



DEATH

A LIEUTENANT TRANT MYSTERY

AND THE

Q. PATRICK

MAIDEN

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## I

The last of those mysterious letters for Grace Hough arrived at dusk. I saw the messenger boy crossing the campus just as I was going over to the dormitory to dress for Steve Carteris' twenty-first birthday party in New York.

The evening was windless, breathless. Although May was only a few days old, the air was warm as June and heavy with the scent of lilac. Around me in the half darkness other students, boys and girls, made indeterminate shadows as they smoked and laughed. Wentworth College, withdrawn in its coeducational seclusion, was coming to the uneventful end of an uneventful day.

The messenger boy and I arrived simultaneously outside Pigot Hall.

"Special delivery for Miss Grace Hough," he said, holding out the letter.

"I'll take it for her." I scribbled *Lee Lovering for G. H.* on the grubby receipt and started up the stairs to the top floor room which Grace Hough and I had shared for almost four years.

It seems incredible now that I could have taken that fateful letter so casually. But special deliveries had been coming thick as flies for my roommate during the past few weeks and, while still a subject of curiosity to some, they had lost their novelty for me.

Grace was peering in the mirror when I entered with the letter. She had, surprisingly, been invited to Steve Carteris' party, and was already dressed in her rose satin which was somehow too pink and too pretty for her thin, delicate face.

"Somebody must love you, Grace," I said. "Another special."

Her pale blue eyes were bright with excitement as she snatched the letter from me. After one swift, short-sighted look at the envelope, she disappeared with it into the bathroom.

Grace could be infuriating at times, and never more so than in the throes of some real or imaginary affair. I had been patient with her while she teetered, rather coyly, on the brink of a romance with Steve Carteris. For Steve was a perfect dear and it was fun having him around. But it wasn't so much fun, after Steve was through, to have to listen to Grace raving about Robert Hudnutt, our handsome French prof. I stood for that, too, at first. But when Hudnutt married the abrupt, unromantic Dean of Women, and Grace continued to yearn after him like a Victorian heroine, I lost my temper with her completely, told her she was making a fool of herself and she had better snap out of it.

Presumably she had snapped out of it. But she hadn't forgiven me for my criticism. And so, when this hectic correspondence started, she went secretive on me, making a point of never confiding in me at all.

That's why I knew nothing about the writer of those special delivery letters. That's why I never bothered my head about them—never dreamed how the cramped, spidery handwriting on those innumerable envelopes was slowly and remorselessly spelling out the handwriting on the wall for Grace Hough.

I have often blamed myself bitterly for my blindness—for my failure to make allowances for Grace. She'd had so much disappointment and tragedy during the past year. Her father's suicide and the collapse of the Hough fortune had swept the ground from under her feet. Besides, she was Jerry Hough's sister, and my own stubborn infatuation for Jerry should have made me more sympathetic.

But it didn't. And not until it was too late did I realize how very far a little sympathetic understanding might have gone in preventing suffering and heartbreak.

That night, however, I was too rushed to dwell on anybody's emotional problems. The sound of arguing voices in the next room warned me that Norma and Elaine Sayler were already in the last stages of dressing. Norma was driving us to New York in their car,

and since she disliked me even more than I disliked her, she would have loved an excuse to start without me.

I grabbed my last year's green velvet and went in for a bit of quick changing. The prospect of an evening at Manhattan's swank Amber Club would always have been exciting. It was doubly so that evening since it involved a flagrant breach of Wentworth's most resented regulation. Ever since Penelope Hudnutt's recent importation from Oxford as our progressive Dean of Women, she had forbidden all girl students to visit New York unless their objective was one hundred per cent cultural. It was amazing how many cultural objectives had been unearthed since the rule went into effect. This time Grace, the Sayers and I had managed to skirt around it by asking permission to see the celebrated French actress, Roulane, in a current Broadway revival of *Pbèdre*. Since Racine was Required Reading in her husband's French Literature Course, Penelope had been obliged to give her consent. She had been shrewd enough, however, to insist on buying our tickets for us, thus setting us back \$2.28 apiece.

I was dabbing some of my precious *Nuit D'Exase* behind my left ear when Elaine, the nicer and less glamorous of the two Sayer girls, burst into the room, trailing clouds of amber chiffon.

"Norma says she's leaving in five minutes. My dear, you must see her. That new outfit is straight out of a clip joint."

Elaine swooped to the mirror and patted at her tightly frizzed bang. "Damn this thing, it was meant to give a Hepburn touch but it's come out all Harpo Marx. Where's Grace? Still wallowing in the tub?"

"Wallowing in romance," I corrected. "Another special delivery."

"Another!" Elaine shot round, her harlequin eyebrows zig-zagging upward. "Who on earth can be feeling so voluminous about Grace?"

"Presumably someone who's even more short-sighted than she is," drawled a voice from the door.

As usual, Norma Sayer had made a feline entrance. She stood posed on the threshold, her disgustingly perfect figure sheathed in flame taffeta. One shoulder was sprayed with a huge corsage of

white orchids, her amazingly blonde head was tilted slightly backward.

She moved languidly to the mirror, brushing Elaine aside. “Oh, Lee darling, I stopped in at the infirmary to see Jerry Hough this afternoon. His ankle is nearly all right again and everyone’s pestering him now the place isn’t quarantined any more. But he said he’d quite like to see you if you dropped around some time with Grace. Why don’t you do that?”

In the mirror I could see she was watching me as she always did when she mentioned Grace’s brother Jerry.

“They’ve only put the infirmary out of quarantine today,” I said. “You didn’t waste much time getting round there.”

“Why should I, my dear? I had to thank Jerry for these orchids.” One of Norma’s scarlet-nailed fingers touched their waxy petals. “He wanted me to take his fraternity pin, too. But I said it just wouldn’t be strong enough for such a lovely corsage. By the way, do you have an old brooch or something you could lend me?”

“Why not use some of the other fraternity pins you’ve been saving for a rainy day?” I asked in my sweetest voice.

Norma knew how I felt about Jerry, and she loved to remind me that she was going all out to annex his scalp. Secretly I had doubts about her success. Not that I could have stopped her myself, for to Jerry I was just a kid from his home town—the girl with whom he had grown up. But Jerry was one of those rare phenomena, an ace athlete with brains. He might let Norma cadge orchids off him; he might give her a rush for a while, but, sooner or later, I was confident, his good sense would do what I couldn’t do. And Norma would be out on her ear.

Forgetting her request for an old brooch, Norma drawled on: “Poor Jerry, he really seemed disappointed that I wouldn’t take his fraternity pin. But you know what that means and I couldn’t dream of tying myself down. After all, he’s a dear but he hasn’t a cent and think of having the god-awful Grace in the...”

At least she had the decency to break off when the bathroom door swung open and Grace appeared. My roommate stood perfectly still on the threshold, the special delivery in one hand.

With her talent for humiliating people less attractive than herself, Norma had made the supersensitive Grace loathe her with a hatred that was almost psychopathic.

My roommate's pale eyes fixed Norma with a steadiness that was somehow frightening. She said: "There's very little chance of your having the god-awful Grace in the family. I'd rather be dead myself—yes and see Jerry dead, too."

Norma seemed staggered into speechlessness by the quiet fury of this unexpected attack. Even I was a little taken aback.

We stood gawking for a few seconds. Then Elaine said hastily: "No bickering, children. Let's get going or the boys will have drunk the Amber Club out of champagne."

But Grace made no move to leave. "I'm not going to the Amber Club." She turned to me, adding in a voice that trembled slightly: "Will you please explain to Steve, Lee—that is, if he notices I'm not there? I've just heard that a friend of mine's going to be in New York tonight. Naturally we want to be alone."

"You mean your special deliverer?" asked Elaine eagerly.

Grace didn't seem to hear. "I thought he and I might go to *Phèdre*, together, Lee. So if you're not using your ticket, perhaps you'd let me have it."

I felt as surprised as Norma and Elaine looked but I said: "Of course," and brought her the ticket from the dressing table.

"Thanks," Grace turned to Elaine. "It wouldn't be taking you out of your way, will it? The Cambridge Theater's just across the street from the Amber Club."

It was while she was stuffing the ticket into her pocketbook that I noticed the first of those many extraordinary things which I was to remember afterwards when each thing that Grace did or said that night assumed such terrifying importance.

My roommate had always been absurdly puritanical about makeup. And yet, since reading that letter, she had been experimenting with my cosmetics in the bathroom. There was a heavy daub of lipstick on her mouth and the hectic flush in her cheeks was due partly to a clumsy application of rouge.

Still clutching the letter, she crossed to the mirror and rather unsteadily pinned onto her dress the small diamond brooch which was the one piece of jewelry to survive her father's bankruptcy. Then she went to the closet and pulled out her only evening wrap, a miserable blue affair with a wilted rabbit collar.

I don't know why, but suddenly I was struck with the pathos of the situation—Grace, whose past romances had never got to first base, going off to the theater to meet a real live admirer with too much make-up on her face and that hideous old wrap. I yielded to an impulse of generosity.

"If you've got an important date, Grace, why don't you borrow my fur coat? I'm not going to use it."

She turned hesitantly. Ever since their prospect of great wealth had been tragically swept away, both Jerry and Grace had been absurdly diffident about accepting favors. "You really mean that?"

"Of course."

While Norma watched in sardonic silence, Grace slipped into my sleek galyak coat and pushed the special delivery letter into one of the deep pockets. For a moment she rubbed her cheek a little wistfully against the creamy fur of the collar.

"Thanks, Lee," she said. "Thanks so much. I promise to take terribly good care of it."

I often wonder now how I would have felt at that moment if I'd had the slightest inkling of the fantastic and horrible things which were going to happen before I saw my galyak fur coat again.



## II

We didn't do much talking on the thirty mile drive to New York. The bitter little scene between Grace and Norma had left us all uncomfortably thoughtful. When we reached the Cambridge Theater where *Phèdre* was playing, Grace got out without saying a word and hurried straight into the theater. Elaine and I followed her into the foyer, to keep a weather eye open for faculty members, while Norma parked the car outside the Amber Club, just across the street.

"I'd give my back teeth for a look at Grace's letter-writing lover," remarked Elaine. "Do you think there's a chance of seeing him?"

"Not if Grace has anything to do with it," I began.

But Elaine clutched my arm and stared goggle eyed over my shoulder. "My dear, we're sunk," she breathed. "Penelope and Hudnutt. And, heavens above, Marcia Parrish and the Big Appel, too. The entire faculty's descending upon us."

I turned just in time to see the Dean of Women and her husband threading through the thin stream of late arrivals. Behind them were Harold Appel, our bachelor Dean of Men, and Marcia Parrish, the youngest and most popular member of the Wentworth faculty.

Retreat was impossible except into the theater itself, and I had given Grace my ticket. There was nothing for it but to hold our ground and pretend we really were attending the show. The four of them bore down upon us, headed by Penelope Hudnutt.

"Well, girls, you've got here safely, I see," she said in that clipped, English voice of hers. "Where are Norma and Grace?"

Very sheepishly I told her we were waiting for our little friends. She gave a brief nod and passed on into the house, followed by Dr. Hudnutt who smiled one of his vague smiles as if he knew he ought to know us but hadn't the slightest idea who we were. The Big Appel, whose father was lawyer to the Houghs and my own family in

Newhampton, offered some inanity about the home town being well represented.

As soon as the faculty quartet had disappeared into the auditorium, Elaine and I stared at each other. "You're right," I said. "We are sunk. They'll be on the lookout for us in the intermissions now."

"I've got an idea." Elaine's face cleared and she dashed over to the box-office where I saw her frizzed bang bobbing vigorously at the man behind the grille.

While she was gone Grace appeared again and announced rather breathlessly that all arrangements had been made, her friend was to join her shortly at the theater.

Then Elaine darted over from the box-office, exclaiming jubilantly, "The man in the cage is a perfect lamb. He's given me the exact time for each curtain. All we have to do is to sneak over from the Amber Club for the intermissions and mingle nonchalantly with the crowd. The Hudnutts won't smell thé rat because they are in the balcony."

"The Hudnutts!" Grace, who had paid no attention to Elaine until then, swung round on her suddenly, her brightly rouged mouth half open. "You mean, Penelope Hudnutt is here—at the theater? I knew of course that he ..."

She broke off quickly, an odd look coming into her eyes. Then, mumbling something about not waiting outside for her friend, she disappeared into the now darkened theater.

Elaine glanced after her and tapped her forehead. "Nuts," she said. "Completely nuts. Come on, my dear, let's go and whoop it."

Looking, probably, as guilty as I felt, I followed her out of the foyer and hurried across the street toward the gay red and white awning of the Amber Club.

A waiter conducted us to a large, flower-decked table on the brink of the dance floor. Steve Carteris was one of those people who always got the most coveted table and the smoothest service without any apparent effort. And that night he had outdone himself. Bottles of champagne, undoubtedly of the most approved vintage, nestled in

beaten silver ice-bowls. An exotic variety of chef's specials from the buffet frond made well-groomed patterns around the central birthday cake with its twenty-one candles.

And when Steve himself rose to welcome us, groomed to the last hair's breadth in a midnight blue tuxedo, it seemed incredible that he was just another Wentworth Senior like the rest of us. But then Steve, with his lithe athlete's figure and his Carteris profile, had a genius for being the right thing at the right time. That was part of his birthright, as the scion of one of the South's oldest families and the son of Governor Carteris who was said to be headed for the White House.

"I've been reserving the place of honor for you, Lee," he said in his slightly Southern drawl.

As he pulled out the chair on his right, I glanced a trifle maliciously at Norma. She appeared quite contented, however, with her place between the captain of the Wentworth football team and the President of the Dramatic Society.

While waiters scurried around, filling our plates and glasses, I explained Grace's absence to Steve.

"Too bad," he said lightly. "I was hoping for a sort of reconciliation with the Hough family tonight. But with poor old Jerry's busted ankle ..." he broke off, his dark eyes losing for a moment their half derisive, half indolent smile. "Grace didn't dig up that theater date as an excuse not to come here, did she?"

