarters and did the work which found its way to him from all over the country.

He was a pleasant-faced tweedy man in his forties, and he took a foul-smelling pipe from his mouth to greet the redhead with a smile at his front door. "Come in, Mike," he urged. "I see by the paper that you were on the spot again last night. Anything in it for me?"

He led the way down the hall to a pleasant, masculinely-appointed sitting room and waved Shayne to a comfortable chair.

"A very simple thing, but I have to check it out to satisfy a client." Shayne dug into his pockets and extracted the two suicide notes and the letter that had been found in Elsa's handbag. He pushed them over to Brandt, together with the rental agreement signed by Lambert.

"I guess there's no doubt that those first three were written by the same man. I don't think there's much doubt that this is also his signature... but that's the thing I have to know."

Harry Brandt glanced through the notes and letter alertly. He said, "The man's left-handed, of course. The second note shows more haste and strain, which is natural, if I understand the circumstances, but there's enough difference that I'll have to make a few tests to be positive the same person wrote them both. This signature..." He studied the name at the bottom of the agreement carefully, glanced aside to compare it with the other two "*Robert Lambert's*."

"Off-hand, I'd say yes, Mike. You want more than that?"

"I need a positive yes or no. And my client can afford to pay for it."

"Nice to have clients like that these days," Brandt told him with a twinkle in his eye. "Okay. I'll give it the works. You just want an opinion... not blow-ups to go into court with?"

"I don't think it'll reach court, Harry. Certainly not if your answer is in the affirmative. Can I call you?"

"Around four."

Shayne thanked him and went out to his car. He had memorized the Miami Beach address from the telephone book in Lambert's apartment, and it was a pleasant thirty-minute drive to a modest, two-story, ocean-front house set in the middle of beautifully landscaped grounds.

The glistening white driveway of crushed coral rock led past the house to a triple garage at the rear, and also curved past the colonnaded front under a *porte-cochere* to a circular turn-around.

There were no other cars in view when Shayne got out and left his car under the *porte-cochere*. He went up stone steps and rang the doorbell, and the door was opened by a trim, colored maid in a dark blue uniform. She had nice, clean-cut features and intelligent eyes, and she shook her head gravely when Shayne asked, "Is Mr. Nathan at home?"

"Not right this minute, he isn't. I expect him back any time." She had a soft, melodic voice and she formed her words carefully without too much of a southern slur.

Shayne said, "Perhaps you could answer a few questions. I'm a detective and I have to check on a few things."

"Yes, sir. I reckon I can try. Mr. Nathan, he said the police might come around and I was to tell them whatever they asked. He went to the burial parlor and I expect he stopped out to have lunch. Won't you come in, sir?"

Shayne followed her down a wide central hall to double doors that opened onto a square library. She stood aside for him to enter, and followed him inside hesitantly. He sat in a leather chair and smiled at her and said, "Why don't you sit down, too? Tell me your name first."

"Thank you, sir." She sat warily on the extreme edge of a chair across from him. "Alyce Brown, sir."

"Were you surprised by what happened last night, Alyce?"

"Yes *sir*. Real shocked. I just can't believe it's true. Not even yet, I can't."

"Didn't you suspect that Mrs. Nathan was... having an affair with another man?"

"No, *sir*. She was always a real lady."

"You never heard anything peculiar. Like... well, phone calls from a strange man?"

"No, *sir*."

"How long have you worked here, Alyce?"

"Most a year now. Ever since they were married and moved in this house."

"What other staff is there?"

"Just the cook. She's my aunt. The two of us do everything needed."

"How did Mr. and Mrs. Nathan get along?"

"Like most married folks, I guess."

"No quarrels or fights?"

"No, *sir*. No more than most married folks, I guess."

"Did you ever hear them discuss a divorce... anything like that?"

"No, *sir*. They wouldn't... not in front of a servant."

"Do you and your aunt sleep in?"

"Yes, *sir*. Except on Friday nights. That's our day off. Friday noon to Saturday noon. Of course, we both came early this morning when we heard about the terrible thing that happened last night."

"But you're both always off on Friday nights?"

"Yes, *sir*. Mrs. Nathan wanted it that way. It was... well, like Mr. Nathan's night off, too. He never came home for dinner on Friday nights."

"Has this been going on ever since they were married?"

"Yes, *sir*. Mrs. Nathan explained how it was to us when she first set our night off on Friday. How that she thought a husband should have one night off to himself every week away from his home and his wife, just like a servant should. And that's the way they did."

"Then you'd say that Mrs. Nathan was generally alone in the house on Friday nights?"

"Either that, or she'd go out some place by her own self."

Shayne settled back and got out a cigarette. Alyce arose swiftly and got a table lighter from beside her and held the flame for him. Shayne waited until she had reseated herself before reaching into the two side pockets of his coat and bringing out the slippers in their plastic container and the red nightgown set.

He handed the slippers to Alyce and shook the nightgown and peignoir out from extended fingertips.

"Do you recognize these?"

Alyce was turning the tiny slippers over and over in her hands. She looked up and Shayne caught a glint of tears in her soft brown eyes. "They... just like some Mrs. Nathan had."

"When did you last see hers?"

"I... just couldn't say. Hanging up in her closet... she lay them out when she wanted me to launder them."

Shayne got to his feet. He said, "Let's go to her room and see if hers are there."

She nodded with downcast eyes and got up carrying the slippers. She held out her hand for the two flimsy garments as though she felt it was not quite proper for a man to be handling them, and Shayne followed her out of the library to a wide stairway leading to the second floor. It was very still inside the house as they climbed the carpeted stairway.

At the top, Alyce led the way to the front where she entered a pleasant, sunny sitting room with doors opening out on both sides of it. There was a cretonne-covered sofa and two rocking chairs near the wide window at the far end of the room; at the left of the entrance door was a gleaming rosewood desk with a matching chair in front of it.

Alyce motioned to the door on the right and said, "That is Mr. Nathan's room." She turned to open the door on the left and said, "I'll go see," closing the door behind her as though she deemed it improper for a strange man to see the interior of her dead mistress's bedroom.

Shayne strolled across toward the window and stubbed his cigarette out in an ashtray on the small table between the two rocking chairs.

Alyce came back through the bedroom door and her features were tight and strained, her lips were trembling. She said brokenly. "It must be so then, isn't it? I didn't... I just couldn't... I kept thinking... I'm sorry, sir." She tried to draw herself up stiffly, avoiding Shayne's gaze.

He said quietly. "Then they are hers, Alyce?"

"Yes, sir. Her slippers and that same set aren't there. You'll have to excuse me, sir, but... it just came to me, like..."

Shayne said, "It's all right. We had to be sure. You've been very helpful." He moved to her and touched her arm gently. "Who uses this desk, Alyce?"

"That one? Mrs. Nathan. That's where she makes out the marketing lists, does the household accounts and writes out checks to pay bills."

Shayne said, "She did all that? Not Mr. Nathan?"

"She always said it was the duty of a lady to take care of household things."

Besides, Shayne couldn't help thinking to himself, it was her money she was spending. She would be one to keep a firm grip on expenditures.

He turned to the desk and pulled out the wide center drawer. A large flat checkbook lay on top of other neatly arranged papers, the kind that has three checks to the page.

He lifted it out and opened it on the desk to the final entry she had made before her death.

It was the top check on that page, dated four days previously and the stub was neatly made out to "cash," \$100.00. The balance in the account after that check was deducted was \$2,962.25. Above the line for the signature on the checks themselves was the printed name, "Elsa Armbruster." So, she hadn't opened a joint account with her husband after they were married. Shayne wondered if he had a personal account of his own, and if so, what his balance was.

He turned the stubs backward slowly, glancing down at the three separate notations on each sheet of stubs. Elsa had been a methodical account-keeper. Each stub was dated, the payee and amount noted clearly, and the purpose of each check meticulously entered.

The entries seemed ordinary enough; dry cleaner, a florist, a doctor bill, a \$50 donation to a charity. She didn't write a great many small checks. They were all for fair-sized sums, indicating that she waited for bills to be rendered monthly.

He stopped on the third page back, his eyes glinting with excitement. The stub was dated almost exactly one month previously. The amount was \$250, payable to "Max Wentworth." Beneath the name, the single word "Retainer" appeared.

Shayne knew quite a bit about Max Wentworth, none of it very good. He straightened up with the checkbook open in front of him, a questioning scowl on his face, when he heard a car coming up

the drive fast, and slow with a protesting screech of brakes beneath the *porte-cochere* beside his own car.

Behind him, Alyce said hurriedly, "That will be Mr. Nathan now. Maybe I'd best go down..."

Shayne said, "I'll go with you," and followed her, leaving the checkbook open on the rosewood desk behind him.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Paul Nathan was closing the front door behind him when they reached the foot of the stairs. He was a few years younger than the man Shayne had expected from the picture in the paper; smooth-faced with the ruddy glow of good health in his cheeks, wearing a dark suit and a neat, black bow tie. He had thinning, dark-brown hair, and he looked just about as distraught and harried as one would expect of a man who had been making funeral arrangements for an unfaithful wife who had taken her own life.

He moved toward them slowly, glancing at the maid and then to Shayne behind her with somewhat hostile curiosity, and then back to the maid again. He stopped in front of the open library door and said, "I see we have company, Alyce."

"Yes, sir. This man, he's from the police. You told me I was to..."

Nathan interrupted, "Of course, Alyce. I can use a drink, please." He looked at Shayne again with lifted eyebrows. "Will you join me?"

Shayne nodded and told Alyce, "A straight brandy, if you have some on tap." She turned toward the rear of the house and Shayne moved forward with hand outstretched. "I'm sorry to bother you at a time like this, Mr. Nathan."

Nathan narrowed his eyes and his lips pulled away from his teeth slightly. He disregarded Shayne's proffered hand. "You're not from the police," he exclaimed. "I recognize you now. You're Michael Shayne. You... found them last night. What right have you to be here impersonating the police?"

"I simply told your maid I was a detective. She invited me in."

"Did she invite you to go snooping around upstairs?" demanded Nathan angrily.

"I brought a nightgown of your wife's and a pair of her bedroom slippers home with me," Shayne told him coldly. "We went upstairs to be positive they were hers."

Nathan's face crumpled suddenly, and he turned his head aside, took a stumbling step into the library where he stood with his face averted.

Behind him, Shayne said in a gentler tone, "I'm doing a job, Nathan. You don't have to talk to me if you don't want to, but I think we can close the case fast if you're willing to answer a few questions."

"Close the case?" Nathan whirled on him, his face distorted. "I thought it *was* closed. God in heaven! Haven't I suffered enough?"

"There are still a few loose ends."

"What concern are they of yours? If the police are satisfied, what possible business is it of yours?"

"I told you I'm doing a job," Shayne reminded him inflexibly.

"Old Eli, eh?" Paul Nathan spoke bitterly. "That old buzzard! I might have known he'd stir up a stink. Can't let his own daughter lie quietly in her grave the way she wanted. Damn his meddling old soul to hell. He tried to turn her against me from the beginning. I hope he's satisfied now that the whole world knows what his precious daughter was." He turned away abruptly again, stalked across the library to a deep chair and dropped into it, breathing hard.

The maid entered unobtrusively, carrying a tray. She went directly to Nathan and he took a tall highball glass from it, and she turned back to Shayne with a large snifter glass and a small amount of cognac in it.

Shayne accepted it with a nod of thanks, and she left the room silently. He didn't wait for an invitation, but moved to a chair in front of Nathan and sat down. "Did your wife leave you a note,

Mr. Nathan?"

Nathan had the glass to his mouth and was avidly gulping the contents. He set it down beside him when it was half-empty, and his face hardened.

"If your wife left you a note under the same circumstances, do you think you'd make it public?"

"I'm not suggesting you make it public. If I could testify to the existence of such a note it would go a long way toward satisfying your father-in-law that further investigation would be useless."

"You mean it would convince the old bastard that I had nothing to do with my wife's death. Isn't that what you mean?" sneered Nathan.

Shayne said cautiously, "He does harbor some such suspicion."

"And he's willing to spend a fortune trying to smear me though it wasn't *I* who brought this about. It wasn't *I* who broke up our marriage and shacked up with someone else. He can't do very much about changing that fact."

"*Did* she leave you a note?"

"Yes, damn it. And I destroyed it as soon as I read it after coming here from the morgue last night. It was a private communication between wife and husband, and I shall respect it as such."

Shayne sighed and took a sip of cognac. It was fine, mellow stuff, but somehow it didn't taste very good in his mouth. Nathan truculently lifted his glass and drank deeply from it again.

Shayne asked quietly, "Were you aware that your wife was having this affair?"

"God, no!" Nathan's hand jerked and he set the glass down. "I hadn't the faintest idea. I still can't believe..." He lifted his left hand to his face and rubbed the spread fingers across it slowly.

"I understand she was always alone on Friday nights?"

"Yes. That was her idea. I was allowed that night out." There was an underlying note of bitterness in Nathan's voice. "You'd have to know Elsa to understand. She was always so logical. So... so *right*. She had it all figured out, you see. The basis for an enduring marriage. That we should each have one night a week on our own... with no questions asked on either side."

"But it *didn't* make for a happy marriage?"

"Oh, it was happy enough. At least, I considered it so."

"Then why did you ask her for a divorce?"

"*I?*" Paul Nathan jerked his head up in astonishment.

"Some months ago, according to her father. And you demanded a quarter of a million dollars cash settlement."

Nathan shook his head disbelievingly and then settled back with a short, harsh laugh. "That old bastard! It was Elsa who asked *me* for a divorce, and he knows it. Sure. I told her okay if she felt like putting out two hundred and fifty thousand. What's wrong with that?" he demanded angrily. "Why shouldn't a woman pay off to get a divorce just the way men do? They rave about equality of the sexes. Elsa was always harping on the subject. So I said, 'Let's make it a two-way street.'"

"And Eli knew this?"

"Of course he knew it. He egged her on to get a divorce. In fact, she told me that he offered to make up half the amount himself."

"Why," demanded Shayne, "did he want his daughter to divorce you?"

"Because she *was* his daughter, I'd guess." Nathan laughed nastily. "Because he couldn't stand the thought of anybody else sleeping with her, if you ask me."

Although the "else" was deliberately stressed, Shayne chose to disregard it.

"At that time did you think that possibly your wife had some other man in mind?"

"Elsa? Hell, no! She wasn't what you'd call... very sexy. I thought it was the old man's idea entirely."

"Does the name of Robert Lambert mean anything to you?"

"I never heard it until last night."

"Then you have no idea when or how she met him... how long it's been going on?"



“None.”

Shayne sipped at his drink and pondered. There were a lot of contradictions here. He thought back over his interview with Eli Armbruster that morning, and he wondered. *Had* the old man lied to him... twisted the facts in order to put Paul Nathan into a bad light? There was no doubt that Eli hated his son-in-law. Why?

He asked Nathan that question: “Why did Eli hate you?”

“Because he would have hated any man his daughter married,” Nathan told him promptly. “She was almost thirty-five when we were married, you know. An attractive woman with more money in her own name than she knew what to do with. Does it occur to you to wonder why she hadn’t married earlier in life?”

“Why hadn’t she?”

“She told me after we were married. Because the old man busted up every affair she had in the past. Twice, he put private detectives on prospective sons-in-law and managed to dig up enough dirt to make her change her mind. *She* thought it was because he suspected they were all fortune hunters. I had a different idea.”

Shayne didn’t ask him what that idea was. It was altogether too plain from Nathan’s attitude.

Instead, he asked, “What did you do with your Friday nights?”

“I went on the town.” Nathan gestured vaguely. “Night spots. Gambling.”

“Have any luck gambling?”

“Not much. I generally ended up loser. Elsa was very generous and forgiving.” Nathan’s mouth twisted sourly. “She bailed me out a couple of times when I got in too deep... with a nice long lecture on the value of money.”

Shayne said, “Let’s go to last night. Did you come home at all?”

“From the office, you mean? No. I scarcely ever did. I... went out for dinner, and then on to make the rounds.”

For the first time during the interview Shayne noted a slight hesitation on Nathan’s part. He didn’t press the point.

“Then you last saw your wife yesterday morning?”

“That’s right. We had breakfast together before I left for the office.”

“How did she seem then? Upset or anything?”

“Not that I noticed. She was a woman who didn’t display her emotions. Goddamn it, if I’d had any idea...” He sighed and relapsed into silence.

“When did you hear... what happened to her?”

“It was about two o’clock this morning. I was having a lousy run at the crap table at El Cielito here on the Beach. Fellow I know from the office, Jim Norris, came in and told me. He’d heard it on the radio. My God! I didn’t believe him. *I couldn’t*. Not Elsa. Any other woman... sure. But your own wife...” He shook his head angrily from side to side, then picked up his glass and drained it.

Shayne said, “I’d like to have a time table of your movements... from the time you left the office until your friend spoke to you at the crap table.”

Nathan glared at him angrily. “Do I need an alibi for God’s sake?”

“It would help,” Shayne told him equably, getting the paper from his pocket on which the police had noted a record of Nathan’s evening as he had given it to them.

“I told it to the police last night. I’ve got nothing to hide.”

Shayne said, “Then tell it to me again. If it checks out, the case will be closed so far as I’m concerned.”

“I left the office about five.” Nathan screwed up his face in a look of concentration. “Stopped with Jim Norris and a couple of others at a bar for a few drinks. Drove over the Venetian Causeway to keep a dinner date at six-thirty.”

“Where? With whom?” Looking at the sheet of paper in his hand, Shayne noted that it did not mention dinner. The first entry was eight o’clock.

“What the hell does it matter? I understand nothing happened until about ten o’clock?”

“Then why do you mind telling me where you had dinner?”

"I don't. That is... I don't think it's any of your damned business, but I ate at the Red Cock. I had a reservation for six-thirty."

"By yourself?"

Paul Nathan colored slightly and wet his lips. "As a matter of fact, no. I was with a girl from the office. A secretary. But it was perfectly innocent and you can leave her name out of it. I drove her home at eight o'clock and left her without even a good-night kiss." A sneer on his lips told Shayne to try to make something out of that. Shayne made a mental note to do exactly that.

But he said, "And after you left her?"

"I went to the Fun Club and played some blackjack and roulette. My luck was lousy. I stayed about two hours and went on to the Bay Breeze where I thought maybe the grass was greener. I know I got there a few minutes before ten because I looked at my watch and mentioned it to the girl when I bought chips. I generally didn't make it there on a Friday night until about ten-thirty."

"Do you mean you made the same rounds every Friday night?"

"More or less. Mostly more. You know how it is, gambling. You get to know the dealers and croupiers at certain places."

Shayne said, "Go on." He continued to check the list in his hand as Nathan mentioned the joints he had visited before two o'clock, with the approximate time he had spent at each place.

His statement checked closely with what he had told the police the preceding night, with a variance of no more than fifteen minutes in any instance.

"And that's the story of my night," Nathan concluded nastily. "Check them out if you like. I'm known at all those places. I should be, by God. I've donated enough money in the past year."

Your wife's money, Shayne thought, but he didn't say so. Instead, he folded the paper and returned it to his pocket. "Just one more thing, and then I'll get out of your hair. Do you know a man named Max Wentworth?"

"Wentworth?" Nathan shook his head. "No. I don't recall the name."

"Your wife knew him," Shayne said.

"What do you mean?" asked Nathan uglily. "Was he another one of my wife's secret lovers?"

"No. Max happens to be a private detective."

"A private detective? What was my wife doing with a private detective?"

"I hoped you'd be able to tell me that."

"But... how do you know?"

"There's a stub in her checkbook upstairs. Dated about a month ago. She paid Max Wentworth two hundred and fifty dollars as a retainer. A retainer for *what*, Nathan?"

He said, "I'll be damned," his lower jaw drooping slightly, and reached for his empty glass. He lifted it half-way to his lips before he noticed it was empty.

He set it down and shrugged with an elaborate show of nonchalance. "Why don't you ask Max Wentworth that?"

Shayne said, "I intend to," and got up. "Thanks for bearing with me, Mr. Nathan. I hope I won't have to trouble you again."

Nathan said with forced lightness, "I hope so too. Find your way out?"

Shayne said, "I'll manage," and turned away.

## CHAPTER NINE

Michael Shayne got in his car and drove away from the Nathan residence thoughtfully. Had Nathan or Armbruster lied about the divorce that had been discussed between the couple? Why would either one of them lie about it? If it had been Elsa's idea, as Nathan stated so positively, it might indicate that her affair with Lambert had been going on for several months. Eli didn't believe that... or didn't want to believe it. Would that be sufficient cause for him to lie about the divorce?

Yes. Shayne guessed it would. He didn't have very many illusions about Eli Armbruster. With his implacable determination to clear his daughter's name and somehow put the blame for her death on Nathan's shoulders, the old man was perfectly capable of telling any lie that fitted his purpose.

He wondered idly if Max Wentworth had been Eli's idea. Nathan had mentioned the fact that Eli had used a private detective in the past to break up his daughter's marriage plans. Max Wentworth?

Shayne knew the man only slightly. He ran a one-man agency in Miami, and had been in business for a decade or more. His reputation was none too good among other members of the profession, although Shayne knew of nothing that had ever been proved against him. He was simply one of those fringe operators who serve to bring an aura of disrepute to all private detectives. Specializing in divorce cases and marital disputes, and probably not above framing evidence to fit his clients' needs if factual evidence was not obtainable.

Another matter for thought was Paul Nathan's clearly evident disinclination to discuss his dinner partner of the preceding evening. A secretary from the office was all he had vouchsafed. And last night he hadn't even told the police that much. There might be something there.

Though, for the life of him, Shayne couldn't see why any of these things were particularly important. What good would it do Eli Armbruster if he could prove that Nathan was involved with another woman? It didn't change any of the plain facts in the case. It didn't put Elsa's obvious relationship with Robert Lambert in a better light. All that Shayne had managed to do thus far was to dig up more evidence to clinch the cut-and-dried aspects of the suicide pact.

And he still didn't know any more about Robert Lambert than when he started. That irked Shayne. Maybe it wasn't important to the final solution of the case, but damn it! a man couldn't just come out of nowhere and carry on a passionate liaison with one of the wealthiest women in Dade County without leaving some traces behind him. How had a man like that met Elsa Nathan... and courted her? What, he wondered, had Elsa been in the habit of doing with *her* Friday nights while her husband was conveniently going the round of gambling places? At her insistence, too. Paul Nathan had made it very clear that it had been her idea from the very beginning of their marriage. And it was she who had decreed that the servants should have Friday nights off. How far did Robert Lambert go back into her past?

By the time Shayne reached this point in his thinking he was back in the business section of Miami Beach, and he slowed while he watched for a public telephone sign. He parked in the first convenient place near to one, and looked in the Miami directory for Max Wentworth's office number.

He dialled it and let it ring six times before hanging up, and looking again for a home telephone number. He found that Wentworth lived in the Northwest section, not far from Miami's central business district, and he tried the number listed.

A woman's voice answered after the second ring, and Shayne asked, "Is Max Wentworth in?"

"Not just this minute. Can I take a message?" Her voice sounded listless and disinterested.

"Do you expect him soon?"

"He shoulda been home an hour ago. Said he'd be back for lunch and he never is this late. Probably be here any minute... hungry as a bear. Who's calling?"

"Tell him it's Mike Shayne." He glanced at his watch. "And that I'll be out to see him in about twenty-five minutes."

"Mike Shayne?" Her voice became interested. "Say, ain't you in his line of work?"

Shayne said, "We're practically buddies," and hung up. He went back to his car and drove across the causeway to the mainland, continued westward across Miami Avenue and found the address he was looking for on a shabby street a few blocks beyond the avenue.

It was a two-family, one-story house on a larger corner lot. Three young boys were playing on the sparse grass in the unshaded yard, and they all turned to look at Shayne with unabashed curiosity as he went up the dirt walk and rang the doorbell on the right-hand side.

The door opened and a thin-faced, middle-aged woman looked out at him inquiringly. She wore fresh make-up that looked as though it had been applied hurriedly, and her hair was in frizzy little curls which had evidently just been released from curlers.

She said, "Mr. Shayne?" and he nodded, and she said, "Max hasn't showed up yet. Won't you come in?"

He followed her down a hall that was littered with roller skates and a velocipede, and into a

cluttered living room where the shades were drawn at the windows.

She snatched a magazine off the most comfortable looking chair in the room, and said uncertainly. "Sit right down. I *know* Max won't be long. He always calls me if he can't make it for lunch. Can I get you a beer... or anything?"

Shayne said, "No, thanks. You're Mrs. Wentworth?"

She nodded and backed away to a shabby sofa where she seated herself with the magazine in her lap. "Is it something about Max's work you wanted to see him about?"

"Couple of questions about a case he's on," Shayne told her. "He is working, isn't he?"

"Oh, he manages to stay pretty busy. Not today though. That's why I don't understand him being late for lunch. He promised yesterday that he'd be home all day and take me'n the kids to the beach. Then this morning he made a phone call and said he had to go down to the office for a little while, but he'd be back for lunch sure."

"Anything to do with the job he was doing for Mrs. Nathan?" Shayne asked casually.

"Max hardly ever tells me anything about his cases." Then the name struck her hard and she drew in her breath and leaned forward intently. "You mean that Mrs. Nathan from the Beach? The one you busted in on last night with her paramour?"

"Wasn't Max doing some work for her?"

"Not that he ever told me. Not even this morning when it was all on the radio. But he never does," she added bitterly. "You'd think a private detective would come home with all kinds of interesting stories to tell, wouldn't you? But not Max. He always says it's just a job like anything else. From what I read in the paper, *you* don't find it like that, Mr. Shayne. Murders and suicides and all. Beautiful blondes. Just like they showed it on TeeVee when your program was running. I used to get Max to watch it and I'd say, 'Now, why don't you get cases like that?' and he'd just sniff and say detecting wasn't anything like that in real life, and it was just a story they made up, like, out in Hollywood."

"Did he work last night?" Shayne asked idly.

"Last night... and every Friday for the past month. Out till all hours. Some cheap divorce case, I guess." Her upper lip curled. "That's all Max gets mostly." There was defeat in her voice and Shayne felt obscurely sorry for the woman who had married Max Wentworth expecting to share the glamour and excitement of his work.

He lit a cigarette and assured her, "My cases are pretty humdrum most of the time, too." He glanced at his watch, aware of an obscure sense of foreboding that was tugging at him.

*Every Friday night for the past month,* she'd said. *Out till all hours.*

"How late was he last night?" he asked abruptly, without knowing he was going to ask her until he heard the words come out.

"I don't know for sure. Midnight I guess, anyhow. I went to sleep about eleven and didn't hear him come in."

"And he didn't say anything to you this morning... after he heard the broadcast about Mrs. Nathan?"

"No. That was at ten o'clock. He'd finished his breakfast and was getting ready to go to the office when we heard it. I hadn't turned it on before that so he could sleep late. He said he'd just be a little while. I don't know what's keeping him."

Shayne looked at his watch again and got to his feet. "I'm afraid I can't wait any longer, Mrs. Wentworth. When Max comes in tell him I'd like to have him call me. Either at my office or my hotel."

"I'll surely tell him, Mr. Shayne. But I *know* if you just wait a little minute longer..."

Shayne said, "I'm sorry. I must go." He went out and she followed him to the door, protesting that Max *always* came home for lunch when he said he would, and Shayne thanked her again and found himself unconsciously hurrying down the path to his car.

It took him less than five minutes to reach an empty parking space in front of the building on West Flagler Street that housed Wentworth's office. There was a dingy lobby that was empty on this Saturday afternoon, an air of desolation and decay about the premises. There was an elevator at

the rear but it wasn't in use today, and a directory on the wall listed Wentworth's office as 212.

Shayne climbed the stairs to the second floor without hearing anything to indicate that any of the offices were occupied. He stopped in front of 212 and knocked on the door perfunctorily, studying the simple lock at the same time and getting a ring of keys from his pocket.

He selected one which entered the lock but refused to turn inside it.

The second key he tried opened the door. He pushed it open directly onto a gloomy, square room with a big desk in the middle of it.