"Good heavens, no," I said, and told him all the details of the special delivery letter and my roommate's last minute change in plans. I also told him that we would have to put in an appearance at the Cambridge Theater during the intervals.

For a while he had to attend to his duties as host, but he returned to the subject again as we left the table to dance.

"I had a hunch Grace wouldn't come," he said, as he took my hand and guided me smoothly over the floor. "She thinks I'm a low-living son-of-a-gun." Somehow his voice sounded less nonchalant than

usual. “She—well, I’ve often wondered if she told you the reason why the Houghs and I severed diplomatic relations.”

I knew, of course, that Grace’s friendship with Steve had somehow gone sour. I also knew that a short time ago Steve and Jerry, who had been inseparable, had stopped rooming together. But no one had told me what it was all about.

“Grace disapproves of me, you know,” Steve was beginning.

But I broke in, “Steve, darling, of course she disapproves of you. So do I. You’re the most disreputable person on the campus. But we all adore you.”

“Don’t say that if you don’t mean it, Lee.”

He squeezed my hand, and I at least abandoned myself completely to the rhythm of the dance. Steve always made me feel gay and happy. If I hadn’t been so stubbornly in love with Jerry Hough, I’d have jostled my way shamelessly through the crowds of his female admirers and tried for Steve in a big way. As the orchestra stopped, I slipped into his hand the tiny enameled lighter I had bought for his birthday. He seemed delighted with it.

Then the lights dimmed before the solitary amber spot which heralded the floor show, and we joined the others.

The show was opened by a torch singer whose voluptuous figure thrust perilously out of a strapless evening gown. She moved from table to table crooning the words of a current hit song. At our party she stopped directly in front of Steve and moaned a complete chorus at him, her strapless gown strained to its uttermost by her deep-chested lamentings.

I was surprised at Steve’s embarrassment. I would have thought his celebrated poise could have withstood far worse things than the possible collapse of a lady’s superstructure. But after the first few lines he kept his eyes fixed on the enameled lighter which he clicked nervously back and forth. His relief, when the girl drifted to another table, was obvious.

There was some perfunctory applause for the singer. Then Elaine leaned across the table and prodded me with a fork.

“First intermission,” she shouted in a voice which had quite enough champagne in it. “Time to go over and make bright comments at *Phèdre*.”

Norma was concentrating hard on the President of Dramatics, either after his fraternity pin or the star part in the next college show. I knew it was useless to try to pry her loose, so Elaine and I went off together to uphold the dignity of the Wentworth Seniors.

Somewhere on the way to the door I lost Elaine. But just as I was going on without her, she rushed after me down the stairs.

“My dear, I’ve just been accosted. That torch singer positively swooped down on me and asked me questions about the party. Apparently they run a gag for birthdays and they wanted to know all about Steve. I had a wonderful time letting myself rip.”

“What did you tell her?”

“Everything, my dear—about Steve’s father being the next Republican President. I said the family was rich as Rockefeller.” She pushed giddily through the swing door and out into the street. “Oh, yes, she asked about you, too. Wanted to know if you were Steve’s fiancée.”

“Elaine, darling, you didn’t say I was?”

She giggled. “Of course I did. I said he was going to announce his engagement tonight and that Norma was a discarded blonde from his dirty past.”

We must have looked like a couple of refugees from a police raid as we dashed across the street without our wraps. And the lights and the crowds were so bewildering that we missed the Cambridge and found ourselves in the foyer of the theater next door where the billboard announced that a Gilbert and Sullivan Repertory was presenting *H. M. S. Pinafore* and *Cox and Box*. I had some difficulty in persuading Elaine that we were in the wrong theater, and by the time we arrived at the Cambridge, the audience was already streaming out.

The first person we ran into, of course, was Marcia Parrish. I hated the idea of putting on an act for her. Marcia Parrish was the one

faculty member we all really liked, and it was still a nine days' wonder on the campus that Dr. Robert Hudnutt had married the cold, British Dean of Women when everyone knew he'd had a good chance of getting Marcia.

With her white satin gown and her dark hair pushed back from her forehead, the Head of the English Department looked cool and lovely as a narcissus. But, as she came up to us, I was startled at the determined gleam in her eye.

"Where's Grace Hough?" she asked.

"I—I think she's inside," Elaine spoke too quickly, too eagerly. "Do you want us to get her for you?"

"Yes." Marcia's lips tightened. "I have to speak to her. It's urgent."

While I was trying to figure out why on earth Marcia Parrish should want my roommate so urgently, Elaine grabbed my arm and started pulling me away past programs, tuxedos and powdered backs. Finally we caught a glimpse of Grace's pink satin in a deserted corner of the foyer. Standing at her side, his back to us, was a tall man with dark hair.

"The mysterious boy-friend at last!" hissed Elaine, plunging eagerly forward. But as the man half turned, she came to an abrupt halt and muttered: "Damn, it isn't the boy-friend. It's Hudnutt." Without warning she swirled off in another direction.

Neither my roommate nor Hudnutt seemed conscious of me as I moved toward them. Grace was standing against the wall, her hands clenched at her sides. The professor of French, slim and slightly stooped in tailored dinner clothes, was very close to her. I could see only his profile but his sensitive features were contorted into a haggard travesty of themselves.

I was surprised to see the two of them like that. I was astounded when I heard him say:

"I'm sorry but you absolutely misunderstood what I told you this afternoon in the quarry. It's all a ghastly mistake. Don't you see how you're senselessly destroying your own chance of happiness and mine...."

I must have made some involuntary exclamation. Instantly he broke off and swung round. For one second his face was completely off its guard. And I noticed that the scar on his left temple, usually almost invisible, was standing out, livid against the white skin.

Then, with the poorest attempt at a smile I had ever seen, he moved away. He never once turned to look at Grace.

But I did. And the expression in her eyes is something I shall always remember. Unnaturally bright above the pink cheeks and the lips of clumsy crimson, they held a gleam which was at once exultant and malicious.

“Why, Grace,” I said, “what on earth’s the matter? Why...?”

But with a little choking sob, she pushed past me and disappeared into the crowd that was trooping back for the second act of the play.

I started to follow her, determined to find out what was the matter and what was behind that extraordinary snatch of conversation. Then I stopped abruptly, realizing that there could be only one explanation. Grace’s letter-writing friend had failed to turn up; she was bitterly disappointed; and for some obscure reason she’d been taking it out on the man she had once admired—Robert Hudnutt.

Apparently the episode had puzzled Elaine, too, for as we made our way back to the Amber Club, she said: “Looks as if the correspondence course has flunked dear Gracie. But what on earth was she talking to Hudnutt about?”

“Oh—just the play,” I said.

I never knew what instinct prompted me to lie to Elaine about that crazy scene. Later it was to prove one of the most tragic errors I made in the whole affair.

As soon as we got back to the party, Elaine cornered Steve and started to give a dramatic version of her encounter with the torch singer. I had expected him to take it in the frivolous mood it rated. But he didn’t. In the middle of Elaine’s story, he turned his back on her and pulled me onto the dance floor.

“She must be crazy,” he muttered. “Does she think it’s funny telling that floor vamp about my father and saying I’m engaged to you?”

I was surprised at his anger and nettled by his last remark. "You needn't object quite so strenuously," I said. "After all, you don't have to disgrace the Carteris name by marrying me, you know."

Steve flushed. "I didn't mean it that way, Lee," he said awkwardly. "You know I'd never ..."

"Skip it, nit-wit," I said.

I had made up my mind to tell him about Grace but at that moment a waiter tapped him on the shoulder and announced that a lady wanted to speak to him on the telephone urgently. I supposed someone at Wentworth was pulling a sophomoric birthday gag, but Steve didn't come back for almost twenty minutes and, when he did, I was amazed at the change in him. He looked disturbingly grim.

He came straight up to me, gripping my hands. "Lee, I'm terribly sorry, but I've got to leave at once."

His expression frightened me. "Steve, has something awful happened?"

"Something awful will happen if I don't get out of here right away. Can you explain to the others, please?"

"Steve, tell me. It isn't anything to do with Grace, is it?"

"Grace Hough? My God, what makes you think that?"

"I ..."

"Listen, Lee. Will you do me two favors? First don't ask any questions about this. Second, for the love of Pete, don't discuss it with Grace. That girl's got me into enough trouble already." He broke off, then added with an unpleasant laugh, "One day Grace Hough will wake up and find herself strangled."

Before I had time to reply he swung away, disappearing through the dancers.

I made feeble apologies for him to the others. They seemed to think it a rather good joke and merely asked if Steve was in woman trouble again and what her name was this time.

I was quite glad when the time came to go over to the Cambridge for the second intermission. Elaine, having added a highball to the



indiscretion of champagne, was in no fit state to accompany me. So I went alone.

My mind—reasonably or unreasonably—was obsessed with Grace. I found myself looking eagerly for her as I threaded my way over to the Cambridge.

I had no difficulty in finding her. She was standing close to the door, with my coat slipped over her dress as if she was intending to leave. At first I thought she was alone. It was not until I had pushed my way closer that I saw she was with a man. He was a naval officer in full dress uniform, his coat bristling with gold braid and buttons.

Grace caught sight of me and beckoned. Her mood had changed completely since her incredible scene with Dr. Hudnutt. She was gay and excited and her voice had a triumphant ring in it as she linked her arm in the naval officer's and said:

“David, this is Lee Lovering, my roommate.”

The naval officer smiled, showing perfect teeth. He was somewhere in the interesting thirties and unquestionably handsome. And yet, for some obscure reason, he was not as attractive as he ought to have been. Even then, before that man became a vital, an almost mythical factor in the lives of all of us, I remember thinking that the magnificent hair was just a shade too long and that his features were just a little too regular. Besides, a uniformed naval officer seemed utterly out of place in Grace's life, just as he seemed out of place in that super-intellectual crowd who had come to listen to the classical lucubrations of *Phèdre*.

And he seemed very conscious of his own incongruity. Grace chattered excitedly, but he said scarcely a word and made no attempt to conceal his relief when the time came to escort her back into the theater for the last act.

On my return to the Amber Club, I found the party completely disintegrated. Elaine and Nicholas Dodd, Steve's roommate, had disappeared; Norma was displaying her sophistication by dancing with a rather oily-looking man from another table.

I was all set to call it a day. Luckily, just about the time *Phèdre* was scheduled to finish, Elaine reappeared, looking rather green and announcing an emphatic desire to go home. I left her to tackle Norma and hurried over to the Cambridge to collect Grace.

I couldn't have timed myself more successfully. Just as I reached the foyer, the faculty party came out of the house and I was able to fiddle convincingly with my wrap, thus maintaining the farce to the bitter end.

It was just after they had gone that I saw Grace pushing through the outgoing crowd. She was alone and peering anxiously to left and right. I called and she hurried to my side.

"Come on," I said. "Norma and Elaine are getting the car."

She shook her head and said rather breathlessly: "I'm not coming with you, Lee. David's driving me home. But I do want you to do me a favor." She opened her pocketbook and held out three sealed envelopes. "Could you please deliver these for me at Wentworth?"

I had just time to see the topmost letter. It was addressed in her ornamental back-sloped writing to Jerry at the infirmary. Then, abruptly, Grace snatched the envelopes back and put them in her bag again.

"No, perhaps it would be better if ..." She broke off. For a moment she stood there in front of me, her small face illuminated with an excited smile. "Lee, I'm so happy tonight, so marvelously happy that I'm going to say something I'd never have said at any other time. It's about you and Jerry."

I felt rather awkward. During all the years we had known each other, Grace had never referred to my feeling for her brother.

"You don't have to worry about Norma getting his fraternity pin—or anything else from Jerry, Lee. He may think he's crazy about her now, but it's you he really likes. He's always been terribly fond of you."

She came closer, clutching at my hands. "I'm going to make him realize just how rotten Norma is. She's jeered at me, but she'll be sorry for it just the way other people in Wentworth will be."

At the beginning of this remarkable speech I had felt a wave of gratitude for Grace. It subsided as I realized that it had been motivated far more by vindictiveness toward Norma than affection for me.

“Yes, Lee.” Grace laughed unsteadily. “No one is going to make me hate them without regretting it.” She pulled me closer and kissed me impulsively on the cheek. “Well, I’ll have to hurry. David’s waiting.”

She hurried down the theater steps to the street. I caught a glimpse of the red-haired naval officer, hatless and impatient on the fringe of the crowd. I saw the two meet; saw Grace slip her arm through his, small and fragile beside that tall, uniformed figure.

I think it was then, for the first time, that I began to realize the potential menace lurking in my roommate’s slight figure. Grace, who until that night had been so pallid and unimportant a person, seemed somehow to have insinuated herself into the emotional life of so many of us. I thought of the anxiety on Marcia’s face when she had asked to speak to Grace; I thought of the blind terror in Robert Hudnutt’s eyes when he gazed down at Grace in the theater foyer; I thought of Steve, grim and tight-lipped, when he had asked me not to mention his departure from the Amber Club to Grace. All the queer, disturbing things that had marred the gaiety of that evening seemed to have had their beginning and ending in Grace.

As she moved away with the naval officer, my roommate turned, waved her hand and called: “Goodnight, Lee.”

Now, as I look back, there seems something oddly valedictory about those three casual words and that brief flutter of her hand.

For I never saw Grace Hough again—alive.

### III

I suppose it was about one-thirty when we left the Saylers' maroon sedan in the college garage and made our way back to Pigot Hall. We were all suffering from after-the-party blues.

One fact alone intruded persistently into my thoughts as I closed the door on Elaine's dyspeptic goodnight, Grace had said that Jerry was terribly fond of me. I let that lull me to sleep.

And, if it hadn't been for my Spartan habit of keeping the window wide open, I might have gone on sleeping until morning; I might never have seen those three things which later were to involve me so dangerously in the lives of other people at Wentworth. But my window was open and the rain, spattering cold on my face, wakened me at some later, indeterminate period of the night.

I was too full of sleep to wonder whether Grace had come back. I merely staggered out of bed and started to tug down the window. While my fingers fumbled over the sash, the steady drone of a car engine caught my attention. Almost immediately a wide shaft of light illuminated the rain-flecked darkness of the campus, and a car hurtled into view, driving away from the college as if all the hounds of hell were galloping in pursuit.

That speeding car was the yellow sedan which belonged to Penelope Hudnutt.

If I had known what was going to happen, I would have paid far more attention to that yellow sedan. But at the time I merely wondered sleepily why on earth the impeccable Dean of Women should be careening through the campus so late at night. Then I flopped back into bed again.

I can't actually have fallen asleep. I must have been suspended half way between dreams and waking or I would not have been so immediately conscious of the faint click of the opening door.

"So Grace has come back at last," I told myself. "About time, too."

The footsteps came right up to my bed and stopped. I was conscious of a figure bending over me, blurred like something in a dream. Then it slipped away toward Grace's bed. I waited for the familiar sound of my roommate's fingers pulling back the covers.

But it didn't come.

"That's queer," I thought sleepily.

Then I stopped thinking, for the footsteps sounded again—this time even softer, more stealthy than before. They were moving away from the bed, back toward the door.

I don't know why that should have frightened me. After all, Grace might easily have forgotten to shut the door. There were a dozen perfectly normal explanations. But, in my sleep-drenched state, that struck me as horribly wrong.

I sat up in bed and peered forward. Although everything was out of focus in the darkness, I could distinguish a figure almost at the door.

"Grace!" I whispered. "Is that you?"

For a moment the figure stood absolutely still, a dark, slender silhouette against the lighter darkness of the wall. Then it slipped out through the door and disappeared.

I was really awake then; awake enough to realize with a twinge of panic that the person who had crept into my room had not been Grace Hough.

The rain, which had been drizzling down when I woke for the first time, had increased in violence now and was beating against the window pane. But as I moved barefoot toward the dressing-table, I caught once again the dull throb of a car engine from the campus.

I supposed it was the Dean's yellow sedan returning from its unknown mission. But I was wrong. This car, like the first, was driving headlong away from the college. The fanlight from the porch illumined its green, rain-polished body, and I recognized it immediately.

It was Marcia Parrish's convertible coupe.

For quite a while after that second car had vanished I stood at the window. Then I looked at my watch.

It was 4:20 A.M. First Penelope Hudnutt, then Marcia Parrish dashing away from the college at that time of night; and an unknown person creeping into my room!

Something was distinctly wrong at Wentworth.

I smoked a cigarette to calm my nerves, then climbed back into bed. Oddly enough I slept.

A bell rang somewhere. That's what awakened me next morning. The first thing my eyes opened upon was Grace's bed. I sat up very straight, staring.

That bed had not been slept in. Grace Hough had not come back.

My immediate reaction as I stared at those smooth, untouched bedclothes, was: "Grace was in a queer mood last night. She's probably got herself into some jam."

Then, as the events of the night before began to come crowding back to my mind, I had another notion. There had been something valedictory about all Grace's actions. She had asked me to deliver letters for her; she had given me that pep talk about Jerry; she had kissed me goodnight as if she were going away.

Then there was the naval officer, the writer of those ardent letters.

Why shouldn't they have gone off together? For a moment I felt that vicarious thrill which the thought of an elopement inevitably brings. And, as I dressed, the thought of an elopement with the naval officer seemed more and more reasonable. It would explain so many of the other things that had seemed so inexplicable last evening. Grace had been more than usually excited by the special delivery letter, and she had spat out at Norma with the self-assurance of someone who is planning something romantic and spectacular.

And it motivated that even more astonishing episode—the scene between Grace and Robert Hudnutt in the foyer of the theater. Grace loved to squeeze the last drop from her emotions, even after they had ceased to exist. It would have been quite in character for her to have thrown a melodramatic farewell scene in front of the old love before going off with the new.

I rushed over to Commons for breakfast, quite enamored of my own powers of deduction. It was not until I returned to Pigot that a thought came to me which made me suddenly uneasy. Grace was the most scrupulous of borrowers and last night she had taken my fur coat. I was convinced that she would have never deliberately gone away from Wentworth without first returning it.

I went to the closet. The coat wasn't there. It was this one, trivial little fact that really started me worrying.

And the only person who could stop me worrying was Jerry. One of those three letters Grace wrote last night had been addressed to him at the infirmary. If it had arrived, he might know exactly what had happened.

I decided to go and see him before doing anything else.

When the nurse let me into his room, Jerry was propped against the pillows, looking pale and rather moody. Not that I noticed it right away. During my first few moments alone with Jerry I never noticed anything except the blue, restless eyes, and the strong line of his jaw.

He seemed surprised to see me. "Why, hello, Lee. Thought you'd forgotten my existence."

I sat down on the edge of the bed, avoiding the hump made by the plaster cast on his foot. "It's about Grace, Jerry. She didn't come back last night."

I told him everything then about the arrival of the special, of Grace's sudden change of plans and her subsequent behavior at the Cambridge Theater.

"She must have gone off with that naval officer. That's the only explanation I can think of," I concluded lamely.

There was a puzzled furrow on Jerry's forehead. "But that's crazy, Lee. I never even knew Grace had a friend in the navy."

"Neither did I. But someone's been writing her all those specials. She wouldn't ever tell me where they came from."

Jerry's hand slid over the coverlet, gripping mine. "One thing I'm dead sure of, Lee. Grace wouldn't have gone off and got married—or

anything serious—without telling me.”

“Maybe she just decided it on the spur of the moment. Maybe she didn’t have the time.”

“But she did have the time. That’s just the point.” Jerry’s lips tightened. “You see, I got a letter from her early this morning. The night nurse said it was delivered here some time around four.”

So my hunch had been right.

“It was pushed under the door of the infirmary. The nurse brought it to me this morning. If Grace had decided to elope, she’d most certainly have said so in the letter. Don’t you see?”

He twisted around and pulled an envelope from under his pillow. I took out a single sheet of college notepaper and read:

JERRY DARLING:

You know how bad I am at expressing myself on certain subjects in speech. That’s why I’m writing this to you in a letter. And it’s important—terribly important. I’ve got to warn you against Norma Sayler. She’s rotten—absolutely rotten. She’s always tried to humiliate me because she despises me. She doesn’t love you. She isn’t capable of loving anyone but herself. And she’ll make you desperately unhappy if you let her. So, please, don’t get too fond of her. I’ve always wanted the best for you. Norma is the very worst. That’s why this hurts me so much. You see, I know how terrible it is to love someone who doesn’t love you. I couldn’t bear to have you suffer the way I’ve suffered. Forgive me for writing this.

Love always,  
GRACE.

I folded it into the envelope and handed it back to him.

“What do you make of it?” he asked urgently.



“I expected something like this,” I said quietly. “You see, Grace almost asked me to deliver this letter myself.”

I told him how Grace had pulled the three envelopes out of her bag and then put them back again. I felt I had to let him know, too, what she had said to me about Norma.

His flush deepened. “I’m not worried by what Grace thinks of Norma,” he said gruffly. “She’s always been hipped on the subject anyway. And I can take care of myself. But what gets me is—why on earth was the letter delivered in the middle of the night? Lee, you don’t think there’s something wrong—really wrong?”

His eyes were fixed on my face, anxious for me to reassure him. I was terribly conscious of his nearness, of the warmth of his body.

I said, “I guess everything will be all right.” But I didn’t really think so. “Jerry, do you think I ought to tell the Dean?”

He nodded quickly. “Yes, Lee. Tell her right away. We ...”

He broke off, dropping my hands. He was gazing over my shoulder, toward the door.

“Hello, Norma.”

I turned sharply. Norma Sayler was moving casually toward the bed, svelte and stunning in a close-fitted sports suit and a tiny green hat tilted over the sensational hair.

“Hello, darling.” Her voice was soft, proprietary. “I haven’t any classes till twelve so I’m just sneaking off to the hair-dresser. I thought I’d bring you the latest editjon of the campus rag.”

She pulled a copy of the *Wentworth Clarion* from under her arm and tossed its yellow sheets onto the bed. It was only then that she deigned to acknowledge my presence.

“So sweet of you to drop in and cheer Jerry up the way I asked you to.”

Then she ignored me.

But Jerry didn’t. As I slipped out of the room, I had the satisfaction of knowing that he was watching me—and that Norma was fully aware of the fact.

## IV

My visit to the infirmary had only increased my anxiety about Grace. She hadn't confided in Jerry about the naval officer. She had mentioned no plans for an elopement. And she had disappeared without returning my fur coat.

Just then I saw Elaine rushing across the campus toward me.

"My dear, I've been breaking my neck trying to find you. What a night! What a night—and I don't remember a word of it! Nick Dodd's just told me Steve arrived home with the milkman and ..." She paused a moment for breath. "I suppose you know Grace didn't come back at all. The dormitory warden reported it and Penelope's been up to Pigot, her face like a thundercloud. She wants to see you in her office at once. We're undone, darling. It'll all come out about the Amber Club, and—here, jump in the car—I'll run you over."

Elaine jumped in the car and jumped out again. "Damn Norma; she always takes the key out."

But I didn't wait for any more. Fighting back an absurd sensation of panic, I hurried across the campus to the Administration Building.

I found Penelope Hudnutt in her office. She was standing by the window, puffing jerkily at a cigarette. With her was a tall young man—a stranger, wearing a gray suit and a maroon shirt and tie.

The Dean didn't look at me. She stubbed the cigarette and said: "I suppose you know that Grace Hough did not return to college last night?"

"Yes," I said.

Penelope Hudnutt indicated the young man. "This is Lieutenant Trant, Lee." Very slowly she added: "Of the New York Homicide Squad."

I gave a little gasp.

"I'm afraid there is some very bad news." The Dean turned her back on the window and faced me. "Lieutenant Trant has had a

report from Greyville, a small town some twenty miles from here on the Albany road. The body of a girl has been—er—retrieved from the river there.”

I must have swayed, for Lieutenant Trant was at my side instantly, steadying my arm.

“From the cleaner’s mark on her dress they know this girl comes from the Wentworth neighborhood,” continued the Dean. “We cannot, of course, be certain that—that it is Grace, but Lieutenant Trant wants someone to go with him to Greyville to try to make an identification.”

I wasn’t really seeing the Dean any more. Her face had faded into a shadowy blur merged in the larger blur that was the room.

“As you know, Lee, apart from her brother, Grace has no immediate relatives, and Dr. Barker says it is impossible for Gerald Hough to be moved from the infirmary at the present time. You are under no obligation whatsoever. I myself or some other member of the faculty would be perfectly prepared to go. But since you were with Grace last night, since you are her roommate, her oldest friend ...”

“I’ll go.” The words were strange, remote. They didn’t seem to come from me. Slowly I turned to Lieutenant Trant. “What—what makes you think it is Grace?”

“How was your friend dressed last night?”

“Pink. A pink satin dress and a cream-colored fur coat.”

“And a little diamond brooch?”

I thought of Grace pinning on that old-fashioned brooch—the one piece of jewelry she possessed.

And I said: “This girl? Was—was she drowned?”

Lieutenant Trant shot a swift glance at the Dean.

“She might as well hear now or later,” he said. “No, this girl was not drowned. She was killed by a severe blow on the back of the head.”

“Then it’s not—it couldn’t be suicide?”

“I’m afraid that’s hardly possible, Miss Lovering. In fact, it is almost certain that she was—deliberately murdered.”

## V

Even before Lieutenant Trant and I started on that somber drive to Greyville, I knew that the girl they had found in the river would be Grace Hough.

For the most part Lieutenant Trant kept his cool eyes on the road and seemed absorbed with the problems of driving. When he did ask me about Grace, he spoke of her casually.

I told him what little I could of the Hough family background; how, from being the wealthiest people in Newhampton, they had been plunged suddenly into poverty and disgrace. Mr. Hough, as president of a large insurance company, had speculated with money intrusted to him and had committed suicide rather than face the inevitable exposure. There had been nothing left to Grace and Jerry except the insurance on their education and Grace's life insurance.

"Grace had a nervous breakdown after her father's death," I said, "and missed a term at Wentworth. When she came back, she was, well—different."

"How do you mean, different?"

"She was more interested in men than before, more eager for life. It was as though she realized she'd missed a lot and was desperately anxious to catch up on what she'd missed."

"And the man?" Lieutenant Trant asked.

I gave him a guarded account of Grace's relationship with Steve Carteris, her crush on Robert Hudnutt and her recent correspondence which had culminated last night in the appearance of the red-headed naval officer.

I was still talking when we reached a small town and drew up in front of a gray, cheerless building.

Lieutenant Trant said: "They've got her in the morgue, Miss Lovering, and they are holding a preliminary inquest at two-fifteen. We shan't have to stay unless you can make the identification."

I was vaguely conscious of entering the building, of an acrid sweet smell and then of voices. Someone said:

“We’ve got her dressed just as she was when they found her.” I felt a moment of blind panic, then suddenly I became surprisingly calm. There was a girl lying on a marble slab in front of me.

I knew at once that it was Grace.

My gaze moved downward over the pink satin dress, stained now and muddy. I saw the pink slippers, the little diamond brooch. Instinctively, I suppose, I was looking for something I expected, but did not see.

Then I realized that Grace was not wearing my cream galyak fur coat. Slipped over her dress was a bright red raincoat whose scarlet clashed violently with the rose pink of the satin. Neither Grace nor anyone I knew owned a coat like that.

“It’s Grace Hough, isn’t it?” Lieutenant Trant’s voice was very gentle. “But it’s the wrong coat?”

I nodded, not quite trusting myself to speak. His steady fingers closed on my hand and he drew me out of the room.

“Good kid,” he said, as we got into his waiting car. “You needn’t talk now. Keep it for the inquest. I’ve got to leave you a while and do a lot of telephoning.”

He dropped me off at Greyville’s only decent-looking hotel. I didn’t see him again until almost half-past one. Then he took me back to the morgue and led me along a passage to a large room where a number of people apparently had been waiting for us. It was some seconds before I realized that this must be the actual inquest.

Then someone got up and began telling how Grace’s body had been found early that morning by two children, playing under a bridge that crossed the river on the outskirts of Greyville.