Max Wentworth lay on the floor in front of the desk. His head was smashed in and lay in a pool of thickening blood.

## CHAPTER TEN

Shayne stood on the threshold and looked down at the dead man in the dim light for a long moment. Then he nudged the door shut with his shoulder, not hard enough to let the latch catch, got a pencil from his pocket and used the end of it to flip the wall switch by the door and flood the room with light.

He knelt beside Wentworth's body and touched the cool flesh of the man's wrist and studied the clotted blood that had flowed from a vicious blow that had crushed the detective's right temple and the side of his head above the ear.

Shayne guessed he had been dead at least a couple of hours.

He got to his feet slowly and thrust his hands deep into his pockets to remind himself not to touch anything inadvertently, and inspected the room slowly and carefully.

There was no sign of a struggle; nothing appeared to be out of place. The desk was bare except for a telephone on one corner of it; a swivel chair was pushed back from behind the desk. There were three straight chairs in an orderly row against the right-hand wall, and two metal filing cabinets against the opposite wall.

Shayne circled the body to stand in front of the filing cabinets. Each one had three drawers, and an oblong of cardboard in a slot at the top of each drawer. They were lettered consecutively, A-D, E-H, etc.

The top drawer of the second cabinet was the M-P file. Shayne put his pencil inside the handle and pulled. The drawer was unlocked and slid out easily on roller bearings. The drawer held two or three dozen cardboard folders, some very thin and some bulging with papers, each with a name tab on it in alphabetical order. The first one was tabbed Mason, J. M. They were held upright by a metal divider inside the drawer, and Shayne flipped through half a dozen M's to Nederov, P. He hesitated with a frown, checked back on the last M to be certain he had not made a mistake, then went past Nederov to Nelson and to Nestiger.

There was no file tabbed Nathan in the drawer. Either Wentworth had not got around to starting a Nathan file, or else the folder had been removed from its proper place.

Shayne pushed the drawer shut with his pencil and stood back, tugging thoughtfully at his earlobe. There was no logical reason, of course, to connect the detective's death with the fact that he had received a \$250 retainer from Mrs. Nathan a month previously. Yet the thought was strongly in Shayne's mind because that was the circumstance that had brought him to Wentworth's office, and he didn't like the coincidence of a third death that had no connection with the two deaths the preceding night.

As he stood there scowling, it came to him suddenly that Elsa signed her checks with her maiden name. Also, he recalled the question he had asked himself previously... whether Wentworth was the detective Eli had employed previously and whether he had recommended the man to his daughter.

He tried the top drawer of the first cabinet and hit pay-dirt at once. The third folder in the drawer was labeled, Armbruster, Elsa. Shayne lifted it out carefully between his fingernails and laid it open on the desk. The first item was a letterhead with scribbled notations on it in pencil. Clipped to the top of the page was a 4x6 photograph of Paul Nathan. Below, the detective had scribbled,

"Paul Nathan. V.P. Beach Devel Corp." with a Lincoln Avenue address on Miami Beach, followed by the Nathan residence address and a telephone number which Shayne recognized. After that was written, "White Thnnderbrd Conv." and a license number.

Below this was scrawled, "Tail Friday nights, 5:00 on. Exec. Pkng lot, office. \$100 amp; exp. \$250 pd."

And below that was the additional notation, "Chek Miss Mona Bayliss for possble contact with subject past months amp; presnt."

Shayne turned that page back and found a carbon copy of a neatly typed report dated Friday, two weeks previously. He eased one hip down to a corner of the desk and read every word of the two-page report carefully.

It was headed, SUBJECT, Paul Nathan. Movements from 5:00 p.m. until 4:20 a.m.

It began: "Subject left office 5:10 to car in lot. Proceeded on Lincoln to ocean, south to Hi-Lo Bar corner 6th. Three drinks at bar alone, evidently killing time, checking watch. Out at 5:52 and across Causeway to Red Cock Restaurant Miami. Met young girl in lobby, evidently by prearrangement. Blonde, 5-2, 110 lbs. red cocktail dress. (Later ascertained she is Suzie Conroy, secretary in office. Newcomer in Miami from New York. Employed six weeks ago. No previous contact with Subject can be traced.) Cocktails and dinner to 7:47. Drove to apartment building 267 Northwest 17th St. (Later ascertained Miss Conroy's address, apt 3-D.) Parted at front door with friendly good night.

"Arrived Fun Club 8:02. Upstairs to gaming rooms where Subject purchased \$100 in \$5 chips. Craps, blackjack and roulette, making \$1 to \$5 bets and losing slowly but steadily until chips were gone at 10:25. Spoke casually to various people, seemed known by housemen and liked.

"Drove north on the Boulevard to Bay Breeze. Arrival 10:42. Purchased another \$100 in chips (also cash), and lost at various tables until out of chips at 12:10. Downstairs to dining room for three drinks and sandwich.

"12:45 across 79th Street Causeway to Bel Luna on Beach. Another \$100 dribbled away (only craps here) and departed at 1:52. Drove to El Cielito, and another \$100. Had run at blackjack and more than doubled stake, then lost at crap table shooting up to \$20.

"To the Hacienda at 3:03. Purchased another \$100, tried blackjack and then roulette. Played low stakes at roulette, seeming to stretch stake to closing time at 4:00. Appeared particularly friendly with croupier, and when play stopped at 4:00, they left together. Downstairs to bar for two drinks in a booth and ten minutes of conversation. Subject left at 4:20 and drove directly home where he put car in garage and went in side entrance. (Later ascertained croupier at Hacienda is Joe Grogan, lives in Miami with wife, steady worker at Hacienda, can discover no outside contact with Subject.) END FIRST REPORT."

The next page was headed, "INTERIM REPORT. SUBJECT Miss Mona Bayliss.

"It was necessary to go back more than a year to trace Subject to present address, which is 729 Hibiscus Road, Miami, Apt. 511.

"Interviews with former friends and coworkers indicate that Subject was badly broken up when jilted by Paul Nathan a month prior to his marriage. Consensus is that she was bitter about treatment by former fiance, began going out with other men, and absenteeism from work led to loss of her position as insurance secretary six weeks later.

"Subject then moved from modest apartment she shared with another girl, and cut off old ties and friendships. Rented a rather expensive apartment (\$300 per month) and did not seek another job.

"Source of income not known, but indications are that she may have become 'party' girl. She is believed to entertain a man (or men) frequently, and often into the late hours.

"Found nothing to indicate she has had any contact with Paul Nathan since he broke their engagement. No conclusive proof otherwise, but his photograph not recognized by employees in building. Possibility that they have met clandestinely elsewhere will be explored if you direct. Will await instructions.

"END INTERIM REPORT."

The next page was again headed: "Subject, Paul Nathan." It was dated the previous Friday and there was the notation: Movements from 5:00 p.m. until 3:36 a.m.

Shayne glanced through this report quickly, confirming his impression that Paul Nathan followed very much the same routine on each of his Friday nights "out."

This time he had left the office soon after five o'clock, driven directly to the Red Cock where he sat alone in the bar and nursed a couple of drinks until he was joined for dinner at 6:15 by the same Suzie Conroy who had dined with him the preceding Friday. After leaving the Red Cock and depositing her at her door, he had followed the same routine as before. First to the Fun Club, then to the Bay Breeze; across Biscayne Bay to the Bel Luna, then El Cielito, and finally to the Hacienda.

At each one of the five places he visited, he invariably bought a stack of chips for \$100, and remained until he lost that exact amount. This night he reached the Hacienda at 2:30, and ended up at the roulette table presided over by Joe Grogan just a few minutes less than an hour later.

In his report, Wentworth noted that he was the only player at the table during his last fifteen minutes of play, and that he and the croupier had engaged in conversation while the wheel was going around and he was losing the last of his \$100. From the table he had gone downstairs alone and had a single drink before driving directly home as before.

When he finished reading the two reports, Shayne didn't have to check the notes on last night which he had in his pocket to know that Paul Nathan was a methodical and losing gambler who evidently set himself a loss limit of \$500 each Friday night, spreading that amount equally and doggedly at each of the five places he visited each night, remaining at each one until he had lost exactly a hundred dollars, and then moving on.

It wasn't a very exciting or imaginative way to spend a night gambling, and Shayne wondered why he bothered to make the rounds at all. He supposed the guy felt he had to do something with the one night of freedom allowed him by his wealthy wife each week, and he evidently felt a certain compulsion to fritter away the five hundred bucks his wife allowed him for each night "out."

All in all it seemed to shape up as a rather dreary sort of married life, and Shayne found himself beginning to feel an unwilling sort of pity for the man who had jilted another woman to marry an heiress.

He closed the file reflectively, digging out a cigarette and lighting it. There was nothing to indicate whether Max Wentworth had been on the same tailing job last night or not. If so, his conscientious and carefully detailed report of Nathan's movements would probably provide the husband with a perfect alibi. There hadn't been time for him to type up his report, of course. Perhaps that was what he had come to the office to do. That might indicate he would have his notes on the evening with him, because he would have to keep notes as the evening progressed to make up an exact timetable such as the other reports provided.

Shayne took the folder carefully by its extreme edges again, and replaced it in the drawer where it had been. He hesitated before closing the drawer, recalling his former question about Eli Armbruster and the detective. He looked behind the folder he had just studied, and nodded with grim satisfaction when he discovered that the next folder was tabbed, Armbruster, Eli. He opened it and saw that it was dated a year before, and was headed: SUBJECT, Paul Nathan.

He lifted it out, glanced at the next folder to note that it was also labeled, Armbruster, Eli. He opened it enough to see that it went back three years and the Subject was a man named John L. Pierson. The following folder was also Armbruster's, dated four years previously, and was a report on someone named David Lobb.

Shayne opened the Nathan folder on the desk, leaving the other two in place. He wondered if Paul Nathan realized that he, also, had been investigated by a private detective, as well as the other two men who had evidently sought to marry Elsa.

He skimmed through the report swiftly and found that it contained no derogatory information about Paul Nathan who was described as 33, 5-9? 145 pounds, from Sandusky, Ohio and a graduate of the State University. He had lived in Miami three years at the date the report had been made, employed continuously during that time as an insurance salesman by a Miami Beach broker on a drawing account of \$100 per week against commissions which averaged between \$125 and \$150.

He lived quietly in a bachelor apartment, was well-liked and industrious, and for six months had been engaged to a girl employed as a secretary in the same office whose name was Mona Bayliss.

The report noted merely that the engagement had been broken off just a month before without indicating whether this had occurred before or after Paul Nathan had met Elsa Armbruster.

Shayne replaced the folder in its proper position in the file and pushed the drawer shut.

Nothing he had found so far proved very much of anything. Except that Eli hadn't missed a bet in checking up on prospective sons-in-law, and it seemed likely that Elsa had come to Wentworth on her father's recommendation when she decided to hire a private detective to tail her husband on his Friday nights away from home.

He sighed and turned back to the stiffening corpse on the floor, not liking what he was about to do, but knowing it had to be done before he called the police in.

A careful search of Max Wentworth's pockets, however, failed to reveal any notes the detective might have jotted down the previous evening. He either had not kept any... or he hadn't brought them to the office with him... or his murderer had found them first.

Shayne rocked back on his heels while he considered this possibility. It was still, he conceded to himself, far out in left field to believe there was any connection between the Nathan case and the murder of Max Wentworth. He had no doubt that Max had made dozens of enemies in his somewhat checkered career who might have been happy to do the job. Max wasn't, he told himself grimly, above trying a spot of discreet blackmail if the occasion arose... and the opportunity for blackmail often did arise during the course of a private investigator's daily work.

He got to his feet and stretched out a big hand toward the telephone on the desk, halted the movement before he touched it.

Thus far he had touched nothing in the office. Better leave it that way. Gentry would be happier if he didn't find any of Shayne's fingerprints in the room, possibly smudging some others.

He pulled the door open with the tips of his fingers on the edge of the wood, went back down the stairs to a telephone booth in the lobby.

There he dialled the number that gave him a direct line to Will Gentry's private office, and was pleased to hear the chief's gruff voice a moment later.

"Mike Shayne, Will. I've got one here that I think you'll want to look at."

"Got one what?" demanded Gentry.

"A stiff." Shayne made his voice sound surprised, as though Gentry should have guessed without being told.

He groaned and said sourly, "Who, and where?"

Shayne told him, and ended cheerily, "I'll be waiting to fill you in," then hung up quickly and went back up the stairs to wait for the police to arrive.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Shayne was standing in the hallway outside of Max Wentworth's office when Chief Will Gentry came heavily up the stairs five minutes later. He glanced in the open door at the body lying on the floor, and drew back, nodding to the two detectives who accompanied him to go on into the office.

He said, "All right, Mike," getting a black cigar from his pocket and glaring down at it. "Business so bad you got to start knocking your competitors off?"

"Max wasn't much competition," Shayne protested mildly.

"All right. How-come you're in on it?" Other members of the homicide squad were coming up the stairs and Gentry and Shayne moved down the hall out of their way.

"I was out at the Nathan house," Shayne told him, "and found a check stub for two hundred fifty bucks Mrs. Nathan had paid Max as a retainer last month. Her husband claimed to know nothing about it... and I wondered. I tried Max's home, but he wasn't there... and came up here. He'd been dead a couple of hours before I got here."

"Door standing open and you just walked in, huh?"



Shayne said carefully, "I knocked and then... I walked in when there wasn't any answer."

Gentry was putting flame to his cigar and he grunted something indistinguishable without looking at the redhead. When black smoke billowed out of the side of his mouth, he settled himself truculently on wide-spread feet. "So what'd you find out... in his files and all?"

Shayne gave him a hurt look. "You know I know better than that, Will. It's strictly against the rules to touch anything at the scene of a homicide until the police get there."

"You didn't, huh?"

"You won't find a fingerprint of mine in the place," Shayne assured him heartily.

Gentry said, "That, I'll buy." He rocked back on his heels and surveyed Shayne glumly. "You trying to tie this in to the suicides last night?"

"I'm not trying." Shayne shrugged. "I told you how I happened to find Max. Have you traced Lambert yet?" he went on swiftly.