After that there was a medical report full of long, scientific words most of which I could not understand. Apparently Grace had been killed some time between two and five o’clock that morning and had, so the doctor said, been dead for at least half an hour before her body was thrown into the river. Obviously it would have been

impossible to strike herself on the back of the head and the wound could not have been caused by a jump from the Greyville bridge. Suicide seemed impracticable.

That was the gist of it as it reached me. They couldn't really tell where Grace had been killed or how.

Then it was my turn. The coroner called me over to his table and asked me to make formal identification.

"Yes," I said, "it is my roommate, Grace Hough."

He then asked me a few simple questions about Grace. Had she any enemies? Who was the naval officer? Had my fur coat been returned? I answered as best I could and he went on to inquire the value of my coat and the probable amount of money Grace had in her bag which had not yet been found. I suppose they were trying to determine whether the motive had been robbery.

"The only valuable thing Grace had," I offered, "was that diamond brooch. It was probably worth more than my coat."

The coroner nodded and thanked me. I resumed my seat next to Lieutenant Trant.

Then the coroner addressed the jury. They did not leave the room to deliver their verdict. It was:

"Death by the hand of a person or persons unknown."

## VI

It was after four o'clock when we arrived back at Wentworth. Classes were over for the day and the campus, usually quiet and peaceful at that hour, was alive with excited little groups of students. Rumors of Grace's death must already have reached the college.

Lieutenant Trant didn't drop me outside the Administration Building. Without offering any explanation, he drove on through the campus until we reached the old stone house where the Hudnutts lived. We got out.

"You'd better come in too," he said.

A maid showed us into the long, beautifully furnished living room where tea was laid out on a low table. Penelope Hudnutt, looking very regal, sat behind the fluted silver teapot, while Marcia Parrish stood at her side, leaning against the mantel, a cigarette tilted in her hand.

Penelope Hudnutt rose and took a step toward us. "Well?" she asked.

"I am afraid," said Lieutenant Trant softly, "that the girl was Grace Hough."

Penelope's eyes flickered very slightly but she did not speak. Marcia moved to her side, laying a light hand on her arm. She looked at Trant with her straight, steady gaze. "I expect you'll have some questions to ask. Dr. Hudnutt and the Dean of Men are upstairs in the study. Shall I get them?"

"If you would be so kind, Miss Parrish."

With a brief, reassuring smile at Penelope, Marcia hurried out of the room. She came back followed by Dr. Hudnutt who looked a slight, almost shadowy figure next to the robustly athletic Dean of Men.

Lieutenant Trant took out a notebook and said in a voice that was almost gentle, "I would like Miss Lovering to tell me exactly



everything she knows about Grace Hough's movements last night." It all came out, of course, about Steve's party at the Amber Club. The gravity of the present situation was brought home to me vividly by the fact that Mrs. Hudnutt seemed hardly interested in that stupid escapade which normally she would have considered a serious breach of discipline.

I found it a terrific ordeal to tell that story to those five people, each watching me with a different kind of intent silence. It was particularly harrowing because I was watching myself, too, desperately trying to decide what I would say when I came to those moments in the first intermission of *Phèdre* when I had overheard that crazy scene between Grace and Dr. Hudnutt.

At last the moment arrived. I Said: "When the time came for the first intermission Elaine and I went back to the theater. We ..."

"You saw Grace?" That was the first interruption Lieutenant Trant had made. It was exactly as if some uncanny intuition had prompted him.

"Yes," I said, "we saw Grace. At least I did."

The impervious gray eyes were on mine. "And she was alone?"

"No," I said, "she wasn't alone. She was with Dr. Hudnutt." There was an interminable pause. Then I found myself adding: "They were talking about the play."

I don't know why I told that deliberate lie for the second time. Probably I was just obeying the natural if unethical impulse which prompts you, when something as fundamentally shocking as murder has been committed, instinctively to side with people you know against the impersonal force of the law.

If he had noticed the slight wavering in my voice, Lieutenant Trant gave no sign of it. He lapsed back into his intent silence as I told of my strange introduction to "David," of Grace's half-hearted attempt to give me the three letters, and her final disappearance into the crowd with the naval officer.

Lieutenant Trant looked up from his notes, his face quite inscrutable. "From your infinite store of information, Miss Lovering,

you couldn't tell me who those three letters were for?"

"I only saw one. It was addressed to her brother. And he got it. It arrived at the infirmary last night."

"Thank you, Miss Lovering." He stopped looking at me. "In spite of certain discrepancies, the disappearance of the fur coat, for example, the discovery of the body so far away either from New York or Wentworth, and Grace's behavior with regard to those letters, this case looks pretty straightforward, doesn't it?"

This question was addressed to the room at large, and I suspected it. It was just a little too bland. I had the feeling that he was letting out a baited hook.

And it was the Dean of Women who rose to the bait. "Exactly," she said. "I regret more than I can say that the matter of those frequent special delivery letters was not brought to my attention. If I had known anything of that sort had been going on ..."

"So that's the way you see it, Mrs. Hudnutt," broke in the detective thoughtfully. "An ardent love affair by correspondence, probably secret meetings with the mysterious, unidentified naval officer and some embarrassing relationship growing up which had to be severed—drastically." He looked at one of the knife-edged creases in his pants. "In other words, you believe Grace was murdered by the naval officer?"

Penelope flushed. "Of course I wouldn't dream of accusing anyone at the present time. But this man was to have driven her home to college. She never returned. He has not yet come forward to give an account of himself. I feel it is of vital importance for the police to locate him."

"So do I." Lieutenant Trant gave a sudden smile. I'm sure I don't know what could have amused him. "I telephoned from Greyville to headquarters. They are working hard to locate him."

For a moment he sat in complete silence, then in a voice that was quite different, he added: "There is one very important point about those special delivery letters your roommate received, Miss

Lovering. Do you happen to know if she was in the habit of keeping them?”

“No. I think she destroyed them as soon as she’d read them.” Suddenly there came back to me the recollection of a trivial action of Grace’s which had slipped my memory. “No, she didn’t destroy the one that came last night. I saw her put it in the pocket of the coat she borrowed from me.”

“The coat which has vanished into thin air.” Trant’s gray eyes moved away from me, resting on the little group of faculty members. “How about the rest of you? You were all at the theater last night. Have you anything to offer?”

Penelope said stiffly, “I saw neither Grace nor this man—this naval officer. I never left my seat during the performance.”

“I saw Grace—several times.” Marcia Parrish had crossed to the mantel and was standing there, her face etched in white relief against the gold parchment of the wallpaper. “Our seats were in the first row of the balcony and I happened to look down from time to time. It might interest you to know that she was alone for the first two acts. I’m almost sure the naval officer didn’t appear until just before the start of the third act.”

It was impossible to tell whether Lieutenant Trant was interested or not. “Why did you happen to be so interested in Grace Hough, Miss Parrish?”

There was something insolently goading in that question, and Marcia reacted instantly. “Obviously, I *happened* to notice her because in a theater full of strangers, she was someone I knew; because she is a student here, because it puzzled me that the other girls were not with her, because...”

Trant’s quiet, “I see” interrupted her edged voice. He looked at his notebook again, then his gaze settled on the Dean of Men.

“Did you see Grace, Dean Appel?”

The Big Appel’s pink cheeks went a little pinker. “No, indeed. I never saw Miss Hough at the theater at all.” He cleared his throat and glanced uneasily at Hudnutt. “Of course, Dr. Hudnutt and I did

meet the girl yesterday in rather—ah—embarrassing circumstances. But I think Hudnutt is better qualified to talk about it than I.”

Trant’s voice was very quiet as he said: “Well, Dr. Hudnutt?”

Penelope’s husband shifted his balance from one foot to another. There were the gaunt shreds of a smile in his eyes. “Since Appel has seen fit to refer to that incident I’d prefer to have him tell the story in his own way.”

“Very good.” The Dean of Men sounded rather nettled. “Hudnutt and I are on a College Building Committee in charge of erecting a new laboratory. It had occurred to us both that we might save the Board of Trustees money by making use of an old stone quarry just about a mile away on the New York road. Yesterday after lunch I was taking my constitutional in that direction and ran into Hudnutt. He said he’d just been there to look the place over. Am I right, Hudnutt?”

As Robert Hudnutt nodded, I had a quick stab of uneasiness. Last night during that fierce scene at the theater Dr. Hudnutt had mentioned the quarry to Grace.

Harold Appel continued: “It seemed to me like a good chance to make up our minds about it so I asked Hudnutt to go back with me. That’s when we saw Miss Hough. She was there in the quarry, sitting on a pile of rocks. Very odd state she seemed to be in, crying her eyes out. Apparently she’d been talking to Hudnutt earlier and her ...”

“I think Lieutenant Trant will get a more accurate impression if I take the story up at this juncture,” cut in Hudnutt with thinly veiled sarcasm. “Dean Appel has painted a very colorful picture. But he is right in essence. Grace Hough was crying and, in a way, I was responsible.”

“Am I to understand that you had an appointment in this quarry with Grace Hough?” asked Trant.

“Very definitely not.” Hudnutt’s ascetic mouth tightened. “When I wish to talk to my students, I have a perfectly adequate office for that purpose. Miss Hough followed me to the quarry on her own initiative. I can only presume that the nearness of graduation examinations

had made her a trifle unstable. Certainly what she had to say was distinctly neurotic." I noticed that his eyes moved to his wife's. They never left them all the while he was speaking. "She had brought with her the last two papers she had done for me on both of which I had given her an F. At one time Grace Hough had been a promising student. But recently her work had gone off very markedly. That's what she came to speak to me about. She demanded to know why I had given her low grades; she accused me of discriminating against her."

He passed a hand wearily across the streak of gray hair at his temple. "I do not find it easy to cope with young girls in an overwrought condition. I did my best to assure her that low grades were merely the result of the poor quality of her work. I was sorry for the girl but when I realized that my presence seemed only to aggravate her—er—hysteria, I left her." He paused. "That is why she was crying when Dean Appel and I returned to the quarry."

The next question Trant asked was completely unexpected: "Did Grace Hough know you were going to be at the theater last night?"

"I may have mentioned the fact to her. I really couldn't say."

"But you did speak to her during that first act intermission?"

That, of course, whether or not Lieutenant Trant was aware of it, was the climax to the whole interrogation. Robert Hudnutt's eyes moved to mine. Marcia crossed a little too aimlessly to the window.

To me the tension was obvious. I didn't see how Lieutenant Trant could fail to notice it.

"Yes," Hudnutt's tone was curiously empty of expression. "I did speak to Grace Hough in the first intermission."

"And she continued the scene she had started at the quarry?" offered Trant.

"She did not." Hudnutt's tongue came out to moisten his lips. "As Miss Lovering told you, we talked of the play. I think she asked me to translate a certain line into idiomatic English."

I knew then, of course, that he was lying. The urgent words I had overheard him say were still in my memory. *"I told you this afternoon*

*in the quarry. It's all a ghastly mistake. Don't you see you're senselessly destroying your own chance of happiness and mine?"* Even if I had not seen *Phèdre*, I had read it. It was only too obvious that those agonized sentences had not been quoted from Racine.

With what seemed like complete irrelevancy, Trant said: "Just as a matter of interest, Dr. Hudnutt, what was the line she asked you to translate?"

"I—that is, I'm afraid I do not recall. My memory for such things is not at all retentive." Hudnutt looked really rattled until his eyes met mine. Then he said: "I think Miss Lovering overheard our conversation. Perhaps she can tell you."

I felt as nervous as a kid of sixteen. I guessed of course why he had said that. He knew I was aware of the fact that he was not telling the truth. He was taking a desperate chance on my backing him up and had thrown the ball to me.

Curiously enough I didn't have to think twice about what course I would take. Immediately I started wracking my tired brain, trying to remember a line, any line from *Phèdre*. And then, a sudden gift from the Gods, one of the most famous passages in the play flashed across my memory, and I heard my own voice in a very un-Gallic accent quoting:

*"C'est Venus toute entiere a sa proie attachee."*

Hudnutt's face lightened instantly, like a dark field on which the sun had shone.

Lieutenant Trant watched both of us. "I'm afraid, Miss Lovering, you'll have to take pity on an ignorant policeman and tell me what that means in English."

I was sure he knew perfectly well what it meant, but I faltered: "I suppose the idea is: *Venus clinging like grim death to her quarry.*"

I realized that I had not given a particularly adroit translation. I realized too that the play on the word quarry might have embarrassing associations. But I was amazed at the change in Dr. Hudnutt's expression when he heard me say that. The smile drained out of his eyes completely. For the second time in twenty-four hours I

saw the scar spring into incandescence on his left temple, and once again I saw on his face the strained look which had tortured his face last night.

It was a horrible moment because, to me at least, it was so completely baffling. The room was dangerously quiet. I could sense the violent, inexplicable under-currents of emotion which connected those three—Robert, Penelope and Marcia—in a bond of common anxiety.

The silence seemed unbearable now. For one second longer Lieutenant Trant held it. Then, almost lazily, he unbent long legs and pushed himself up out of the chair.

His eyes, faintly sardonic now, moved slowly from Robert, to Penelope, to Marcia and finally to the Dean of Men.

“Thank you,” he said. “Thank you very much indeed. You have all been extremely helpful.”

## VII

The interview was at an end. Lieutenant Trant seemed suddenly an ordinary, almost respectful police officer again. He turned to Dean Appel and said: "I believe your father is the Houghs' lawyer, isn't he? I'd be very grateful if you could give me any details of the family's financial set-up."

The Big Appel looked rather flustered. "I'm—that is, I'm afraid I don't know a great deal."

"But you may be able to help. Perhaps Dr. Hudnutt will let us move to his study?"

Hudnutt murmured: "Of course." And Trant left the room followed meekly by the Dean of Men. Almost immediately Penelope got up, saying she had to report to the President, and I was left alone with Dr. Hudnutt and Marcia Parrish.

For several minutes the three of us sat there, not saying anything and very carefully not looking at each other. Then Marcia glanced at Hudnutt, her eyebrow tilted questioningly upward. He nodded and, with too obvious casualness, strolled out of the room.