Gentry shook his bullet head. "Nothing on him yet. Preliminary report from Washington is negative on his prints. That's only the active criminal file, you know. May be something in a day or so. You dig up anything?"

"Nothing you haven't got. Except three telephone calls from Lambert to the Nathan residence the last three Friday nights. About nine or nine-thirty, they were made."

"Um. And the woman turned up at the apartment about half an hour later each time?"

Shayne said, "That's the way it is."

A detective came briskly out of the office and said, "They're ready to cart him off to the meat wagon, Chief. Okay?"

"Sure." Gentry rolled the cigar to the other side of his mouth. "What you got so far?"

"Been dead about two hours. One lick on the side of the head with something like a lead pipe or the butt of a pool cue. Dropped him in his tracks. Left-handed blow."

Gentry took the cigar from his mouth and echoed gently, "Left-handed?" and a puzzled look spread over Shayne's face.

"That's right," the detective told them. "That's about all they got for sure. No sign of a struggle. Door was on the night-latch. Boys are just about through dusting for prints."

Gentry turned to Shayne with a scowl as two ambulance attendants came out of the office carrying a stretcher with a sheet-covered body on it.

"Those suicide notes were written by a left-hander."

Shayne nodded. "And Lambert has been dead for more than twelve hours. You know, Will, I'm beginning not to like this."

Gentry started to respond, then shrugged eloquently and went into the office.

Shayne followed close behind him. The fingerprint man was closing up his kit. He shook his head and told the police chief, "Nothing at all. Only the dead man's prints. Whoever slugged him just walked in and... whammo! Then walked out."

Gentry nodded absently, his gaze going all around the small square room. He circled around the blood and chalk marks on the floor to stand in front of the two filing cabinets and studied the alphabetical listing on the drawers. He pulled the top drawer of the right-hand cabinet open, and Shayne kept his expression blandly disinterested.

Gentry pawed through the cardboard folders and snorted in disgust. He turned to Shayne and said accusingly, "There's nothing on Nathan in here."

"Isn't there?" Shayne frowned. "Maybe Max didn't keep his files up to date. But that was almost a month ago." Then his expression cleared. "I just thought of something, Will. Mrs. Nathan keeps her bank account in her maiden name... Elsa Armbruster. The check she gave Max was signed that way. Do you suppose...?"

Gentry said, "Let's take a look." He moved back to the other file and pulled out the top drawer. He thumbed through the folders and grunted with satisfaction. "Here it is, Elsa Armbruster." He pulled the folder out, hesitated with his gaze fixed on the next one. "And here's an Eli Armbruster, by God. Two... three folders for Eli." He opened the folders to glance inside, and whistled softly. "First one's a check-up on Paul Nathan a year ago. Next two are on a couple of

names I don't recognize. Pierson and Lobb. Mean anything to you, Mike?"

Shayne frowned to indicate deep concentration. "I think... Tim Rourke was checking back on Elsa in the newspaper files this morning. I think Pierson and Lobb both made a play to marry her and the weddings both fell through."

"And I bet these folders will tell us why," Gentry said triumphantly. "It's as plain as the nose on your face that old Eli checked up on any man that wanted to marry his precious daughter, and these two both flunked out."

"And Nathan didn't," guessed Shayne.

"Probably not. We'll know when we read it. But this first one... for Elsa..." He turned to the desk and opened it. "She had Max tailing him the last couple of Friday nights," he mumbled over his shoulder.

Shayne said, "If Max tailed him last night and it checks out with what Nathan told you..."

Gentry turned the pages inside the folder, glancing at each one. "Nothing for last night. Just the two previous Fridays."

Shayne looked at his watch and said, "In that case I'm going to beat it. Last night is the one that interests me."

Gentry turned around abruptly and expostulated, "Wait a minute, Mike," but Shayne was half-way out the door and he kept on going.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

It lacked a few minutes until four o'clock when Michael Shayne walked into the lobby of his apartment hotel on the north bank of the Miami River at Southeast Second Avenue. At that time on Saturday afternoon the lobby was deserted except for Pete behind the desk.

Pete grinned widely as the rangy detective strode toward the desk and said, "I been reading the papers, Mr. Shayne. That was somethin' you busted into on the Beach last night, huh?"

Shayne said, "It wasn't a very nice something, Pete. You stay away from married women... hear?"

"You don't have to tell me. There's some woman phoned you a few minutes ago. She sounded right fussed you weren't in." He turned and extracted a telephone message from a pigeonhole and slid it across to the redhead.

Shayne smoothed it out and read, "Call Mrs. Grogan at once." And there was a local telephone number. He didn't know anybody named Grogan that he could recall. Wait a minute though. The name was vaguely familiar. He had heard it recently... or seen it... in some connection. He nodded absently and told Pete, "I'm expecting a couple of calls. Be in my room for awhile." He went back to the elevator and up to the second floor, and was unlocking his door when he remembered where he had seen the name of Grogan, and in what connection.

He went into the shabbily pleasant sitting room and directly to the telephone on the center table, laying the telephone message down in front of him. He dialled the number written on it, and a softly feminine voice answered almost immediately. He asked, "Mrs. Grogan?" and she said, "Yes. Who is this?" her voice rising, tight and high.

"Michael Shayne. I just got your message."

"Oh. Mr. Shayne." She sounded momentarily let down and confused, and there was a brief silence before she spoke in her normal, soft voice. "I wonder if I could see you right away, Mr. Shayne. It's about my husband... Joe."

Shayne said, "Let me get one thing straight. Does your husband work at the Hacienda on the Beach?"

"Yes, he does." Now she sounded frightened. "How did you know? Has something... happened?"

Shayne said, "I'd like to talk to you. I'm at my hotel right now... waiting for a couple of calls."

"I know right where it is. I'm only a few blocks away. I could come there if you like. Do you

have any news about Joe?"

Shayne said, "Not exactly. I'll be waiting for you in my suite on the second floor." He replaced the receiver, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, then turned away and went into the kitchen where he got a tray of ice cubes from the refrigerator, ran water over them and put two cubes in a tall glass. He filled it with water from the tap, lifted down a four-ounce wine-glass and carried them both back to the table. His telephone began to ring as he got a bottle of cognac from a wall cabinet near the kitchen door. He uncorked the bottle as he went back to the table, lifted the receiver with his left hand while he poured cognac into the wine-glass with his right.

He said, "Shayne speaking," and a voice came over the wire:

"Sergeant Deitch here, Mr. Shayne."

"What have you got, Sergeant?"

"Not very much, I'm afraid. I've checked all the prints out and there's not a single one except Lambert's and the officers who were in the apartment last night."

"None of the woman at all?" Shayne frowned and lifted his glass to sip cognac.

"Nothing clear, and nothing very fresh. Not last night, certainly. A few indeterminate smudges that might have been made by her a week or so ago. But no certainty of that. They didn't do very much in that apartment, or else they cleaned up pretty carefully after they did."

"How about Garroway?" asked Shayne. "Is he through in the lab?"

"He's sitting right here to tell you himself." A moment later the younger man's voice came to Shayne's ear:

"I'm afraid I haven't got anything for you either, Mr. Shayne. The cocktail that was spilled on the rug for one thing. It contained exactly the same proportion of cyanide as we estimate was in the one the woman drank. The clothes reveal absolutely nothing. They're all new... never laundered or cleaned... and apparently worn only a few times. I made some further laboratory tests on samples from the bedding with negative results."

Shayne said, "All right. My client is paying for negative results just the same as positive ones. I'll see you." He hung up.

Then he sank down into a chair and lit a cigarette, took a drink of ice water and idly turned the cognac glass around and around on the table. He wasn't disappointed in the reports from Deitch and Garroway. He hadn't actually expected or even hoped for anything different. It was just as cut and dried as a double suicide now as it had been before he started his own investigation of the affair. The only new element was the murder of Max Wentworth in his office. And that didn't necessarily have anything at all to do with Paul Nathan or his wife. Any one of Max's clients might have had a motive for bumping him off.

There was just the coincidence that it had happened on the heels of the double suicide last night. Shayne didn't like coincidences in homicide investigations.

And there was the further coincidence that the blow that had crushed Max's skull had been delivered by a left-handed man.

Robert Lambert was left-handed.

But Robert Lambert was dead. It was a cinch he hadn't killed Max.

This reminded him that he was to call Harry Brandt, and he looked at his watch. A few minutes past four. He dialled the number and said, "Mike Shayne, Harry. What's the dope on those notes and the signatures?"

"It's open and shut, Mike. The notes and the rental agreement were written and signed by the same man. A left-hander. You want one of my famous character analyses as deduced from his handwriting to go along with that conclusion?"

Shayne said, "Sure. Let's have it."

"He's under forty, but not too much." Harry Brandt spoke with quiet assurance. "Middle-class background, I'd say. High school and maybe college. Not a brilliant intellect, but not stupid. A romantic who has become embittered by the role life has handed him and is continually looking for a way out... a way to break the bonds. Not an active criminal type, but certainly a passive one, without too many scruples if he saw a chance to get away with something. How's that for a

character analysis in one brief nutshell?"

"Sounds all right," growled Shayne. "If we ever find out who Robert Lambert is, I'll let you know how close you hit it. Send me a bill, Harry."

"Will do."

This concluded the conversation, and again Shayne sank back with a frown and returned to his cognac and its ice-water chaser.

Both glasses were almost empty when he heard a hesitant knock on his door. He went to it to admit a pleasant-faced woman of about thirty, with a direct gaze that pleased him, and a spray of freckles across the bridge of her nose that somehow gave her a wholesome and ingenuous look. She wore a simple cotton dress and sensible shoes with Cuban heels, and her only jewelry was a plain gold wedding ring on her left hand.

Her look was frankly appraising and her handclasp was firm as she said, "It was kind of you to see me, Mr. Shayne, I'm afraid I've come on a fool's errand, but... I didn't know what else to do."

Shayne said, "Come in, Mrs. Grogan." He closed the door behind her and said, "I'm having a drink. Can I get something for you?"

"No, thank you. I don't hardly... I hardly ever take a drink in the afternoon." She paused in front of a chair close to the table and turned, clasping her hands together in front of her. He saw now that she was striving to conceal an inner nervousness or fright. "You said on the phone about the Hacienda... do you know my husband, Mr. Shayne?"

"No. I simply happen to know that there is a man named Joe Grogan who works as a croupier at the Hacienda."

"Has that got anything to do with... with the case you're working on? That is, it said in the afternoon paper that you were investigating that double suicide last night."

Shayne said, "Please sit down, Mrs. Grogan," and moved to his own chair and poured more cognac into his glass. "Before I answer your question, tell me about your husband. Why are you worried about him?"

"Because he didn't come home last night. And never a word from him all day. And I called the Hacienda at noon and they said Joe never turned up for work last night and he hadn't told them beforehand and they hadn't heard from him either."

Shayne said, "A lot of things might have happened."

"Joe's steady. He's never done anything like that before. He liked his job the best of any job he ever had. It gave him, oh... a feeling of being important. Seeing people lose more money in one night than he ever earned in a year... and not turning a hair either. But it's more than that. He's been funny... this last month he has. Like he had a secret he wouldn't tell me. But he had some extra money and he kept hinting about I wasn't to worry because there was going to be a lot more where that came from. And last night I could see he was keyed-up. Before I went off to work, I could tell. I'm a cocktail waitress in the Griffin Hotel lounge from six to twelve, and have to leave for work at five-thirty. He kept saying I wasn't to worry and maybe he'd tell me all about it today. And then... he wasn't home when I woke up this morning."

"What makes you think it has anything to do with the suicides last night?"

"It's not much, I know. It's just... well, when I read about that Mrs. Paul Nathan in the paper this morning, it came to me suddenly. That's the name of the man he mentioned a month ago when this all started, like I said. It was another Saturday morning I remember because we always go to the beach on Saturdays, and Joe began talking about the rich people that gambled at the Hacienda, and how lots of them got real friendly with him at the roulette table while they were playing, and not uppity at all.

"And he mentioned this Paul Nathan as an example, and he hinted that they were cooking up something together that was going to make him a lot of money. But he clammed right up and said I was to forget all about it when I begged him not to do anything foolish because he was sure to get caught. Like fixing the table, you know, or some trick to make this Mr. Nathan win at roulette instead of lose. And he said it wasn't like that at all, and I wasn't to say another word about it, but

maybe things were going to be so I could quit working as a waitress. So when I read about Mr. Nathan's wife last night... and Joe not home and no word from him at all, I got to thinking back and I got worried. *Do* you know anything about Joe, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne said, "No. I'm sorry, Mrs. Grogan. All I know is that Paul Nathan played roulette at your husband's table the last two Friday nights; and the first night they went down to the bar together and had a couple of drinks and a talk at the bar after the gambling room closed at four. And last Friday Nathan was playing alone at your husband's table just before closing and they were observed talking together. That's nothing in itself, but with what you've told me it may add up to something."

"Like what, Mr. Shayne?" She twisted her hands together in her lap and caught her lower lip tightly between her teeth.

Shayne said honestly, "At this point, I don't know. I can't even make an intelligent guess. You said you thought they might have some scheme for Nathan to win money at roulette. Do you mean the table is crooked and the croupier can fix it so a certain person will win if he wants him to?"

"Oh, no. It wasn't that. I'm sure it wasn't. The games are all straight at the Hacienda. Joe always said that. It's one reason why he liked to work there. But... well, it's something that Joe *might* do. I don't want you to get me wrong, Mr. Shayne. He's a good man. Never been arrested in his life." She said this proudly. "He isn't what you'd call a gambler. Not like a lot of the others that hang around those joints. It was a job to Joe. Pure and simple, a steady job. He wouldn't do anything he thought was wrong or really crooked. Not for all the money in the world. But you know how it is working in a place like that every night. Money gets so it doesn't *mean* very much. In the first place, they're all breaking the law. The ones that run the games and the ones that come to play. So you get a sort of different slant on things, I guess. It wouldn't really seem like *stealing* money... to maybe fix it to get a little of it for yourself. I know Joe felt that way. Him getting just a regular salary while the house was raking in thousands of dollars every night. So when he kind of hinted that he and Mr. Nathan were into something that would make him rich, I just thought it might have to do with gambling."