I started to leave, too, but Marcia said quickly:

"Don't go yet, Lee." She took an onyx cigarette case and offered it to me with a tired smile. "You must be worn out, my dear. It's been ghastly for us all. But it's worse for you."

"It has been hard," I agreed. "And I suppose the hardest part of all has been telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

I hadn't really meant that as a challenge. But she took it that way.

"It's even harder to know when telling the truth is helpful and when it's hideously misleading." Her eyes, dark and intent, fixed my face. "It would have been hideously misleading if Lieutenant Trant had been told what Robert really said to Grace at the theater last night. I want to thank you for keeping back something which has nothing whatever to do with Grace's death."



It was difficult to think of anything to say. Marcia's fingers were twisting the cigarette uncertainly.

"I know what you're thinking, Lee. You know we were lying just now and ... I'm sure Robert would rather I told you the truth." She hesitated. "You know, of course, the way Grace felt about him?"

I nodded. "I knew she used to have a sort of crush on him. But—well, obviously it was all on her side. I never imagined Dr. Hudnutt was even aware of her existence."

"I don't think he was. Robert's an awfully vague person. His students are really just grades in a mark-book to him. That's why yesterday afternoon at the quarry she took him so completely off his guard. You can imagine how he felt. This girl suddenly appeared at his side in the quarry. He didn't even recognize her at first. And then she started hurling all those accusations at him. He has lost sympathy with her work. Things used to be so different when he tried to understand her—before he started to discriminate against her. She worked herself up into a state bordering on hysterics. She threatened to go to the Dean of Women—Robert's own wife—and complain that he was treating her unfairly"

Marcia broke off, rising and starting to pace slowly up and down that long, quiet room. "Robert couldn't cope with a situation like that, Lee. He hasn't the slightest idea how a young girl's mind works. He probably said all the worst possible things. I know he told her he was going to *Phèdre*. I think he had some blurred idea that if she knew she would see him again that evening she might leave him alone then. All he wanted was to get rid of her."

"But I don't understand," I insisted. "Surely Grace wouldn't have thrown that scene and then the one in the theater just because Dr. Hudnutt had given her low grades."

"Of course you don't understand. Grace wasn't at all an easy person to understand." I was startled at the suppressed vehemence in Marcia's voice. "I'd been worried about her for some time. So had Penelope. She'd started to do something we're all tempted to do at times—especially after any violent upheaval in life. She had started

to grab at things just because she felt she had a right to them. When a woman begins doing that, she's apt to be desperate and—dangerous.”

She came over to me. “Last night at the theater—you remember I asked you to send Grace to me—well, I had a hunch she was going to be difficult. Robert had told me about the scene in the quarry. I didn't want it to happen all over again at the theater in front of Penelope. I was too late, of course. Penelope didn't feel very well in the first intermission. I stayed with her a few minutes. When I got out into the foyer, Grace had already cornered Robert.”

I was watching her intently, remembering those violent words I had heard Dr. Hudnutt saying.

“It was unpardonable what Grace did,” Marcia was saying slowly. “I hate to talk this way about her now she's dead. But she was morbidly interested in other people's lives. Perhaps you never realized that. But she had found out something from Robert's past, something terrible which only he and I here at Wentworth knew and which he's been trying so pathetically hard to forget. Grace brought that up at the theater last night. She threw it in his face, threatened to make it public.”

She gripped my shoulders, her face drawn and desperate. “That's why he was so completely shaken when you saw him. For some devious reason Grace was threatening to ruin his career here at Wentworth. Now you can see why he had to try to keep all that from the police.”

There was something fierce, insistent in her voice. I had the feeling it was desperately important for her to convince me of something—that it was only by doing so perhaps that she could convince herself.

“I can't tell you any more, Lee. But I've got to ask you one thing. We stand to lose everything, Robert and Penny and I, if the police hear the wrong things. It sounds shocking, I know—a faculty member asking a student to join a conspiracy. But what concerns us

has absolutely no bearing on Grace's death. I swear it. Will you stand by us?"

I looked at her; at her pale, drawn cheeks and the almost tortured anxiety in her eyes. Almost before I realized what I was saying, I murmured:

"Of course I'll stand by you."

"Thank you." She leaned forward impulsively and kissed me. "That means a lot to me, Lee—a hell of a lot." There was a ghost of a smile in her eyes. "I suppose you're wondering why I'm getting so exercised by Robert's problems. Maybe you think I'm just being noble. It's not that. I was engaged to Robert once. You know that, don't you? I'm terribly fond of him and Penelope is my oldest and best friend. She was swell to me at Oxford when I was just another long-legged American who wore *quite* the wrong clothes and who couldn't play hockey. It was I who moved heaven and earth to get her over here. I feel responsible for her." There was a brittle laugh. "Even though she did walk off with the only attractive man on the campus."

She gave me a queer complex look as if she felt she had maybe told me more than she had intended. But I was too confused to get any more than the gist of what she had said.

Marcia moved away from me, lighting another cigarette. As she did so, the door was pushed open. Lieutenant Trant was there, watching us from quiet, wary eyes.

"So you're still here, Lee Lovering," he said. "That's very efficient of you. Did you guess I'd be needing you again?"

## VIII

Obediently I followed Lieutenant Trant out onto the campus. There were already gray hints of evening in the sky. The broad plane trees threw quiet shadows across the neatly trimmed lawns, the formal beds of tulips glowed yellow, pink and white.

But, as we got into the car and turned up the narrow drive from the Hudnutts' to the center of the campus, the illusion of academic peace was completely shattered. The little knots of students were even more numerous, more excited than before, and I noticed an utterly unfamiliar sight, newsboys with sheaves of papers under their arms, scurrying from group to group.

Trant did not speak until we were right up to the Administration Building. Then he asked: "Which way for the infirmary?"

I had known, of course, that he would have to see Jerry, but as I gave the directions, I could hardly bear the thought of how Jerry's face would look when we broke the news.

When we drew up outside the infirmary I laid my hand on Trant's arm. "Please let me have a moment with him first," I begged. "It would be such a shock to have to hear from the police."

The detective looked down at me, a faintly amused smile in his eyes, almost as if he had guessed the way I felt about Jerry.

"Of course you can see him first, Miss Lovering. That's why I brought you along."

Jerry was lying back against the pillows, the bedclothes raised in a mound by the plaster cast on his foot. There was something pathetic about the helplessness of his strong young body. And in his face was the resignation of someone already prepared for the worst.

"Lee!" He swung forward and clutched my hand with a grip that hurt my fingers. "Have they found her?"

I sat down on the edge of the bed, and told him. I had wanted so desperately to say something that might comfort him. But there was

nothing but the bitter fact of Grace's death.

He didn't say a word until I had blurted out the whole story. We just sat close together in silence. His fingers were cold in mine.

At last he spoke, his voice hardly more than a whisper. "Who did it? Who do they think did it?"

"The naval officer hasn't—hasn't come forward yet to explain." With sudden uneasiness I remembered Lieutenant Trant waiting in the building. "Jerry, the detective from New York is here. He's going to want to see your letter from Grace."

His fingers slipped from mine. His blue eyes flickered. "He can't see it."

"But, Jerry, you've got to show it to him. You can't hold it back just because it says things about Norma."

"It's not that." A slight flush darkened his cheeks. "I can't show him that letter because I don't have it any more. I felt I ought to let Norma see it. There was another one, too, that Grace wrote me last week when we were in quarantine here. It was more or less on the same subject. Norma read them this morning. She—she tore them both up."

"Tore them up!"

"Please, Lee—" his voice was hoarse, pleading—"don't let him know she did it. She was crazy but she didn't realize that last letter was important. She couldn't have known Grace was dead. If he asks about it I'm going to say I destroyed it myself."

"But he'll want to see the pieces."

"Then I'll say I burnt them."

"But, Jerry, it's one of the last letters Grace wrote. Lieutenant Trant's going to think it said something important about—about the case. He'll know you couldn't have got out of bed to burn it. He'll think you are lying because ..."

"I don't give a damn what he thinks," broke in Jerry savagely. "I'm not going to have Norma—"

He stopped very quickly. We both of us turned to face the door as it opened on Lieutenant Trant.

He stood there, smiling that quiet, sympathetic smile of his. Then he came right over and sat on the other side of the bed. The whole thing couldn't have been less formal when he started to question Jerry. He covered more or less the same ground he had covered with me; the naval officer, the hectic correspondence, the state of mind that might have led up to Grace's unaccountable behavior the night before. Jerry, of course, had to answer as I had done. Although Grace had visited him almost every day before the infirmary had been quarantined, she had confided in him no more than she had in me.

"There's a point you may be able to help with, Mr. Hough," said Trant eventually. "Have you any idea where Grace could have met this naval officer?"

"There's only one place I can think of. Grace often spent her vacations with some old friends of Dad's—Dr. and Mrs. Wheeler in Baltimore. She was there last Christmas. It was just after that when the letters first started coming."

Trant nodded and made a note of the Baltimore address. He hesitated before his next question, his eyes fixed gravely on Jerry's pale face. "It's sort of tough bringing this up, but I've been talking to Dean Appel. He tells me your sister had a life insurance policy. I understand it's quite large."

Jerry nodded tersely. "We both had policies. Father took them out just six months before he died. When—when we lost our money, the court ruled my policy forfeit to the bankrupt estate since I was under twenty-one."

"But Grace was over twenty-one at the time?"

"Yes. She kept hers."

"And the amount?"

"My policy was for \$150,000. I think Grace's was the same."

"That's a lot of money." Trant's eyes were oddly abstracted. "Has it occurred to you, Mr. Hough, that your sister may have been persuaded into making out a will in favor of some interested party? If that were so—" he shrugged—"it would give a very strong motive."

“It’s not possible. Grace wouldn’t ever have made a will without telling me. Besides, our lawyer, Dean Appel’s father, advised her to surrender the policy when it fell due next month. We couldn’t keep up the payments.” His lips tightened as if he were making a desperate effort to keep himself steady. “She wanted me to have the cash value so I could take a post-graduate course in electrical engineering.”

“I see,” Lieutenant Trant was murmuring. “In that case, I presume you stand to benefit now by the insurance policy?”

“I suppose so.”

Without the slightest warning, Trant added: “I would like to see that letter your sister had delivered here last night.”

Instinctively I laid my hand on Jerry’s sleeve. I could feel his arm tense beneath the white cotton. He looked straight at Trant. “I’m afraid it’s destroyed. When it came I didn’t know anyone would want to see it. I tore it up.”

“You tore it up?” Lieutenant Trant repeated that last sentence, weighing each word as if they all had some special significance to him. “In that case you’d better tell me what she said.”

Jerry’s fingers tightened on the coverlet. “It had no possible bearing—on what’s happened.”

“It was delivered mysteriously in the middle of the night and yet it had no possible bearing on what’s happened?”

“That is what I said.”

“I see.” Once again Lieutenant Trant seemed to slip into some harmless day-dream of his own. “You understand, of course, that the insurance company may want to know what was in that letter before they pay on the policy. Since it was taken out less than two years ago the usual suicide clause is probably still valid. If they know you are suppressing a letter, in spite of the circumstances of death, they may charge that it was a note expressing intention to commit suicide. As you know, in the case of suicide, they are not bound to pay.”

He said this so casually that its implication didn’t make itself clear to me right away. It wasn’t until I saw the quick color flood Jerry’s

cheeks that I realized the detective was deliberately using shock tactics to force him into telling the contents of the letter.

I said heatedly: "What Jerry says is true. I read the letter this morning and it had absolutely nothing to do with the case. Grace was just writing about one of the girls hejæ, a girl she didn't like and Jerry did. She said some rather—rather nasty things about her."

"And the name of this girl?" asked Trant.

Jerry broke in sharply: "There's no need for you to know her name."

"But I would like to know what prompted your sister to write about that particular girl last night."

Jerry hesitated and I said impulsively: "She had a reason for thinking last night that Jerry was falling in love with her and she was sure the girl didn't love him. Grace was terribly fond of Jerry and she'd been unhappily in love herself. She said she didn't want him to suffer the way she'd suffered."

I hadn't meant to say it quite that way. It was only after I'd spoken that I realized I had taken an unwarranted slam at Norma.

Lieutenant Trant was watching us both. "So Grace implied she'd had an unfortunate love affair which had made her suffer. I suppose neither of you would know to whom she was referring?"

Jerry shook his head. I ventured: "Perhaps the naval officer?"

"Or Dr. Hudnutt?" added Lieutenant Trant. "Or Steven Carteris?"

I wondered uneasily just what was in Trant's mind. But he gave me no clue. He merely rose abruptly and crossed to the door.

"Once again, Mr. Hough, I want you to know just how sorry I am about all this. Good-by."

When I made no move to follow, he added: "I'd like you to come with me, Miss Lovering."

I had time only to smile at Jerry and to catch his answering smile, faint and very tired.

As the detective and I moved down the white corridor of the infirmary I had the very distinct sensation that he had not wanted me to stay behind.



## IX

I felt utterly exhausted as we stepped into the dusk of the campus and stood together under a tall clump, of rhododendrons near which the Lieutenant had parked his car. Trant lit a cigarette, glancing at me above the pale flare of the struck match.

“Well, it’s been a tough day for you, Lee Lovering. But you’ve got what it takes.”

I didn’t reply. I was thinking how queer it was that I could like this young man, admire him, and yet be scared to death of him.

He tossed the burning match into the bushes and added suddenly: “If you felt like it, you could make me an invaluable ally.”

“An ally?”

This embarrassed me because I had already allied myself with Marcia and the Hudnutts—against him, if necessary. And I had the uncomfortable feeling, too, that he was aware of the fact.

“I’m not going to ask you to snoop into private lives.” His eyes, faintly amused, were watching me through the dusk. “I was just wondering whether you would keep your eyes open—wide open.”

I knew Lieutenant Trant never made a gesture unless he had a very sound reason for making it. This request was some obscure kind of challenge. It was in that spirit I accepted it.

“All right,” I said. “I’ll keep my eyes open.” Then, impulsively, I added: “But you don’t really—I mean you can’t think anyone here at Wentworth killed Grace?”