"But you said," Shayne reminded her patiently, "that the croupier had no control over who won or lost on the wheel."

"That's right, too. Well, it came to me what Joe had mentioned once before... oh, it was months ago, when he was saying how careful the house had to be about the men they hired. It would be easy enough, he said, for a crooked dealer to *pretend* a man had won when he hadn't. You know how fast at roulette those balls go around and drop into the slots... with piles of money spread out on the table on numbers and combinations. They have spotters around, of course, to see it doesn't happen, but it would be easy enough, Joe said, to get away with it a few times before they noticed and started watching. And just a few times, with the odds they pay on a single number, would mount up mighty fast to a big killing."

Shayne nodded slowly. "I can see that possibility. But we happen to know, Mrs. Grogan, that Nathan didn't win at your husband's table. In fact, he was a consistent loser."

"Well, it was just the only thing I could think of. Like I say, it couldn't have been anything really bad or Joe wouldn't have touched it with a ten-foot pole."

"Do you have a picture of him?" Shayne asked.

"I brought one along... just in case." She lifted a large handbag from the floor beside her and withdrew an enlargement of a snapshot taken on the beach.

It showed a smiling, clean-faced young man of about her age, squinting into the sun and wearing a tight pair of bathing trunks. He was of medium height and build, and had a likable, open countenance.

Shayne studied the picture carefully, wishing to God that the shotgun had left more of the dead man's face for identification last night.

Because, although it couldn't be, of course. All logic told him it couldn't possibly be so, but as he looked at the photo he had an uneasy realization that with the addition of a mustache and a

pair of blue-tinted glasses, Joe Grogan would fit Robert Lambert's description quite well.

He put the picture down and asked her casually, "Do you know if Joe had his fingerprints on file anywhere? Chauffeur's license? Or was he in the army?"

"I'm sure he never was fingerprinted. He missed the draft, you see, on account of a heart murmur. It made him mad because he said he was as good as the next man, but they turned him down."

"How did you and your husband get along, Mrs. Grogan?"

She looked at him uncomprehendingly for a moment before answering. "You mean... at home and all? We got along real well. Joe was a steady worker and we were saving up to buy a house of our own. We wanted to have kids, but... we've been waiting until I could afford to quit work."

"Your husband is quite an attractive young man," Shayne told her, looking down at the picture. "Did he ever... get mixed up with other women?"

"We've been married five years," she told him placidly. "During that time I'll swear my Joe never looked at another woman." Her steady gaze met his candidly and unflinchingly. "A wife knows about a thing like that, I guess. And then besides," she added with a quiet smile, "there he was, working steady every night in the week. And us doing things together in the daytime. That's why I worked night shift. So I could be more with him."

Shayne didn't press the point. He asked instead, "Did he have any scars on his body? Any distinguishing marks that would identify him?"

"No. He didn't. And if you're thinking what I think you're thinking, you can stop it right now. It wasn't my Joe that called himself Robert Lambert and was meeting that married woman on Friday nights. In the first place, he wouldn't. In the second place, he hasn't missed a night at work for the past two months. In the third place, I heard over the radio that he said in his suicide note that he was married to a Catholic who wouldn't give him a divorce. I'm no Catholic, and Joe and I have agreed lots of times that if it ever was to happen one of us fell in love with someone else that he could *have* a divorce just for the asking."

"Have you been to the police, Mrs. Grogan? Their Missing Persons department has better facilities than I for tracing lost people."

"No, I haven't. I... I'm worried about what kind of thing Joe maybe got himself into. Like I said, I just had a feeling in my bones it was something illegal. That's the only reason he could have for not telling me. So I didn't want to put the police onto him. And when I got to thinking about Mr. Nathan and all, I thought you'd know best if I could just talk to you."

Shayne said, "I can do some quiet checking without giving his name to the police. I'd like to keep this picture, and I'll need a description of him, and what he was wearing when he disappeared."

"He's five feet ten and he weighs right in at a hundred and fifty. Thirty-four years old and all his own teeth and not a gray hair in his head." She spoke with unconscious pride as she recited these details. "He was always a sharp dresser. Not flashy, but... he liked colored shirts and sport jackets. Last night when I left home he was wearing... let me see now..." She closed her eyes and thought for a moment. "A light-blue short-sleeved shirt and light gray slacks. When he went out at night he always wore a light-weight navy-blue sport jacket with those slacks."

Shayne was making notes as she spoke, and he asked her, "Is that what he would normally wear to work? He wouldn't have changed to a matching suit?"

"Not ever. At the Hacienda they liked their dealers and house-men to dress informal."

Shayne nodded and said, "I'll start a check on the hospitals and accident cases on the strength of this description. In the meantime, please call me at once if Joe returns or you have word from him."

She said, "I thank you kindly." She had her bag open in her lap and she tentatively took out her wallet. "I can pay you for your trouble."

Shayne shook his head and waved it away. "It's no trouble. If it does turn out to have any connection with the Nathan case, I'm already being paid for that investigation."

"I can't for the life of me see how there could be any connection... but where *is* Joe do you think?" Her face was suddenly drawn, and the freckles stood out across the bridge of her nose. Her eyes pleaded with him piteously for some word of comfort as she slowly got to her feet.

"More than likely at home right now wondering where the dickens you are," Shayne told her with a grin. "Try not to worry, and I'll let you know if I get any line on him."

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

When he returned to the table and poured himself another drink of cognac, Michael Shayne's face wore an expression of deep concentration. Now he was confronted with one more fact which didn't seem to fit in anywhere. He wandered out to the kitchen to refill his water glass, brought it back and sat down heavily.

A short time ago he had been trying to pass off Max Wentworth's death as sheer coincidence... insofar as it pertained to the Nathans. Now, he was less sure. The disappearance of Grogan under the circumstances was one too many coincidences to swallow. Yet, for the life of him he didn't see how Grogan fitted into the picture.

The man was a croupier at a gambling house where Nathan was apparently in the habit of dropping a hundred dollars once a week. They had become well-enough acquainted so they'd gone down to the bar to have a couple of drinks together after closing time two weeks ago. Mrs. Grogan had reason to believe they were cooking up some illegal scheme together from which her husband hoped to get quite a sum of money.

What could that have to do with Elsa Nathan committing suicide last night?

Shayne found himself looking down at the photograph of Joe Grogan again. He narrowed his eyes and brought back a visual memory of the man's body in pajamas and robe with his features shattered by the blast from a shotgun in his mouth. The dead man *could* be Grogan, he decided, though he didn't see how or why. It was simply that Grogan was inexplicably missing, and there was an unidentified dead man in the morgue.

Had Paul Nathan planned this whole affair somehow, with devilish cunning? Could he have arranged for Grogan to meet his wife in the expectation that she would fall desperately in love with him and they'd end up as the principals in a suicide pact?

It was utterly impossible. No husband could possibly *plan* such a thing... and foretell the consequences. Besides, there was Mrs. Grogan's positive opinion of her husband's character, the fact that he had been on the job at the Hacienda each one of those Friday nights when Elsa was keeping a rendezvous; there was the discarded clothing in the bedroom which didn't fit Joe's description as a "sharp" dresser at all. It was absurd. Shayne took a hefty drink of cognac and shoved that line of thought out of his mind. What other angles were there to follow up? There was the secretary who worked in the office with Nathan and whom he had taken to dinner at least three Fridays in a row. Suzie Conroy, her name was.

What was the name of the other man in the office whom Nathan had mentioned twice from the preceding night? Once as having a pre-dinner drink with him, and again as the person who had told him the news about Elsa's death at two o'clock in the morning.

Shayne scowled as he dug back into his memory for the man's name.

Jim Norris! That was it. Shayne picked up the pencil and jotted the name down on a pad in front of him, and wrote "Suzie Conroy?" behind it. Norris might be able to tell him whether Nathan was having a serious affair with a secretary who worked with them.

The only other name Shayne could add to those was Mona Bayliss, the girl whom Paul Nathan had jilted a year ago soon after he met the heiress to the Armbruster fortune.

Shayne didn't know why he wrote her name down underneath Jim Norris. Force of habit. In a case like this you checked everything out. True, Wentworth's report to Elsa stated that he had been unable to discover any link between Mona and Nathan after their engagement had been broken.

But why had Elsa suspected such a link? What had caused her to give Mona's name to Wentworth when she retained the man to tail her husband every Friday night? Under normal

circumstances, she would have been scarcely aware of Mona Bayliss a year ago when she and Paul were married. It was improbable that they had even met at that time. Yet, a year later the woman had been enough in her thoughts that she had ordered a detective to check up on her.

A tiny thrill of excitement coursed through Shayne's veins. Maybe this was an angle. *Something*, certainly, had occurred recently to make her suspicious of Mona.

He settled back in his chair, tugging at his earlobe and reflectively draining his glass of cognac.

His telephone rang as he set the empty glass down. He picked it up and spoke into it and recognized the forceful voice of Eli Armbruster at once:

"Mr. Shayne. I called to ask what progress you've made."

Shayne said, "Very little."

"I see." Armbruster's voice remained suave but there was a hint of iron in it. "May I inquire how you have employed your time during this entire day since I retained you to investigate my daughter's death?"

Shayne hesitated before he replied, repressing his natural reaction to the question. He made his tone as suave as Eli's when he said, "I've mostly been engaged in gathering evidence which corroborates the fact that your daughter died by her own hand as the result of a suicide pact with her lover whom we know only as Robert Lambert."

"Nonsense, Shayne. I explained to you this morning the utter inconsistency of this with Elsa's character. She would never have entered into such a liaison."

Shayne said grimly, "I'm looking at facts, Armbruster. Lambert telephoned your daughter where she was at home, alone, each Friday evening since he rented that apartment. She was observed arriving to keep a tryst with him within half an hour of each phone call. She remained in the apartment with him until after midnight each of those nights. She brought her own nightgown and bedroom slippers with her and left them in the apartment. There is no evidence that any other person has been in the apartment since Lambert rented it. These are facts. Did you know, too, that *she* had asked her husband for a divorce a couple of months ago?"

"Elsa? Had asked him for a divorce? Nonsense. I told you how she felt about that. Refused him absolutely even though I urged her to go ahead and pay the man off."

"And offered to pay half the sum yourself?" Shayne asked pleasantly.

"Where did you get that information?"

"From Paul Nathan. He admits asking for two hundred fifty thousand as a cash settlement, but insists it was Elsa's idea."

Eli Armbruster barked, "The man is an unmitigated liar. I warned you not to believe a word he said."

"He warned me the same thing about you." Shayne kept his voice completely neutral.

"Surely you don't take him seriously."

"I'm trying to sift out the facts. If Elsa did not want the divorce, Mr. Armbruster, why did she hire a private detective to report on her husband's movements?"

There was a slight pause before Armbruster said thoughtfully, "So she did, eh?"

"You suggested it, didn't you?" Shayne pressed him. "Recommended Max Wentworth to her?"

"I told her I had found Wentworth an efficient person for that sort of job in the past, and that if Paul Nathan continued to pester her about a divorce she might do well to see if Wentworth could gather evidence to take into court against him."

"Why didn't you tell me that this morning?"

"Why should I?" countered Eli sharply. "What bearing has it on the case?"

"Max Wentworth might be alive at this moment if you had told me."

"Wentworth... alive? What on earth do you mean?"

"He was found murdered in his office a short time ago. That makes three people dead in less than twenty-four hours, Armbruster. Are you keeping anything else back from me?"

"I don't care for your attitude or your tone of voice, Shayne. I fail to see how Wentworth's



death has any possible bearing on what happened last night.”

“Goddamnit!” said Shayne angrily. “If you knew this morning that Elsa was having Paul tailed on Friday nights you must have realized that his testimony concerning last night would be very important. Maybe it was important enough for someone to murder him before he had a chance to make out his final report.”

“I see. Yes, of course.” Armbruster seized the idea happily. “If Paul knew he was being followed last night, he would most certainly feel he had to silence the man. Because I’m convinced he engineered those two deaths.”

“I wish you’d tell me how he managed it.”

“I’m paying you to work out the details,” Eli reminded him acidly.

Shayne said, “I don’t think he knew he was being followed. It’s not the sort of thing a wife would be likely to tell her husband.”

“Perhaps Wentworth approached him... with an offer to keep his silence for a price.”

“Perhaps. Did you get the impression Wentworth was that sort of double-dealer from your previous contacts with him?”

“I got the impression that he had few moral scruples... that he would have little hesitancy about selling out to the highest bidder.”

“Yet you recommended that sort of a man to your daughter?” Shayne couldn’t prevent a caustic note from creeping into his voice.

“What sort of blasted nonsense are you talking, Shayne? One uses the tools at hand for the sort of job one wants done. I felt that Wentworth was the man for the job.”

“What you mean is, don’t you, that you felt Max might be persuaded to manufacture some evidence against Nathan if he couldn’t turn up anything?”

“I resent that imputation. I suggest this discussion be closed.”

Shayne said, “There’s one more point that may be very important. How well do you know Mona Bayliss?”

There was quite a long pause while he waited for an answer to this question. Then the old buccaneer repeated hesitantly, “Bayliss? Mona Bayliss? Is that the name of the young woman whom Paul jilted in order to marry my daughter?”

“I’m sure you know that’s who she is,” Shayne told him. “Max Wentworth made a full report on her when he checked into Nathan’s background for you. And you met her at that time, didn’t you? And offered her a large sum of money to sue Nathan for breach of promise in the hope of preventing your daughter’s marriage to him?”

Shayne held his breath as he waited for a reply to this completely unwarranted accusation. It was just the sort of thing he guessed the old man might have done under the circumstances. In this case the gamble paid off.

Eli said heavily, “I did talk to her, yes. And sounded her out somewhat along those lines. She was completely intransigent. She was apparently madly infatuated with the fellow and terribly hurt by his cavalier treatment of her, but blamed only herself for losing him and was childishly determined not to interfere with his marriage. It was impossible to reason with her.”

“Have you had any indication that she and Paul have been seeing each other recently?”

“N-no.”

“But when you and Elsa discussed her hiring a private detective, you did suggest to her that it might be worthwhile to check up on Mona Bayliss on the chance that they were seeing each other again?”

“Certainly not. I would have had no reason for doing that.”

“And you’re sure that you didn’t?”

“Of course, I’m sure. As a matter of fact, I’m positive that Elsa and I never discussed the woman at any time. So far as I know, my daughter was not aware of her existence. And now, if you’re quite through cross-examining me, Shayne...”

“There’s one other thing,” the detective said hastily. “A man named Norris who works in your organization. Do you know how I can get in touch with him?”

“Jimmy Norris? Certainly. I’m sure he’s in the Miami telephone book. James R. Norris. The R stands for Roosevelt, but it isn’t the lad’s fault that he was born in the nineteen thirties to Democratic parents. He’s one of our bright young men.”

Shayne thanked him and hung up. He sat back and lit a cigarette, frowning thoughtfully at the bits of information he had got from the old man. Something had caused Elsa to be suspicious of Mona Bayliss and to direct Max Wentworth to investigate her current relationship with her husband. With both Elsa and Max now dead, there was no one to ask what that something was.

Shayne hesitated, glancing down at the pad in front of him on which he had written down the three names a short time before.

He opened the telephone book and looked for Norris, found a number of listings, but only one James R. He lived at a good address in the Northeastern section, and Shayne wrote the number down behind the man’s name on the pad in front of him.

Then he turned the pages to see if he would find Mona Bayliss listed also. He did find her, at the address on Hibiscus Road which Wentworth had given for her. Shayne wrote her telephone number down slowly, staring at each digit as he set it down behind her name.

Somehow, that number was vaguely familiar to him. He *knew* by God, he had heard it very recently. Where?

He narrowed his eyes at it, letting the digits run together in his mind, then closed his eyes completely and concentrated. It did no good. There was that haunting sense of familiarity... nothing more. He made his mind go back to the typewritten report Wentworth had prepared for Elsa Nathan. No. Her address had been there. 729 Hibiscus Road, but no telephone number. There was no reason why Wentworth should have given it, of course.

But somewhere... somehow... in some connection with the case at hand...

He shook his red head angrily and dribbled more cognac into his glass. In a case like this you never got anywhere by trying to force the memory to come to you. You pushed it completely out of your mind and pretended absolute disinterest in the subject. Eventually it would come to you... when least expected.

He sipped cognac and reached for the telephone, intent on calling Norris’s number and arranging to meet him.

His hand stopped in midair before it touched the instrument.

He reached in his pocket and got out the slip of paper on which he had jotted down the telephone numbers Robert Lambert had called from the apartment, although he did not really need to do so.

He already knew positively that Mona Bayliss was the other person whom Lambert had telephoned that first evening after renting the apartment in which he had died last night.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

When he had looked up Mona’s number in the book it had been with the idea of calling to see if she was home and arranging to have a talk with her if possible.

This knowledge changed all that. He didn’t want to see Mona Bayliss quite yet. Not until he knew more about her relationship with Robert Lambert. Not until, goddamnit, he knew more about Robert Lambert himself.

He caught himself looking down at the photograph of Joe Grogan again, and was reminded of the promise he’d made Mrs. Grogan.

He called police headquarters and was connected with the Missing Persons Bureau, and was lucky enough to find a man he knew in charge.

“This is off the record for the moment,” he said after identifying himself. “I’ve got a missing guy named Joe Grogan. Since last evening.” He described Joe from the photo and from what Mrs. Grogan had told him, including the way he had been dressed when she last saw him.

“We’ve got nothing that fits that, Mr. Shayne. Unless,” he added hopefully, “you’re thinking about the stiff who blew his head off with a shotgun last night. Superficially...”

"Yeh. I've already thought about that angle," Shayne growled. "If anything at all comes in let me know, huh?"

He hung up, still staring down at Joe Grogan's picture. Then he called the number for James R. Norris and got a cheerful, youthful voice in reply.

"This is Michael Shayne, Mr. Norris. I understand you know Paul Nathan quite well."

"The detective? Say, that was terrible last night, wasn't it? I was the one who told Paul. Just ran into him by chance at a joint on the Beach, and he hadn't even heard the news."

Shayne said, "I know. I think you also had a drink with him last evening after you left the office together?"

"Let's see. Yesterday? That's right. There were two or three of us..."

"I'd like to talk to you," Shayne cut him off.

"Well... I... Let's see. It's about four-thirty..."

"Let me buy you a drink," suggested Shayne. "I've got a couple of things to do. About six o'clock?"

"Six o'clock? Sure. Where can I meet you?"

"How about the Red Cock? I'm having dinner there."

"Fine. I'll see you at six."

"Ask the bartender. He knows me."

"Oh, I'll recognize you, Mr. Shayne." Norris sounded youthfully eager. "Your picture has been in the paper often enough."

Shayne hung up and called Lucy Hamilton to ask her to meet him for dinner at the Red Cock at six. She was delighted to accept the invitation, and he finished his drink and then had a fast shave and shower and changed into fresh clothes for the evening.

It was a little after five when he drove out West Flagler Street beyond the F.E.C. railroad tracks and stopped in front of a dingy apartment building. He climbed up one flight and went to the rear of the building and knocked on a flimsy door behind which he could hear the muted sound of folk music.

A thin-faced young man opened the door onto a large untidy studio room with windows along the entire north wall. He was in his shirtsleeves and was barefooted; his hair was awry and his white duck pants were smeared with daubs of paint. A couple of easels occupied prominent places in the room, and the walls of the studio were hung with paintings and prints, mostly of female nudes. He was one of the most successful free-lance commercial artists in the city and a friend of long standing.

He exclaimed with pleasure, "Mike Shayne, the demon sleuth! Come in and rest your ass and I'll dig up a drink. Burgundy, huh? The budget doesn't run to cognac these days."

Shayne stepped inside and grimaced. "I'd have brought a bottle, Peter, if I'd thought about it."

Peter Holding went to a cupboard and rummaged inside, triumphantly turned around with a gallon jug half full of domestic burgundy and two water glasses. "This stuff goes farther than cognac." He sloshed red wine into a glass and handed it to the redhead. "I see you've been in the headlines again."

"I've got a job for you, Peter." Shayne got the photograph of Joe Grogan from his pocket and showed it to the artist. "Can you put a small, dark mustache on this guy and sketch in a pair of blue-tinted horn-rimmed glasses?"

Holding studied it professionally. "I could do a better job if the face were blown up about twice that size."

"You can blow it up, can't you?"

"Sure. I do all my own photographic work here." He drank wine from his glass and shot an intent glance at the detective. "Some miscreant trying to disguise himself?"

"We may end up with a picture of the guy who blew his head off with a shotgun last night."

"That one?" Peter looked at the photo with new interest, then began shaking his head. "I don't believe it. This guy *likes* life."

Shayne sighed. "It's a wild shot in the dark," he agreed. "I don't know how you'll work this,

Peter, but what I'd like as an end result is an actual print of him wearing a mustache and glasses. So it isn't clearly evident that it's been painted on. That always throws a witness off. When they see it's been doctored, they always start thinking what he looked like before it was doctored." He gestured vaguely. "See what I mean?"

"Sure. There's nothing to it, Mike. I'll first photograph the head from this and make an eight by ten. I'll put the mustache and glasses on that print, and then rephotograph it and reduce it to about a normal four by six."

"How long will that take?" Shayne asked dubiously.

"Couple of hours I can give you a finished print."

Shayne said, "It's worth a hundred bucks if I can pick it up by eight."

"Sold! To the highest bidder," said Peter Holding enthusiastically. "If you're not going to drink that dago red, just set it down and I'll get around to it later."

It still lacked a few minutes of six o'clock when Shayne entered the cocktail lounge at the Red Cock. He didn't see Lucy at any of the tables, and went to the bar where the bartender nodded to him and set a double shotglass in front of him which he filled with cognac. He added a glass of ice water on the side and Shayne said, "No one asked for me, Ed?"

"Not yet this evening, Mr. Shayne."

"I'm expecting Miss Hamilton and a fellow whom I don't know to meet me here. Jim Norris."

"I don't believe I know him by name."

Shayne said, "I'll take my drink over to a table, and make a dinner reservation. If Miss Hamilton shows up, have her sit down and order a drink."

He carried the glasses over to a table in one corner, and then sauntered through a side door to the dining room entrance.

The *maitre* was there with his reservation book, and he greeted the detective affably, "A table, Mr. Shayne?"

"In about half an hour. For two, Andre." Shayne waited until he made a notation in his book, and then asked, "Do you have a customer named Paul Nathan?"

"You mean for dinner tonight, Mr. Shayne?"

"Not necessarily. I mean, does he often eat here?"

"Mr. Nathan? Once a week, perhaps. Last evening, I think."

"Would you see if he had a reservation?"

Andre raised his eyebrows, but turned two pages back in his book. "At six-thirty. For two, Mr. Shayne."

"Do you remember the woman who was with him?"

Andre considered this carefully. "She has accompanied him before, I think. Young and pretty. Quite petite."

Shayne nodded his thanks and turned back into the lounge. Lucy Hamilton was just seating herself at the table where he had left his drink, and Ed was hovering over her. Shayne went to the table and sat down and Lucy smiled at him expectantly, and said, "I stayed at the office until three, but you didn't come back."

He said, "I've been busy all day," and then looked up at a tall, handsome young man who was bearing down on him with a wide, white-toothed smile. "It is Mr. Shayne, isn't it?"

Shayne stood up and shook hands, receiving one of those offensively bone-crushing handclasps which he resented, particularly from athletic young men. He said, "Jim Norris?" and then, "My secretary, Miss Hamilton."

Norris sat down as Ed brought Lucy a Tom Collins, and ordered Dewar's on the rocks. He said, "You wanted to talk to me about Paul Nathan, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne pulled his cognac and ice water in front of him. "I understand he was having an affair with a girl in the office," he said bluntly.

"Oh. You mean Suzie Conroy? Not really an affair, I think." Norris shook his head condescendingly. "She's a cute little thing. Only been with us a month or six weeks. I think Paul's taken her out to dinner a couple of times. He's... he *was* ... pretty much married, you know. The

old man's daughter." He smiled in a man-to-man way.

"You mean he walked a straight line?"

"Pretty much. At least that's my impression. I only saw his wife once or twice at the office. Never socially. But Paul used to talk about having one night out a week." His scotch came and he lifted his glass toward them. "Cheers."

"Is Paul Nathan left-handed?"

"No." Norris's reply was prompt and unequivocal.

"You had a drink with him after work last night?"

"Two or three of us went out to a bar. He didn't stay long. I believe he did mention he was meeting Suzie for dinner and we kidded him a little. Said he'd better not let Elsa find out." Norris winced as he spoke her name. "Seems queer now... after what happened last night. Do you suppose he... suspected what was going on?"

"I was going to ask you that."

"I wouldn't know. I wondered since... he never showed any interest in any of the girls at the office until just recently with Suzie."

"What sort of girl is she?"

"Cute. Quite pretty. Flirtatious, I'd say, but not fast."

"Good figure?" Shayne spoke absently. "How tall?"

"Nice. About... your size, Miss Hamilton."

They finished their drinks and Jim Norris talked nervously about Paul and what a shock it had been to break the news to him last night. He'd accompanied him to the morgue, he said, to identify Elsa, and it had been a gruesome experience. He'd offered to go on home with Paul and spend the night, but Paul had refused. It was a hell of a nasty thing to happen, he kept reiterating.

Shayne politely waited until Norris had finished his drink before thanking him for meeting them there and saying it was time he and Lucy were going in for dinner.

Norris assured him it had been a pleasure, that he'd be glad to help any way he could because he certainly did feel sorry for Paul, and they left him in the bar ordering another drink for himself while they went in to a secluded corner table which Andre had reserved for them.

Shayne ordered sidecars for them both this time, and Lucy propped her elbows on the table and cupped her chin in her hands and said sweetly, "All right, Michael. You're just bursting to talk about it, I can tell. *What* have you found out today?"

He grinned ruefully, gave her a cigarette and took one for himself, lit them both and blew out a double stream of smoke from his nostrils.

"Bits and pieces, Angel. One contradiction piled on top of another. You're right about my wanting to talk about it. Maybe something will clarify itself if I put it in order and say it out loud."

The waiter brought their drinks and menus, and when he went away Shayne began talking slowly and thoughtfully, giving Lucy a complete and concise fill-in on his movements during the day while they each had another drink, ordered and ate a delicious dinner.

They were dawdling with after-dinner coffee and cognac when he reached the end of his interview with Peter Holding, glanced at his watch and finished, "As soon as we're finished here, we'll stop by at Peter's studio and pick up the picture he'll have for us."

"Then you think Joe Grogan is actually Robert Lambert?"

"It's the only thing that makes sense at the moment. We'll go to your place and see if the manager and Mrs. Conrad identify the picture with a mustache and glasses."

"But how *can* he be, Michael? You know he was at work on the Beach those two preceding Friday nights when Lambert was entertaining Mrs. Nathan in that apartment above me."

"I told you there were contradictions. But I've been thinking about that and I'll have to check with the Hacienda. It's my impression those croupiers work short shifts. Maybe only four hours. In that case, he may not go on until midnight."

"But Mrs. Conrad says they stayed in that room together until after midnight."

"She says the outer door remained closed and no one came out until after midnight each night." Shayne hesitated, scowling. "There's another way out. Down the fire escape."

“But why would anybody...?”

“I haven’t gotten to the whys yet,” he said morosely. He paused. “I don’t even know whether Joe Grogan is left-handed or not. I’ll have to ask his wife.”

“Who killed Max Wentworth?” she asked helplessly. “You said a left-handed man. But Lambert is already dead.”

“I’m not too sure he is,” Shayne told her slowly.

“Then who... *was* that you found?”

“Maybe it was Joe Grogan lying there with his head blown off.”

“You’re talking in circles, Michael.”

“I’m thinking in circles,” he agreed with a wry smile. “I told you there were contradictions piled on top of contradictions. But somebody killed Wentworth, even if that was a legitimate suicide pact last night.”

“It doesn’t have to be anyone connected with them. You said yourself that Max had lots of enemies.”