“A policeman has very unwholesome thoughts, Lee Lovering. But a wise policeman keeps them to himself.” He took a small notebook from his breast pocket. “When I’m working on a case I always have this book with me. On the left hand side of the page I put down what I know. On the right hand side I put down what I don’t know, but what I’d give a great deal to find out. It’s a hangover from my methodical days at Princeton.” To my complete surprise he added: “It might

interest you to see the record to date.” He opened the book and handed it to me. There was just light enough for me to make out his neat writing.

On the left hand side of the page I read this single entry.

### FACTS KNOWN

The murderer either owns or has access to a car which was used to take the body from (?) to the river. Suspect all cars out after 2 P.M.

As I stared at those words my thoughts were uneasily full of the two automobiles I had seen dashing across the campus last night; the automobiles about which I had no intention of telling Trant.

The right hand side of the page was almost full. As I read it I realized that here were crystallized all the most vital issues in the ghastly puzzle of my roommate's death.

### FACTS TO BE FOUND

#### WHO

- (1) Owned the red slicker (N. B. a woman's)?
- (2) Delivered Grace's three letters?
- (3) Received the two not yet accounted for?
- (4) Wrote Grace those numerous special deliveries?

#### WHERE

- (1) Was Grace actually killed?
- (2) Is L. L.'s galyak fur coat?
- (3) Is Grace's pocketbook?
- (4) Was the naval officer's hat?
- (5) Did Hudnutt get the scar on forehead?

I handed the book back without a word. As I did so a sound caught my attention which set every nerve in my body on edge.

A faint rustling behind us as if someone were creeping through the rhododendrons and moving very slowly and stealthily toward us.

The sound stopped almost as soon as it had started, but I glanced quickly at Trant to see whether he had noticed it too. His face, as usual, was inscrutable. With a cheerful nod, he stepped into his car and switched on the headlights so that they pointed straight into the rhododendrons.

Then, turning on the ignition, he leaned out of the window. "I've got a job for you already, Lee Lovering. Root around in those bushes, find your friend Steve Carteris and ask him just what part of our conversation it was that interested him most."

With that he was gone.

I stared at the patch of rhododendrons. The branches were moving now and, almost at once, a tall dark figure was at my side.

"Steve!"

Steve Carteris gripped my arm. He was staring after Trant's disappearing automobile. He said, "The papers said that fellow was the smartest detective on the New York force. They ought to have seen him pull that little trick."

A bunch of students appeared around a corner of the drive and his grip on my arm tightened.

"I've got to see you alone, Lee," he whispered urgently. "I've been trying to get you all afternoon. Where can we go?"

I suggested the ornamental garden by the gym, one of the few places on the campus where a male and female student had a fair chance of being undisturbed. We reached it by a short cut through the bushes.

It was a charming spot, with a fountain playing into a marble pool. In the gathering twilight it looked particularly lovely. A late flowering forsythia drooped canary yellow close to the brim of the pool, there was an all-pervading fragrance of narcissus, and brooding over the lily-pads stood a little German figurine of wrought-iron, a bearded dwarf with a red cap and a wise, solemn face.

Steve and I sat on the stone bench by the pool. For a moment or two we did not speak. Steve was staring down between his knees at the intricate mosaic of the paving.

“Why, oh why was I such a fool?” he muttered, more to himself than to me. “Lord, what a mess!”

I was terribly fond of Steve and I felt terribly sorry for him now. I put out my hand and touched his shoulder. He raised his head, and his face in the half light was haggard and grim.

“I want you to know how badly I feel about all this, Lee,” he said quietly. “You were fond of Grace, weren’t you? I’d like Jerry to know how sorry I am, too. I feel pretty low about that dust-up he and I had. It was about Grace and ...”

He broke off, adding with a hard, rather savage laugh, “I ought to apologize, too, for walking out on my party last night. Heaven knows I stepped with both feet out of the frying pan into the fire.”

I knew, of course, that Steve had not returned to the dormitory until four o’clock in the morning, but this seemed a fragile link in the chain of mysterious circumstances, and one only distantly connected with the major tragedy of Grace’s death.

“I simply had to leave the Amber Club when I did,” Steve insisted, taking my hands and pulling me round to face him. “And I had to go somewhere and do something that simply had to be done. I’m not telling anyone about that. But later on something happened which someone must tell the police.”

“You mean you’d like them to know the second half of the story without having to tell them exactly why you left the Amber Club.” I smiled at him a little frostily. “I suppose it was something to do with a girl?”

“Yes, there’s a girl in it, indirectly—and directly.” He looked up at me and I caught a glimpse of the old twinkle in his eyes. “I thought you’d have guessed, Lee. I’ve got it badly this time. Haven’t you noticed how I’ve given up running around and raising hell like I used to? Of course I’ve had to reform some since Dad decided to run for President, but that wasn’t the only reason.”

I said "Oh" rather limply. Sitting there in the early spring darkness with Steve's fingers warm on mine, his eyes bright and eager on my face, I felt a vague stirring of jealousy for this unknown girl.

He moved a shade closer, and perhaps for the first time I was conscious of how dangerously attractive he was. "I thought you'd guessed I was in love, Lee, because you're in love, too, aren't you?"

When I didn't answer he repeated the question: "You're in love with Jerry Hough, aren't you?"

This time he evidently took my silence as assent, for he murmured: "And there's Norma. I guess we're both in the same boat, except that I have far less of a prayer than you."

"Aren't we getting off the point, Steve?" I said, pulling my hands away. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to tell that fellow Trant a crazy story without letting on who told it to you. Can you do that?"

"I can try," I said bleakly. "What's the story?"

He turned away so that I could not see his face. Then very slowly he said: "I saw Grace Hough last night, Lee, hours after she'd left the theater."

For a second I felt too shaken to say anything, but at last I managed to ask: "You—you don't mean you had a date with her?" Steve shook his head. "I ran into her by accident about three-thirty in the morning. I was driving back from New York and I stopped for gas at that service station just outside the village. There was another car there with a man in it—and Grace. I didn't recognize her at first, but just as I pulled up by the pump she got out of the car. I heard her say something to the fellow she was with about telephoning; then she went off into the station and I knew it was Grace all right."

"But the man with her?" I asked quickly. "Did you see him?"

"Not very well. He never got out of the car. But I guess he was the guy Nick Dodd said you saw Grace with outside the theater. He wasn't wearing a hat and you could have seen his hair a mile off. It was red as a Stop sign."

“So the naval officer did drive her back,” I said, trying to get some logical sequence to my thoughts. “But who on earth was Grace telephoning at that time of night?”

“Haven’t the remotest idea. But she seemed kind of excited and pepped up when she came out.”

“What coat was she wearing?”

“What coat?” Steve hesitated a moment. “When I saw her she was wearing a light colored fur like the one you have.”

So my hunch had been wrong. It must have been later that Grace made that bewildering change of coats.

Steve’s profile was only a silhouette now in the deepening darkness. “I’d hoped she wouldn’t see me,” he went on, “but she must have recognized the car. She came over and peered in through the window in that short-sighted way of hers and said: ‘Oh, Steve, wait a minute. I’m going to want you.’ Then she calmly walked over to the other car and said something to the red-head. I don’t know what it was, but he just up and drove away toward New York—as fast as he could make it.”

“You mean he left her there with you?”

“He left her with me all right.” Steve’s laugh tilted a trifle unsteadily. “She got into my car without so much as a by-your-leave and said: ‘You don’t mind doing a bit of chauffeuring for an old friend, do you, Steve?’”

I caught my breath. “Then it was you who drove her back to college?”

“It was I who started driving her back,” Steve corrected, a rather unpleasant smile twisting his mouth. “But the whole thing was so completely crazy I’d have thought Grace was tight if I hadn’t known she never touched liquor. I was just starting up the car when she did something perfectly cockeyed. She fumbled in her bag and brought out two letters.”

“Two letters,” I exclaimed. “Sure it wasn’t three, Steve?”

“No, she only gave me two. One was for Jerry and the other was very formally addressed. It was to—Mrs. Penelope Hudnutt, Dean of

Women.”

That came as a real shock; a shock which left no room for speculation about that third letter which seemed to have vanished into thin air. Grace had written a letter to Penelope Hudnutt last night and Penelope had said nothing about it to Lieutenant Trant. I could not fail to see the almost appalling implications of that fact, particularly when it was linked up with what Marcia had told me and my memory of the Dean’s yellow sedan rushing out into the night.

“Go on, Steve,” I begged, horribly curious and yet somehow dreading what would come next.

“That seemed a little too screwy even for Grace. I asked her right out why the hell she couldn’t deliver—or mail—her letters for herself. That’s when she dropped her bombshell. She said she wasn’t going back to college right away. She had a date to meet someone—somewhere else.”

“A date at that time of night!” I exclaimed. Then hardly daring to ask it, I said: “Where?”

“She wanted me to drop her at the disused quarry—you know, just where the road from Wentworth turns to join the New York highway.”

I suppose I might have guessed that from the beginning—that the old quarry was destined to have a far more terrible significance in the case than had at first appeared. But when I heard Steve actually name it as the place of Grace’s rendezvous, I felt suddenly numb.

My voice sounded hoarse and far away as I said: “And you did drop her at the quarry, Steve?”

“I didn’t want to. I felt certain she was going to do something crazy. I knew I ought to stop her if I could. But—well, I just couldn’t.” He was speaking now with obvious reluctance. “I know it sounds low to slam Grace at a time like this, but she pulled a mean trick on me, Lee. She forced me to drive her to that quarry.”

“But how—?”

“She had me just where she wanted me.” There was a harsh, dangerous note in Steve’s voice. “You see I was fond of Grace once. Remember how we used to run around together—all three of us, and

Jerry, too? Well, I was damn fool enough to tell Grace something at that time. I wanted her advice as to how a nice girl would react to a certain none too savory incident in my none too savory past. I told her the incident and I told her who the girl was that I was crazy about. Last night she threw the thing up at me. She threatened to spill the dirt if I didn't do as she asked me."

"Grace actually threatened to queer you with your girl?" I exclaimed.

"That's not the half of it. If that had been all I'd have told Grace to go to hell and tipped her out into the nearest ditch." He gave a short laugh. "It just so happens she couldn't have hurt me in that direction because I haven't a prayer with the girl anyhow. But she could have raised merry hell in the Carteris family."

He paused: "You know, of course, Lee, that Dad is as poor as a sharecropper and he's governor in the most puritanical state of the Union. If Grace had come out with what she knew, it would not only have ruined his chances as presidential nominee, it would—or it might have almost ruined the family financially." I didn't press him for details. I was too startled and shocked by the new side of Grace's character which was gradually emerging from the ghastly tangle of last night. In the past I had always seen her as a pathetic, slightly colorless girl lost in her own wispy daydreams. Now there was not only Robert Hudnutt, there was Steve, too. Grace Hough had put the screws on both of them.

For the first time I could see that it was not so utterly incredible after all that Grace Hough should have come to a violent end.

The stars were sliding out, very bright in the cloudless sky. A pale shaft of light struck down on the little manikin at the edge of the pool, giving him a false, rather sinister illusion of life.

Steve said suddenly: "So she forced my hand, Lee. I did take her to the quarry and I left her there. It had started to drizzle. I—when I saw her last she was standing at the mouth of the quarry in the rain, all het up and excited, peering down the road, waiting for somebody."



His hand searched for mine again and found it. "That's all I know about Grace's death. I swear it, Lee."

I believed him. There was some stubborn factor inside me which refused even to consider the possibility that anyone I was fond of could deliberately lie to me on anything so vital.

"You do believe me, don't you, Lee?" Steve was asking urgently.

"Of course I believe you." Suddenly I felt utterly tired and spent. "So that's what you want me to pass on to Lieutenant Trant?"

"Yes. You see that he's got to know, not only that Grace came back to Wentworth, but also about the date at the quarry. They're probably the crux of the whole thing. Of course her date might have been with the red-haired naval officer coming back again, but it does look rather as if my story will eliminate him." His voice was quiet. "But if he is counted out, I've got enough sense to realize just what kind of a spot it puts me in. I seem to be slated for the well-worn role of Last Person to See Deceased Alive."

Impulsively I said: "Steve, why not come right out and tell him your real reason for leaving the Amber Club last night? It'd be safer."

I could just make out the thin set line of his mouth. "No, Lee, I can't tell him."

"And you won't tell me?"

"Not even you."

"But there's one thing I've got to know." I forced myself to ask the question which had been bothering me so insistently. "Last night when you left the Club so suddenly, you told me not to discuss the matter with Grace. You had a telephone call. You've got to tell me if your leaving or that telephone call had anything to do with Grace."

He hesitated before answering. "I can tell you this much. It had no direct bearing on her death. But there's something else I want you to know, Lee. Something pretty queer which I couldn't help overhearing last night. It happened after I left Grace. When I was delivering the second of those two letters for her."

I nodded, inwardly prepared for almost anything.

“First I slipped the one for Jerry under the door of the infirmary, then I went over to the Hudnutts’ house. Just as I got on the front porch, I heard voices inside the hall. Naturally I didn’t want any faculty member to see me at that time of night, so I dodged back behind some bushes. The door opened and a man and a woman came out. I couldn’t have moved without their seeing me. They were Hudnutt and Marcia Parrish.”

He broke off, adding rather awkwardly: “I hate to sound like a snooper, but do you think Hudnutt and Marcia Parrish could be having some sort of an—affair?”

“It’s absolutely impossible,” I said indignantly. But immediately after I had spoken, I thought of Marcia passionately pleading with me to stand by Robert.

“Don’t want to talk scandal,” Steve was saying, looking down at his shoes. “It’s just that what I heard them say made me wonder. I could see Hudnutt’s face plainly in the light from the hall. He looked like death. Then I heard him say: ‘We’ve got to tell her, Marcia. It’s ruining my work—everything.’ And Marcia Parrish said: ‘We can’t tell her just now, Robert.’ And Hudnutt gave a desperate sort of laugh and said: ‘Don’t be surprised if I commit murder, that’s all.’ Marcia Parrish laughed, too. She said: ‘If there’s any killing to be done, leave that to me. Women are so much better at that kind of thing, and I’m as deeply involved as you are.’”

Steve was running his fingers through his thick black hair. “I wouldn’t tell even you what I heard next, Lee, if there was any chance of my having got it balled up. But I heard it. I swear I did. It was Hudnutt who said it. He took both of Marcia Parrish’s arms and said: ‘I don’t know what I’d do without you, my dear. I’ll never forget that even when my hands were stained with blood you stood by me and rescued me from the particular hell reserved for murderers.’ That was all. I thought he would see Marcia Parrish into her car, but it was Hudnutt who got into the car and Miss Parrish who went back into the house.”

“Marcia stayed and Robert went off in a car?”

He nodded. "I pushed Grace's note for the Dean in their mailbox right away, then I took my car to the college garage and went back to Broome."

Coming on top of everything else, that was just one thing too much for my exhausted brain. I didn't even try to make sense of it.

Very weakly I said: "And that's all? You—you didn't see anything else?"

"Well, I had my own problems to worry me and, naturally, I didn't know about Grace at the time. I didn't pay as much attention to it all as I might have done. But I do remember seeing one thing just after I'd parked at the garage. Mrs. Hudnutt's big yellow sedan went by me hell for leather. I had the crazy idea that Penelope had gone off chasing her wandering husband. I didn't see anyone else. Wait ... I did, too." He gave his old spontaneous laugh. "Just before I got to Broome I heard what I thought was a wild animal charging across the campus. Gave me quite a scare at first. What d'you think it was? Your Newhampton boy-friend, the Big Appel, off for one of his small hour rowing practices on the river, all fat knees and shorts and sculls."

Somewhere, from far away across the campus, I heard a boy shouting and another boy calling back. It reminded me that college life was still moving along its leisurely way—that, in spite of the miasma which enshrouded us, Wentworth students were working, not working, thinking of Saturday's game and what to wear for the Senior Ball—with Grace little more to them than an ephemeral thrill.

The contrast between all that and us was suddenly more than I could bear. Almost before I realized, I was leaning against Steve's shoulder, crying like a baby.

One of his arms slipped around me, supporting me. His warm fingers were stroking my hair.

"Bear up, darling," he whispered. "I know it's tough as hell. But we've got to take it."

I hated breaking down that way.

“Sorry, Steve,” I faltered. “But suddenly everything seemed pretty grim.”

We got up and stood there, facing each other in the vivid starlight. With a quick, impulsive gesture, he drew me toward him and kissed me very gently on the lips.

“It’ll stop being grim—one day,” he said.

We turned our backs on the fountain and moved away toward the campus.

But before we left the formal garden I caught one last glimpse of the little manikin crouched over the lily-pads, intent and vaguely evil.

I had the distinct impression that he was leering at me.

## X

Steve and I felt we couldn't face Commons that evening. We sneaked off together to the one cafeteria in Wentworth. We ate as little as we talked. Grace seemed very near and every attempt at conversation led inevitably back to her.

I suppose it was about eight-thirty when I said goodnight to Steve and returned to Pigot. My room was somehow different. I noticed that my work notes, which were usually strewn at random, were heaped in neat piles; the things on the dressing-table had been rearranged. Only gradually did it occur to me that the place had been searched by the police.

Even here Grace's ghost followed me.

My talk with Steve had worried me terribly, not only because he too had been caught up in the web of suspicion, but because what he said made it so very evident that Marcia Parrish knew very much more than she had told me.

I had almost made up my mind to go and see her when a voice behind me drawled:

"So you're in circulation again, darling."

Norma Saylor lounged into the room, stunning in a box-sleeved housecoat of white and gold brocade.

She sank down onto Grace's empty bed, watching me sardonically through long lashes. "They tell me you and the New York detective are soul-mates."

At first I attributed the malice in her voice to jealousy. Norma was just the type to envy my unenviable position in the spotlight. Then, for one instant, I saw the lashes flicker and I realized she was nervous.

Her voice was just a shade too casual as she added: "By the way, has your Sherlock invaded the infirmary yet?"

I knew then exactly what was bothering her and I was too tired to beat about the bush.

“You needn’t worry,” I said. “Lieutenant Trant doesn’t know it was you who tore up Jerry’s letters from Grace. He doesn’t even know your name was mentioned in them. Jerry said he’d destroyed them himself, and I backed him up.”

“You backed him up?” Norma tried to conceal a very obvious relief behind exaggerated nonchalance. “My dear, how sweet of you to do that for me.”

“I didn’t do it for you,” I said bluntly. “I did it because Jerry was fool enough to want to keep you out of it and I promised to stand by him. Incidentally, by destroying that letter you may easily have done him out of Grace’s insurance money. But then, that wouldn’t interest you, would it?”

Norma patted one delicate ear and said: “I rather suspected you’d twist things round so that I’d be the villain of the piece.”

As she stared at me, her red lips parted in a smile, I thought about that insurance money for the first time and realized just how it might affect us all. I wanted Jerry to have it, of course. But, if everything worked out, he would be comparatively rich—rich enough for Norma to marry.

I think it was the realization of this, coupled with Norma’s maddening condescension, that made me decide I would come out in the open and put up a fight for Jerry.

As a declaration of war, I said: “I’d very much like to know what Lieutenant Trant would think if he heard you’d torn up those letters.”

Norma propped herself up on one brocaded elbow. “And what do you mean by that little crack?”

“Yesterday when you accepted Jerry’s orchids and, on your own showing, almost accepted his fraternity pin, he was practically penniless. Now he’ll presumably be rich. Grace would have been a real stumbling block to his marrying you. Now—well, she isn’t a stumbling block any more.”

Very slowly and deliberately Norma lit a cigarette, her eyes behind the blue smoke intent as a cat's. "This is intensely amusing, darling. Go on."

"It gets funnier and funnier," I said, and had the satisfaction of getting an impatient "Well?" from Norma.

"The police know Grace wrote a letter last night," I said. "A letter to someone who hasn't admitted it yet. Supposing it was to you, making a date somewhere. You have a car. You could easily have gone out last night and met Grace. Suppose she told you she'd found out something about you, something she threatened to let everyone else know unless you promised to lay off Jerry. Wouldn't that explain just why you tore up the letter she wrote about you to Jerry—so that the police wouldn't even begin to connect you with Grace's death?"

For one lightning moment Norma's eyes narrowed and I detected a gleam of genuine fear. But it went as quickly as it came, giving way to that bored languorous stare of hers.

"I've got to hand it to you, Lee," she said at length. "Even Grace, who had me tabbed as the fiend incarnate, wouldn't have had the nerve to come right out and accuse me of murder." One negligent finger flicked ash onto the carpet. "You at least are specific. All Grace could ever bring against me was the fact that I could get men and she couldn't.

"I'm frightfully sorry to disappoint you, Lee." She was still smiling with dangerous sweetness. "But I didn't murder Grace Hough. Although I'm not hypocritical enough to pretend she isn't better off dead, I am sorry for Jerry, of course. But I'm mostly sorry for him for having such a poisonous little beast of a sister. Grace wrote that letter about me just because she was spiteful and jealous." She shrugged indifferently. "You can't blame me for tearing it up—and others like it."

"Nice if the police heard your gentle comments about Grace. Sounds like the missing motive," I said.

Norma got up from the bed and started straightening imaginary creases from the gilded housecoat. "The police won't hear me being vitriolic about Grace unless you pass the news on to your little detective buddy." She looked up, the cigarette dangling from her lips. "Of course this is all too divine for you, darling. Now Grace has poisoned Jerry's mind against me, all you have to do is to sit smugly back and wait till he returns to his languishing boyhood's love."

The smile suddenly drained from her eyes, leaving them hard as agate. "Well, listen to me, Lee Lovering. If you get Jerry Hough, it will be over my dead body."

I said, "Don't make it **too** attractive, darling."

But I was talking to an empty room. Norma had gone.



## XI

That foolish spat with Norma marked a very definite change in my point of view. Not only did it decide me to put up a fight for Jerry; it also made me conscious of exactly how far I was becoming involved emotionally in the tragedy of my roommate's death. I knew too much now not to have to try to learn the complete truth.

It was the realization of this that made me decide to follow my earlier hunch and go to see Marcia Parrish. I felt I knew enough against her to force her into telling me the truth.

It was fairly late when I slipped out of Pigot and started across the dark campus to the row of little faculty houses behind the library. My fellow students must have retired to their dormitories, for I passed no one as I turned down the side drive and moved up the path to the wisteria-covered cottage where Marcia lived alone.

She came to the door almost immediately when I knocked.

"You, Lee!" From the guarded surprise in her voice I had the impression that she had been expecting someone else.

I followed her into the living room which was bathed in the warm glow from two shaded reading lamps. Marcia didn't ask me to sit down; she didn't even say anything. We just stood there looking at each other.

Finally I said: "You know a lot more about Grace's death than you told me, don't you?"

Marcia was watching me, her eyes suddenly cold. "Why should you think that?"

"Oh, I'm not just being inquisitive," I said wearily. "It's just that I've got to know. You said we should stand by each other. If we are going to hold things back from the police, we mustn't get our wires crossed. You see, I know quite a bit I haven't told you. For example, I know you left the college last night in your car."

“So you know that?” Her voice was very quiet. For a moment she seemed to be struggling with indecision. Then she said: “I suppose you’re right. I suppose I was very foolish to tell you only half the truth.”

She took my hand. I could feel a slight throbbing in her cool fingers. “But you’ve got to understand one thing, Lee. Whatever we’re doing, it’s for the good of the college, to prevent a meaningless scandal and to—to preserve our own happiness.” She withdrew her hand and dropped into a chair. I sat down, too. When she spoke again, her tone was dry, unemotional. “Robert and I are keeping it back from the police that Grace telephoned the Hudnutt house last night—long after she’d left the theater.”

That didn’t come with as much of a shock as it might have done. I knew from Steve that Grace had phoned someone.

I said quietly: “She called from the service station outside Wentworth, didn’t she? That’s one of the things I know.”

Marcia’s lashes flickered. That was the only indication of surprise she showed. “I’ll tell you the whole thing, Lee, the whole damn thing. After the theater, Harold Appel, Penelope, Robert and I all drove back together. Harold Appel left us at the college. I went home with the Hudnutts. Penelope hadn’t been feeling well and went straight to bed.” She paused, adding wryly: “As confidences are bound to be going by the board tonight, I may as well tell you she’s going to have a baby. At her age women are apt to have a rough time and that’s one reason why Robert wants her kept out of this beastly business as much as possible.”

I suppose my face must have registered the surprise I felt because Marcia gave an ironical laugh.

“Poor Penny, she’s so anxious none of the students should know until it’s all respectably over. She feels in some obscure, British way that it isn’t quite proper for a Dean of Women to have a baby.”

The laughter drained out of her voice. “It makes it all far worse for Robert, too. Last night after Penny had gone to bed, I stayed downstairs with him for hours trying to calm him down. All he could

think of was Grace and the scene she'd thrown at the theater. And then, on top of it all, the phone rang and Grace was on the wire."

"What did she say?"

"She was perfectly normal. She apologized for the things she'd said at the theater. Said she must have been crazy. She told Robert her friend had left her at the service station. She wanted Robert to drive her back to Wentworth."

Rather shakily I said: "And he refused?"

"No. After all, when any girl student gets stranded she's supposed to call the Dean of Women. Penelope was asleep. Grace couldn't be left there. Robert told her someone would go right away to pick her up."

I knew then, of course, that something was terribly wrong. Grace had made Steve drive her away from the service station to the quarry. Why on earth would she have done that if Robert Hudnutt had already consented to drive her back to college?

Marcia was saying: "I tried to make Robert let me go instead. But he wouldn't. He didn't want Grace to know I had been there at the house with him at that time of night. He thought if she found out—" She broke off, a faint flush staining her cheeks.

The sequence was gradually clarifying itself in my mind. "And he did go. That was just before the letter for the Dean of Women was delivered."

Marcia drew in her breath sharply.

"I know the person who delivered that letter," I explained. "I can't say who it is. But he told me everything. He saw you and Dr. Hudnutt there and ..."

"And heard what we said, I suppose," added Marcia with a thin, humorless laugh. "That's really rather funny. You don't realize until something terrible like murder comes into your life how easy it is to misinterpret everything one sees and hears. I can explain what Robert said to me and what I said to Robert, Lee. But it's more important for you to know what Robert did. He did drive to that

service station; he did look for Grace. But she wasn't there. The place was locked up. There was no sign of her."

I said: "And you—what did you do?"

"I did practically the same thing." Marcia rubbed a hand wearily across her smooth white forehead. "Just after Robert had gone, your friend delivered Grace's letter. I heard it drop into the box. I looked at the envelope and I knew right away it was Grace's writing. I had the feeling it would be something Penelope shouldn't see. I didn't trust Grace Hough—not one inch. I kept the letter, Lee. I didn't give it to Penelope."

That, of course, allayed my suspicions against the Dean of Women, which had been growing ever since Steve had told me about that letter.

"I took it for granted Grace had delivered the letter herself," Marcia was saying. "And it made me think the call from the service station must have been a hoax. I decided to find out whether Grace had come back or not."

I understood then. "So you were the person who crept into my room last night?"

"Then you did see me? I hoped not to waken you." There was a sharp hiss as Marcia struck a match and held it to a cigarette. "When I saw Grace's bed was empty, I realized someone else must have delivered the letter. I was worried then, worried for Robert. I thought the best thing to do was to follow him in my car. I did. I drove to the service station. Of course, there was no sign of Grace."

She stared down at the dim roses of the carpet. "I drove straight back to the Hudnutts' house. The garage door was open and I saw Robert's car was there again. I didn't want to run the risk of waking Penelope by going into the house and I was pretty tired. I went home to bed. But I talked to Robert this morning. That's when he told me that he hadn't found Grace either."

We sat there in that quiet room, looking at each other. She must have guessed what I was thinking, for she took my arm quickly and

said: “You know where Grace went from the service station, don’t you?”

“I do.” My voice sounded absurdly unlike itself. “She had a date with someone somewhere else. She was driven there to the quarry—the quarry where she met Dr. Hudnutt yesterday afternoon.”