“Sure. And Grogan may have just gone off on a binge and is still sleeping it off. But I’m on the edge of a hunch, Lucy. A crazy irrational hunch that won’t come straight.”

“What’s bothering you, Michael,” she told him severely, “is that huge sum of money that Mr. Armbruster offered you to prove his son-in-law guilty. That’s why you refuse to accept the obvious.”

He paid no heed to her. “Those notes,” he muttered angrily. “The wording of them. They don’t sound like a man named Joe Grogan... not one married to the woman I met this afternoon.”

“Then he can’t have been Lambert,” Lucy pointed out patiently. “His signature on the rent receipt proves he wrote them.”

Shayne said slowly, “Y-e-a-h. You’re right, Angel. Maybe you put your finger on something. Let’s drink up and get that picture from Peter.”

Lucy had taken a taxi to the restaurant, so Shayne drove her to the studio on West Flagler Street and got out. “Do you mind waiting? If I take you up, Peter will insist that you drink some lousy burgundy while he makes passes at you.”

She laughed and said, “I’ll wait,” and Shayne hurried inside. He emerged within five minutes and got under the steering wheel. He handed Lucy a still-damp 4x6 print, exulting, “He did a terrific job.”

She held the picture to the light of a street lamp as he pulled away. “It certainly looks like an actual photograph. You’d never guess it had been tampered with.”

When they stopped in front of Lucy’s apartment building and went in, Shayne asked her, “Does the manager live here?”

“Mr. Barstow? Yes. He has the ground-floor apartment just to the right of the elevator.”

Shayne said, “You go on up. I’ll try this on him and then be right with you. There’s another angle I want to figure out before we tackle Mrs. Conrad.”

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Lucy had left her door ajar for him and Shayne had the photo in his hand when he entered five minutes later. He laid it down with a grimace, and answered her questioning look by reporting, “Your Mr. Barstow is a very cautious soul. Maybe... and maybe not. It *could* be Lambert, all right. But on the other hand...”

“He only saw the man once, Michael.”

Shayne growled, “I know. Let’s hope Mrs. Conrad does better.” He paused for a moment, rubbing his chin and regarding Lucy thoughtfully. “Let’s see if we can kill two birds with one stone. Suppose you come up the stairs with me, Lucy? We’ll peek and see if she’s in her room with the door open. If so, you stay back out of sight and take your high-heeled shoes off. I’ll go in her door and close it behind me and distract her attention by showing her the picture. You take this key to the Lambert apartment.”

He produced the padlock key from his pocket and handed it to her. "As soon as I close her door, you go up quietly and unlock the door. You'll find Mrs. Nathan's wide black hat still lying on the table by the door where she put it last night. Get it and close the door and go back for your shoes. Put the hat on, pulling the brim down on the left side to conceal your face and let your heels go clackity-clack up the corridor. I'll open her door so she can get a good look at you. Have you got that?"

"I guess so," she said uncertainly. "But I don't see..."

"It's just an experiment," he said hurriedly, "which may prove one thing I'd like to know. Come on."

He led her firmly out the door and up the flight of stairs, and at the top he peered down the corridor and nodded with satisfaction when he saw Mrs. Conrad's door standing open a foot or more and heard music coming out of her room.

He squeezed Lucy's arm and nodded reassuringly, left her standing there on the third step from the top taking off her shoes, while he strode down the hall; through the open door he saw Mrs. Conrad sitting inside her room in a strategic position where she had a clear view of the hallway.

She recognized the detective and got to her feet as he paused at the open door, and he stepped quickly inside and pushed it shut behind him, saying, "I'm so glad to find you in, Mrs. Conrad. You can be a great help to me if you're willing to."

"Of course, Mr. Shayne. I've been wondering and wondering..."

"It's this picture, Mrs. Conrad," Shayne stayed between her and the closed door, extending the print. "I wish you'd look at it very carefully and see if you recognize it."

She took the picture from him and glanced at it, then nodded her head and spoke firmly and positively. "That's him all right. That's Mr. Lambert."

"You couldn't be mistaken?"

"I've got eyes in my head, haven't I? I looked right at him across the hall there... not once but three times. How could I be mistaken?"

"You may have to swear to it on the witness stand, Mrs. Conrad," Shayne warned her gravely. "With a lawyer cross-questioning you and trying to get you confused. I want you to be very positive."

"I am. I've got a memory for faces. Oh, I'll testify on the witness stand, all right."

Shayne said, "That's wonderful, Mrs. Conrad. You'll be a very important witness." He took the print back from her and slid it into his coat pocket, then turned and reopened the door and glanced out into the corridor to see that it was clear and the door across the hall was properly closed.

"Not many people using this hall tonight I guess." At the end of the hall he saw a slender figure wearing a droopy black hat suddenly materialize from the stairway and start toward them. He stepped back to stand beside Mrs. Conrad so she could have a clear view through the open door, and heard the clack of high heels nearing them briskly.

"There hasn't been for a fact." She stiffened as she heard the heels, and peered past him inquisitively. Then her mouth fell open and she gave a little shriek of panic as Lucy came into her view, and she shrank back and caught Shayne's arm with thin fingers.

Then she straightened herself, her eyes bulging as Lucy went past with the brim of the hat concealing her features, and she stammered, "My goodness, I thought for a moment..." Then her voice rose excitedly. "It's the same *hat* though. I know it is. Who do you suppose...?"

Shayne smiled down at her reassuringly and pulled the door open and said, "Okay, Lucy. Let Mrs. Conrad see who you are."

"Well I never! It's Miss Hamilton," she exclaimed as Lucy turned toward them and showed her full face.

"Just that first minute I thought I was seeing a ghost," she chattered excitedly. "Then I saw you weren't near as tall or heavy as her. My goodness, you did give me a turn."

"I'm sorry," Shayne said smoothly. "I was testing your memory and your powers of observation, Mrs. Conrad. I must say they are both excellent, and I'm sure you'll be a perfect

witness if it comes to identifying Lambert's picture."

When they were able to get away from her questions and back to the apartment downstairs, Lucy threw the droopy black hat on the sofa and turned on Shayne with her hands on her hips to demand angrily, "What *did* you prove by that stunt, Michael? I felt like a Mata Hari with that dead woman's hat on my head."

He told her seriously, "I proved two things. First, that Mrs. Conrad is a very observant woman with an excellent memory... so I don't think there's much doubt that Grogan is the man she saw... wearing a trick mustache and blue glasses. We can also now be fairly positive that Suzie Conroy didn't impersonate Mrs. Nathan by wearing that hat. She's about your size, Norris said, and Mrs. Conrad spotted the discrepancy in size at once."

"Suzie Conroy?" Lucy sank down onto the sofa, her face a mask of bewilderment. "The secretary whom Paul Nathan took to dinner a few times? Whatever made you think...?"

"All right," said Shayne harshly. "I'm grasping at straws. Every elimination helps." He strode up and down the room, pounding his left fist into his palm, a scowl of concentration on his face. "After I get the answers to a few more questions, everything will be clear to me. About as clear as mud, probably," he added in disgust, pausing in the center of the floor to glare at her. "But I want to know whether Joe Grogan was left-handed... and whether he owned a shotgun. Let's see. Mrs. Grogan said she went to work in the Hotel Griffin Lounge as a waitress at six o'clock. See if you can get her there, Lucy."

Lucy compressed her lips, and went to the telephone book to get the number while Shayne resumed his impatient pacing up and down.

She called a number and spoke into the phone, then replaced it and told him, "Mrs. Grogan did not come to work. She's at home sick."

Shayne said, "Good. If I can see her at home I can pick up another piece of the puzzle I need. I think I have her phone number here." He began to search his pockets for the telephone message Mrs. Grogan had left.

Lucy said, "Michael," in a queer, stifled voice. He looked up, still searching his pockets.

"I've just remembered something."

He said, "Oh?"

"Talking about people who are left-handed. Did you know Mr. Armbruster is?"

"Eli?" Shayne stood very still and stared at her. "Is left-handed?"

Lucy nodded emphatically. "I don't suppose it means anything, but... he is. When he wrote out that check in the office this morning. He wrote and signed it with his left hand."

Shayne sat down heavily, his eyes narrowed, his features tight in concentrated thought. He muttered, "Eli? I don't see..."

He sat like that for several minutes, shaking his head and moving his lips although no words came out. Then he began looking in his pockets again, found the slip of paper he wanted and held it out to Lucy. "Please call Mrs. Grogan and see if she's well enough to see me. Get her address if she is."

Lucy took the slip and asked, "Do you think it's important, Michael? About Eli?"

Shayne shook his head with a harried grin and ran fingers distractedly through his red hair. "Right now I'm so mixed up with half a dozen fantastic theories that I don't know what's important and what isn't. We have to take it a step at a time, Angel. Call Mrs. Grogan."

He got up and went into the kitchen to pour a drink while Lucy made the call. She turned to him with the phone in her hand when he came back with a glass in his hand. "She's not sick... just didn't feel like working tonight. Do you want to talk to her?"

He shook his head. "Just ask if Joe is left-handed."

She asked the question, then shook her head at Shayne. "No."

He said briskly, "Get her address and tell her I'd like to come around for a minute."

He went back to the sofa to sip his drink, and Lucy hung up and told him, "It's close by. On N. E. Sixteenth Street."

He nodded, thinking hard. "You come with me, Lucy. Have you got a paper bag or something



you can carry that hat in?"

"Mrs. Nathan's?" Lucy looked doubtfully at the black hat lying beside him.

He nodded, his gray eyes very bright. "I've got one more crazy hunch to check out."

Lucy knew better than to ask him any questions at a time like this. She went into her bedroom and emerged with a brown paper bag large enough to hold the hat without crushing it too much. Shayne tossed off the rest of the drink and they went out together.

The Grogan address on 16th street proved to be an old two-story stucco building that had been divided into four apartments. When he stopped in front of it Lucy told him, "She said it was the downstairs front. Do you want me to come in, Michael?"

He said, "I'll be only a few minutes," and got out briskly and went up the walk to the lighted front porch.

Mrs. Grogan opened a side door on the left and peered out at him as he opened the front door. She said anxiously, "I thought that'd be you, Mr. Shayne. You brought news of Joe?"

Shayne shook his head and told her gently, "I'm afraid it's going to be bad news when I do bring it, Mrs. Grogan. May I come in a minute?"

She stepped back to let him enter a shabby but pleasant sitting room, saying unhappily, "I've been getting that feeling more and more. Seemed like I just couldn't go to work tonight. When your secretary called me... *why* did she want to know if Joe is left-handed? Like I told her, he just couldn't do anything with his left hand."

Shayne said, "I haven't time for explanations now. There's one other question. Did your husband own a shotgun?"

"Not a shotgun nor no other kind of gun. Joe wasn't a killing man, Mr. Shayne. Why he even hated to catch a fish on a hook."

Shayne said, "There's one more thing. I've got to get something to take with me that will have Joe's fingerprints on it."

"What for? Why do you need his fingerprints?"

Shayne said flatly, "To help me catch a killer, Mrs. Grogan. Think a minute." He looked around the sitting room. "What would he have handled... and not you? Did he smoke a pipe?"

A look of infinite sadness settled down over her face and Shayne knew she must have guessed why he wanted a set of her husband's fingerprints. She said, "No, but there's a whiskey bottle in the kitchen that Joe kept for when he wanted a nip. I never touched it because I hate the stuff. Would that be what you need?"

Shayne said, "That should be just right." He followed her out to a neat and sparkling clean kitchen, and she opened a cabinet beneath the sink and pointed to a bottle of bourbon with a few drinks left in the bottom of it. It was the same blend, Shayne noted grimly, as the whiskey bottle in the Lambert apartment.

"I guess you want I shouldn't touch it," Mrs. Grogan said in a hushed voice.

Shayne leaned down and lifted it out by two fingers gripping the cork. He went back through the sitting room and paused by the open door. He wished to God he could think of something comforting to say to her, but there was nothing. He said gruffly, "You'll be hearing very shortly, Mrs. Grogan," and hurried out to the car.

He set the bottle carefully on the seat beside Lucy, warning her, "Fingerprints," then got in and drove swiftly to headquarters.

Lucy didn't speak until he stopped at the side entrance. Then she asked, "Shall I wait?"

He got out, lifting the bottle by the cork again. "If I'm lucky I'll know in a few minutes, Angel." He hurried across the sidewalk and disappeared inside the building.

Lucy shivered and huddled down on the seat to wait for him. If she only *knew* what was in his mind. If he would only tell her the direction in which his thoughts were taking him. But she knew he wouldn't. Not now. Not when he was possessed by this driving, feverish impatience to get on with it. She had seen him like this too often in the past.

She set her teeth together tightly to keep from asking any questions when he hurried back and got behind the steering wheel again.

He pulled away from the curb and headed north, glanced fleetingly at her strained face and said, "I guess you must be wondering, Lucy. Our corpse is Joe Grogan."

Her teeth chattered as she said, "I th-thought so. After Mrs. Conrad was so sure." She hesitated, then asked in a small voice, "Where are we going now, Michael?"

"Seven twenty-nine Hibiscus Road. It's out in the northeast section about fiftieth street. I don't know just how we're going to play it with Mona Bayliss, but I may need your help. We'll see when we get there."

He found the address near the bayfront, a large, new and very modern apartment building covering at least half a block. Shayne found a parking place near the entrance and got out and hurried around to Lucy's side to open her door for her. "Bring your paper bag," he said quietly. "Just carry it inconspicuously under your arm and don't mind mashing it."

He took her elbow and they went to the canopied entrance and into a large, well-lighted and aseptically neat lobby, past a small reception desk to a pair of elevators at the rear. One of them stood open with a neatly uniformed operator inside. He was young and pallid-faced, with hot, greedy eyes which regarded the couple thoughtfully as he closed the door. Shayne told him, "Six," and then got out his wallet and extracted a twenty-dollar bill which he held loosely under the operator's avid eyes. "How long have you worked here, son?"

"Almost a year now." They were going up slowly and very smoothly.

Shayne dropped the wallet in his side pocket and brought out the doctored photograph of Joe Grogan. "Ever see this fellow around?"

They stopped at the sixth floor but he didn't open the door at once. He looked hard at the picture and nodded, "He used to come around I think. Haven't seen him for a month or so."

Shayne moved the twenty closer and his hand closed over it. He reached for the control to open the door, but Shayne checked him by getting out another twenty. "I'll bet this one against that one you can't tell me who he visited here."

The youth hesitated. But just for a moment while his scruples fought a very faint and losing battle. "That'd be Miss Bayliss." The second bill disappeared and again he reached to open the door.

Shayne said quickly, "A little thin girl?"

He grinned triumphantly, showing bad teeth. "Not on your life, Mister. She's a hunk of woman." As the door opened on the sixth floor he made the traditional hour-glass gesture with both hands to describe Miss Bayliss.

Shayne said, "She must have grown since I saw her," and stepped out behind Lucy. He took her firmly by the arm and led around a corner from the elevator as though they belonged there and knew exactly where they were going. There was an EXIT sign at the end of the corridor and he told Lucy hurriedly, "We'll walk down to five. Her number is five-eleven, and she isn't home. At least she wasn't when I phoned from headquarters."

"Michael," Lucy quavered as they went through the doorway and found stairs leading down. "What are we doing here?"

He said cheerfully, "We're going to be breaking and entering in just a moment."

He opened the door at the bottom of the flight and they went into an empty hallway with numbered doors on both sides. He had his key-ring in his hand when they stopped in front of 511. He knocked perfunctorily while he studied the lock and selected a key.

Lucy stood beside him unhappily, looking up and down the corridor and wondering what on earth they would do if one of those doors opened.

With a start she realized that he had the door open and was pulling her inside. He closed the door and pushed a wall switch to light a small foyer with a fair-sized living room through an archway beyond it. On their left a door opened into a bedroom.

Shayne pushed her toward the bedroom and said urgently, "Check her closet, Angel. On the shelf where she keeps her hats. If there's not a match to the black one in your bag, plant yours on the shelf and let's get out of here fast."

Until that moment Lucy Hamilton had not had the faintest idea of what they were doing in

Mona Bayliss's apartment, nor why Shayne had insisted that she bring Mrs. Nathan's hat with her in a bag.

She still didn't understand, but she responded to the urgency in his voice by hurrying into the bedroom and opening the door to the large clothes closet in one corner. She stood on tiptoe to scan the shelf above an array of dresses on hangers, saw two turbans and a dressy straw hat with flowers, but no drooping black one.

Her fingers trembled as she pulled it from the bag and pushed it back on the shelf with Mona's other hats.

Shayne was waiting for her with his hand on the doorknob when she rejoined him, breathing hard and shaking all over.

He grinned at her reassuringly as he turned off the inner light and eased the door open for a quick look down the corridor.

Then he drew her out boldly and closed the door and hurried her back toward the stairway.

When the door to the stairs closed behind them, he put his arm about her waist and squeezed tightly and told her admiringly, "You went through that like a veteran, Angel. By God I think I'll put you on the payroll."

She got a tremulous smile on her lips as they started to climb the stairs. "If I only knew what I was doing, Michael! If you'd only told me before..."

"Then you wouldn't have done it," he told her with a grin. "I didn't know myself until we got here. We're playing this strictly by ear, and when that lad recognized Grogan's picture I figured this might be it." He squeezed her waist again, slid his arm away and took hold of her elbow decorously as they emerged on the sixth floor again.

They went to the elevator and he pressed the DOWN button, and Lucy fought to get her breathing under control before the door opened to take them down.

It was the same car and the same boy. When they got in, he closed the door and told Shayne with a sly grin:

"That lady we mentioned... Miss Bayliss... I just let her off at five."

Shayne stiffened and glanced sharply at Lucy. She averted her gaze from him and he knew she was thinking how close they'd come to being caught by Mona in her room.

Neither of them spoke until they reached the bottom. Then Shayne said casually to Lucy, "Why don't you go on and grab a taxi for home? I think I'll drop in on Mona for a moment."

Lucy did not stir from the car. She said steadily, "I'll go up with you, Michael. I am on the payroll, damn it." The youth stood by listening to them with his hand on the control bar and not understanding at all.

Shayne said to him, "What are you waiting for? We'll go back up to five."

He said, "Yes, sir," and they went up. When they got out he watched them go out of sight around the corner toward 511 and wondered what in hell this was all about. But he had two twenties in his pocket, and he quickly decided it was no concern of his.

Lucy stood close beside Shayne, stiff and white-faced and with a churning in her stomach when he again knocked on the door of 511, loudly and commandingly this time.

It opened after a moment, and a tall, voluptuous blonde looked out at them questioningly. She wore street clothes and had a light coat folded over her arm, and she looked frightened when she saw them, and exclaimed, "What is it?"

Shayne said gruffly, "Police," and pushed the door open.

She fell back in front of him protesting loudly. "What do you want? You can't come in here and..."

Shayne pushed her back roughly toward the archway and growled, "We're already in. I've got a warrant for your arrest, Mona Bayliss, on a charge of murder."

"Oh, God... no!" She swayed backward, her face going white. "There's some awful mistake. You can't..."

Shayne said grimly, "We don't think there's any mistake, Miss Bayliss. This is a police-woman, Miss Hamilton. Take a look in her bedroom, Hamilton. If you can find that hat in there..."

“What *hat?*” Mona practically screamed at him, her eyes big and rounded. “What do you mean by murder? You can’t...”

“This what you want, Sarge?” Lucy emerged from the bedroom carrying the big, drooping, black hat carelessly. “It was shoved back on the closet shelf...”

Mona’s eyes became glazed when she saw what Lucy carried in her hand. She staggered back, almost falling, and whimpered, “Oh, no, I... *ditched* it. God in heaven! I never meant it. You’ve got to believe me. I never knew.” She sank down onto her knees, tears piteously streaming from her eyes. “It was just a gag, he said,” she sobbed. “Just to get a divorce. I swear I never knew... until I read in the paper this morning. Oh, God, you’ve got to believe me,” and she slid forward onto the floor in a crumpled heap.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Lucy Hamilton had driven Shayne’s car home after they took the half-hysterical and almost incoherent Mona Bayliss to police headquarters, and she was waiting for him with an open cognac bottle on the table just before midnight when a police car dropped him in front of her apartment.

He looked tired and depressed as he strode in, and Lucy quickly poured him a drink and asked wonderingly, “Did anything go wrong, Michael? From the way that Bayliss woman was babbling I thought the whole case was solved.”

“It’s solved, all right,” Shayne took a long swallow of cognac and grimaced, but not over the taste of it. “It’s all such a damned nasty mess,” he exploded. “My God! that bastard is a complete psycho. When he realized that Mona was spilling her guts and the jig was up, he didn’t bother to confess, by God. He boasted about his smartness and what a perfect murder plan he’d worked out. He’s not half as bothered about being executed as he is because things went wrong and he’s afraid people won’t think he’s as smart as he thinks he is. What a character.”

“Who, Michael?”

He lowered his glass slowly and stared at her. “What?”

Lucy Hamilton wet her lips and said, “*Who?* I’ve got a whole list of questions you’re going to answer before you leave here tonight, and that’s the first one.”

“Who... what?”

“Who *did* it? Was it Paul Nathan or Eli?”

“My God, I thought you knew. You heard Mona confessing her part.”

“I heard her raving about how she was just an innocent bystander... how she’d been sucked into impersonating Elsa here in order to frame her for a divorce. But all she ever said was *‘he’*. I’ve been sitting here for an hour trying to figure it out, and everything I know about it points to Eli just about as much as it does to Paul. Maybe more, with him being the only left-handed one around.”

“It was Paul, of course. That left-handed deal was a good stunt. He’s secretly been practicing using his left hand for a year... writing with it mostly... just to set up that phony Lambert identity and the suicide notes which could never be traced to him by the handwriting. He admits that killing Max Wentworth with a left-handed blow was a sudden inspiration... just to confuse the issue... and hoping it would point to Eli.”

“A year?” Lucy echoed. “Then he planned to murder Elsa all along?”

“Ever since he married her. He never told Mona, of course, but he did tell her he was just marrying Elsa for her money and if she’d play along with him he’d manage a divorce later and a big cash settlement. In the meantime, he used some of Elsa’s money to set Mona up in that apartment where he visited using a mustache and tinted glasses as a disguise.”

“The elevator boy identified Joe Grogan’s picture as her visitor,” Lucy reminded him.

“That’s what really clinched it for me. That’s when I realized that almost any man of medium size and build, wearing that mustache and those glasses, would pass for any other. I knew, then, that Paul had worn the disguise that afternoon when he rented the apartment, and then turned the mustache and glasses over to Joe Grogan to wear up here that evening and let Mona into the apartment... with *her* wearing a duplicate of Elsa’s hat which Paul had provided.”

“Please start at the beginning, Michael. How did he get Grogan to do it?”

“Same way he got Mona to impersonate Elsa. By telling him it was to get divorce evidence. Grogan came to the apartment and made those phone calls to the Nathan residence...”

“What about those calls? What did he say to Elsa?”

“What did it matter what he said? ‘Let me speak to Helen, please. Oh, sorry, I’ve got the wrong number.’ He could say anything, just so it was on record the calls had been made. And that first evening he made a local call to Mona to tell her it was okay for her to show up.”

“And that passionate love letter in her purse... and her own nightgown and slippers... Paul planted those, too.” Lucy shuddered.

“Sure. It was simple enough. Joe just stayed in the room each Friday night long enough for Mona to settle down and mix herself a drink... then he went out the fire escape and over to his job on the Beach... where his regular hours were from midnight to four as I guessed they might be.”

“But last night... Mona stayed home and Elsa herself came.”

“That’s right. It was the pay-off. Both Mona and Joe understood that the two previous weekends had been rehearsals to establish Elsa’s guilt. Joe came here last night as usual for Mrs. Conrad to see him, and let Paul come up the fire escape. Then he got into his pajamas and robe because he believed that Elsa was coming and that a detective was to break in and take a picture for evidence. As soon as he was undressed in the bedroom, Paul very efficiently knocked him unconscious with a sap, and then took off his own clothes... which were new and had no cleaner’s or laundry marks... and dressed in Joe’s. His whole plan, you see, was actually dependent on making it impossible to identify the dead man... presumably some person named Robert Lambert.

“Then *Paul* made the call to his wife last night. He told her some yarn to lure her over to that apartment. He had the suicide notes all written, and that extra clinching love letter in his pocket, and the cyanide ready in two cocktail glasses. When Elsa walked in unsuspectingly, he mixed two of her favorite cocktails and said the others would be along soon, and she drank hers off while he dropped his own on the floor. He had it all figured out, you see. He didn’t miss a bet. He boasted about that. How he *figured* the police would analyze that spilled cocktail, and it had to be just as deadly as the one Elsa drank if they were to believe the suicide notes.

“She dropped dead in her tracks, and he wiped his prints from his glass, pressed Joe’s fingers onto it, and tossed it there on the rug. Then he dragged Joe into the living room in pajamas and robe, got the shotgun from the closet where he had previously secreted it, and set the scene for suicide. There was no hurry. He had all the time he needed... until the shotgun went off with the muzzle in Joe’s mouth and his own hands convincingly pressed around the barrel in just the right place, and even Joe’s bare toe on the trigger.”

Shayne stopped abruptly and shrugged, tilted his glass up to empty it down his throat. “With the door bolted and the inside chain on, he had plenty of time after the gun-blast to get down the fire escape and be blocks away from here before anybody could break in and find the dead couple.”

Shayne shook his head wonderingly and sighed, and poured out more cognac. “It’s a damned wonder he didn’t get away with it. What a hell of a shock it must have been to the guy the next day when Max called him up to say that he had been on his tail the whole of the previous evening... had watched him go up the fire escape in this building, and come down it later. As soon as Max learned what had happened here last night, he knew he had Paul Nathan dead to rights. Max’s mistake was in underestimating the man. He was marked for death when he made the phone call to Paul. Max was a damned fool. With two down, you can’t expect a murderer to hesitate over a third one.”

Shayne took a long drink and stretched his legs out in front of him and regarded Lucy benignly. “Have I answered all the questions you had saved up for me?”

“Wait a minute. I told you I had a list made up.” She got a sheet of paper from the table beside her, and wrinkled her nose at it.

“What caused Elsa to have the detective check to see if Paul and Mona were seeing each other?”

“Since they’re both dead I don’t suppose we’ll ever know the answer to that one. We know that he *was* seeing her at that apartment, and we can suppose Elsa got suspicious somehow.”

“All right. What made you suspect that the woman who came to the apartment those two Friday nights wasn’t Elsa... but was someone wearing a hat like hers?”

“Mrs. Conrad practically told me that. The first two visits the woman was very careful not to let Mrs. Conrad see her face, tilting her head the way I had you do tonight. But *last night*... when it was really Elsa for the first time, she turned at the door and calmly looked Mrs. Conrad in the face. You see, *she* had nothing to conceal at that point.”

“And when you thought it was another woman impersonating Elsa, you thought it might have been Suzie Conroy?”

“I just didn’t know. It seemed a possibility. At that point, you see, there was nothing to indicate that Paul had been seeing Mona. I knew he had been taking Suzie out. And that, Paul admits, was just to becloud the issue. He intentionally and openly made a play for her so if anyone started looking for another woman they would be sidetracked. Okay?”

“I guess. But right now: What about that *fifty-thousand* agreement with Mr. Armbruster? He hasn’t signed it yet. Do you think he *will*?”

Shayne grinned and said, “Let’s not be mercenary, Angel.”

“It isn’t being mercenary, Michael. It’s just... you don’t realize how many cases you’ve been taking recently without earning a penny. You can’t stay in business that way.”

Shayne kept the grin on his face and told her with provoking good humor, “I think Eli will pay off. Tell you what... if he does, let’s close up the office and take a long vacation. Hawaii, Tahiti... He waved a big hand. “You name it. Okay?”

“Do you mean it, Michael?” She got up and came over to him. “We haven’t had a vacation for years and years.”

“Sure I mean it.” He put his two big hands on both sides of her face and pulled her down to press a kiss on her lips. “Let’s start collecting travel folders tomorrow, and I’ll brace Eli for his fifty grand on Monday.”

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