“The quarry!” For one second Marcia’s eyes were completely off their guard and I detected the same blind panic I had seen in those of Robert Hudnutt earlier in the day. “Whom was she going to meet at the quarry?”

“I don’t know. I only wish I did.” Then I added hesitantly: “But there’s that letter Grace wrote to the Dean. Are you going to show it to Lieutenant Trant?”

Marcia’s face went suddenly grim. “I most certainly am not.”

“Then you read it?”

“I read it. And I shall be thankful as long as I live that I did. It wasn’t just malicious; it was more than that; it was diabolically cruel. Last night when I read it and realized what Grace Hough had tried to do, I think I could have willingly murdered her myself.”

Marcia rose. Very deliberately she crossed to a desk and brought out a letter.

“I didn’t destroy it and I want you to read it. Perhaps you’ll begin to understand why I don’t have a great deal of sympathy with Grace Hough.”

She gave me the letter. With uncertain fingers I pulled out a single sheet of notepaper.

DEAN HUDNUTT:

It must be interesting to be married to a man who has been having an illicit affair with your great friend, Marcia Parrish—to a man who not only destroys women’s souls, but their bodies, too. If, by any chance, you are in ignorance of his delightful capabilities, ask him exactly who it was who stayed at the Wheeler Sanitarium with him as his “sister.”

Then read the California *Examiner* for March 3rd, 1936, pages 3 and 6. Then ask him *exactly* what happened at the quarry.

Your sincere well-wisher,  
GRACE HOUGH

I stared blankly at the note and then at Marcia.

“But what does it mean?” I gasped. “Why on earth should Grace...?”

“Exactly. Why on earth should Grace do a thing like that to us? I don’t know. I haven’t the slightest idea. But she did.” Marcia’s voice was thick with disgust. “You’d better hear what she knew about Robert and what it was she tried, so kindly, to pass along to Penelope. It happened out in California when he was teaching there. His first job. He killed a girl in a car accident, one of his own students. She was a neurotic, emotional creature who imagined she was in love with him and one night she got him to drive her home from a college dance. Robert had taken one or two drinks during the evening, but the girl was very drunk. When he wouldn’t take her to a night club or somewhere she wanted to go, she made a grab for the wheel. There was a collision and she was killed—rather horribly mutilated. It was only by a miracle that Robert wasn’t killed too. That was when he got the scar on his temple. You say a friend of yours overheard us talking together last night. I guess he heard Robert say something about his hands being stained with blood. That’s what he was referring to.”

Marcia threw back her head. “Robert was arrested for drunken driving. They acquitted him, but he had to leave the college. You can imagine how a sensitive person would react to such scandal.”

As I listened, I felt a wild, burning anger against Grace.

“I’m the only person Robert ever told, Lee. I was madly in love with him from the minute he came to Wentworth. I admit it. I forced him to love me; forced him to depend on me. We got engaged more for

propriety than because we intended to get married. I wanted to, but he wouldn't. Although he didn't know it, he wasn't really in love with me. He just clung to me as something he needed, just as he needed the liquor and the sleeping drugs which he'd been taking more and more to help him forget. He got to a stage when he'd developed a drug addiction. He was in a hopeless state. I persuaded him to go to Dr. Wheeler's sanitarium."

"Dr. Wheeler!" T echoed. "You mean the Houghs' friend whom Grace used to stay with?"

"Yes. He's one of the best neurologists in the country. He's got a country sanitarium where the patients live in cottages like a club. As soon as he saw Robert, he knew he'd have to keep him there at least a month. I didn't dare let Robert stay all that time alone. I called myself Mrs. Hudnutt and went to live with him as his wife." She paused. "One day when we were there, we ran into Grace. It was just after her father's death. She'd had a sort of nervous breakdown and was recovering from it there."

I thought of the overheard conversation Steve had passed on to me. Marcia had said: "*I'm as much involved as you.*" I was beginning to see just how true that was.

"It was rather embarrassing—" the shadow of a smile flickered for a moment over her lips—"to be caught living in sin by one of your own students. I knew there would be awkward questions so I did something I shall regret to my dying day. I told Grace about Robert, told her why we were both at the sanitarium, about the car accident and its aftermath. It was the worst error of judgment I've ever made."

Marcia made no move to take the letter back from me. "You know everything now, Lee. You know exactly what sort of a woman Wentworth has for the head of its English department. You know what a frightfully strong motive both Robert and I had for murdering Grace Hough. You see what Trant is bound to think if ever he reads that letter and knows we were both out in our cars just about the time the murder must have been committed." She paused and when she spoke again her voice was like ice. "I told you this afternoon that

both our lives are in your hands. I tell you now that we are both innocent of murder. If you want to take that letter to the police—I can do nothing to stop you.”

It’s strange that never for the slightest second was I in doubt as to what I was going to do. With fingers that shook slightly, I picked up a box of matches, struck a match and held the flame to the edge of the letter.

It crinkled, blackened. I let the ashes drop to the floor, then I stamped them into the carpet with my heel.



## XII

I left Marcia's house in a daze. It was not until I was back in my own room, trying to think, that I remembered what was probably one of the most vital facts in the whole case. Marcia had been out last night in her car, and Robert had been out in his. But was there anyone in Wentworth who knew what I knew—that Penelope's yellow sedan, too, had dashed headlong through the rainy darkness during those crucial moments before the murder was committed?

I tortured myself with thinking of this, wondering whether I should have told Marcia and, if I had told her, whether she would have been able to offer an explanation.

Grace had been moving through a drama as logically and relentlessly worked out as *Phèdre*. I was certain of that. But to me it was a drama of utter inconsistencies, a series of mysterious and contradictory scenes with no basic motivation. And at least one of the central characters was still a meaningless shadow. I had seen Grace's red-haired naval officer; I had spoken to him. But apart from those brief moments at the Cambridge Theater he had never once broken into the realms of reality.

Had he written those innumerable special delivery letters to Grace? Where had she met him? Where had he and Grace spent those hours between the end of the play and their arrival at the service station? Why had he gone off and left Grace there? Had he been planning to meet her again later at the quarry?

Endless questions with no answers to them.... They followed me remorselessly into a troubled sleep.

I did not wake up until one o'clock next day. Afterward I learnt that I owed the blessing of my prolonged oblivion to Elaine Sayler, who had played Angel with a Flaming Sword in keeping the curious from my room.

She was hovering over my bed when I opened my eyes.

“Darling, you’re not to move. Penelope’s orders. The whole world has gone completely mad and I’ve been battling with press photographers who are simply dying to snap *The Room Where The Murdered Girl Dressed For Her Last Party*.

“Now, I’m going to get you some breakfast with my own fairy fingers. Just relax and enjoy yourself with these.” She threw a sheaf of newspapers on the bed, exclaiming as she turned to whirl out of the room, “You don’t mind being locked in, do you?”

I picked up the top paper. Somehow it came as a shock to see Grace staring at me from the front page. It was a prettified, posed portrait which had been taken four years ago at the time of her coming out.

I glanced over the columns. There was nothing I didn’t know already. The naval officer had not yet come forward; the police were still entertaining the possibility of a hit-and-run driver or an unknown prowler who had murdered Grace for the fur coat and her pocketbook. I detected the influence of Lieutenant Trant in that conservative statement.

Jerry and I came in for our share of publicity. Grace’s brother was portrayed as an embryonic Edison in the field of electrical engineering and Wentworth’s most popular athlete. I was loathsomely referred to as an *elegant socialite* and credited with knowing dark secrets about Grace which could not at the present time be revealed.

I had just thrown the paper on the floor when Elaine burst in again carrying my breakfast tray. I could tell from the upward tilt of her eyebrows and the compression of her lips that something had happened.

“Lord, now let me depart in peace,” she exclaimed irreverently, “for I have just seen with my own jaundiced eyes the most magnificent spectacle of all time.” She put down the tray and fanned herself with my napkin. “Darling, Penelope walked into Commons just now and—right there in front of everyone—she laid our Norma so low that a worm would have towered over her like the Chrysler Building.”

“What on earth are you talking about?” I asked, taking a gulp of black coffee.

“Lookit here.” Elaine snatched up a tabloid from my bed and turned the pages with excited fingers. “There’s my sweet sister for you!”

She pointed to a picture of Norma standing by the running board of her car with the Administration Building distinctly visible in the background. Even more visible in the foreground were the celebrated Saylor legs. Norma’s blonde mane was tossed back and she was gazing down at the place where Jerry’s fraternity pin should have been on her lapel.

Beneath the picture I read the headlines:

### *WAS STORK HOVERING?*

“I shouldn’t be surprised if Grace Hough did get into a mess,” said Norma Saylor, Wentworth’s Blonde Campus Queen. “But I shan’t let Jerry down, even so. Nothing will make any difference....”

“Isn’t it divine?” Elaine crooned. “And doesn’t it just serve Norma right? Having her picture bang slap under the hovering stork and with those maternity chins and her skirt all rucked up in front. And doesn’t she look exactly like something a sophomore picks up in a Jersey roadhouse on the way back from the Swarthmore game?”

I said wearily: “I don’t think it’s funny, darling. I think it’s unpardonable.”

“My dear, that’s exactly the word Penelope used when she marched into Commons like Brunhilde on the war path. I fairly shook in my shoes when she said: ‘Miss Saylor, stand up.’ And there Norma had to stand like a high school kid while Penelope gave her the biggest lambasting you ever heard. She told her she was a disgrace to her sex and to her college and accused her of vulgarity

exploiting a terrible tragedy. I never liked Penelope before, but I had to hand it to her. I suppose I've got to hand it to Norma, too. She just gave one of her famous Mae West shrugs and walked out of the room as nonchalantly as a Saks mannequin."

Elaine walked to the door, only to stop dramatically on the threshold. "My dear, you couldn't hint to your Lieutenant Trant that I'm just bursting with vital information, could you?"

She bounced out of the room, and bounced back in again.

"And I don't mind telling you, that if he doesn't interview me on this murder, he'll have to on the next, as sister of the murderess. Because Norma is out for Penelope's blood just as sure as the Lord made little gourds and gooseberries."

I felt inclined to agree with her. Indeed, as I finished my breakfast-lunch and started to dress, I couldn't help wondering what Norma would have done if she, instead of myself, had known how deeply Penelope Hudnutt and her husband were involved in the murder of Grace.

When at last I emerged, the campus was comparatively peaceful. There were no signs of newspaper men; no excited little groups of boys and girls. Nevertheless, students I hardly knew by name greeted me as a bosom friend in the hopes of luring me into confidences. Paradoxically, the only place in which I felt safe from questions was in class.

It was a relief to feel the impersonal touch of a wooden desk again and to listen to harmless little Mlle. Pervanche holding forth on Middle French Semantics.

As soon as class was over I went to the infirmary, hoping to see Jerry. But the nurse wouldn't let me in. Dean Appel was with him, she said, and old Mr. Appel, the Dean's father, who had flown down from Newhampton for an important legal conference. The nurse did have one piece of good news, however. Dr. Barker was delighted with the progress of Jerry's ankle and hoped to have him out and about that night or the next day.

But the prospects for the immediate future were far from comforting. Sooner or later I would have to see Lieutenant Trant and I was rather dreading that interview.

I thought of those cool, observant eyes. It wasn't going to be easy to keep anything back from Lieutenant Trant.

In preparation for the ordeal I decided it was essential to get things worked out in my mind. I chose the library as sanctuary and parked myself in the most remote corner of the stacks under a NO TALKING notice.

As I sat there, feeling thoroughly inadequate and nervous, I started thinking of Tram's little notebook and his concise, rather frightening method of keeping the salient points straight. It seemed ideally suited for my purpose. I took a piece of paper and divided it in two and, after much pencil chewing, I wrote on the right hand side:

#### *WHAT I MUST TELL LIEUTENANT TRANT*

- (1) The naval officer left Grace at the service station.
- (2) Grace was driven to the quarry and left there.
- (3) Grace had a date with someone at the quarry.

The entries on the left hand side of the page were far more numerous:

#### *WHAT I CAN'T TELL LIEUTENANT TRANT*

- (1) That Grace telephoned the Hudnutts from the service station.
- (2) That it was Steve who drove her to the quarry.
- (3) That it was Steve who delivered the letters at the infirmary and at the Hudnutts'.
- (4) That the second of those three letters was addressed to the Dean of Women but intercepted by Marcia Parrish and ultimately burnt by me.
- (5) That Robert's, Penelope's, and Marcia's cars were all out at approximately the time of the crime.

- (6) Where Robert Hudnutt got his scar. Then very reluctantly, and only for Jerry's sake, I added
- (7) That it was Norma Sayler who tore up the letter Grace wrote to Jerry.

Staring up at me in my own handwriting, that congregation of facts was rather appalling. I was reading them through uneasily when a quiet voice at my elbow said:

"How about starting on some of the things that you *can* tell Lieutenant Trant. This is as good a time as any."

I snatched up the paper and spun round. The detective was standing in front of the dusty stacks of books. His hands were thrust in his pockets and his mouth curved in an ironic smile. "I'm glad you found my little trick useful, Lee Lovering." Before I could answer he pointed to the NO TALKING sign, took my arm and led me through the stacks into a small room which belonged to one of the librarians.

The piece of paper which contained so much damning information was still in my hand. With a sinking heart I waited for him to demand it. But he didn't. He seemed to have forgotten its existence.

When he did speak his question seemed utterly irrelevant. He said: "Did you ever lend things to Grace before the fur coat?" "Why, yes. That is—Grace always hated borrowing." My relief was making me unnecessarily loquacious. "She was awfully sensitive because she had been so rich in the old days."

He glanced up from the magazine, his gray eyes very intent. "You might like to hear what I've unearthed since I saw you last. Grace was seen in the lounge of the Cambridge Theater during the second act—writing letters. That was an odd thing for a girl to be doing at a theater. But the more we find out about Grace's behavior that night, the more peculiar it becomes. Presumably she was writing the three letters whose later career is so nebulous. She was also seen leaving the theater with the red-headed naval officer."

He paused, adding slowly: "That mysterious naval officer couldn't have been an Annapolis cadet, could he?"

I shook my head. “He was too old and there was too much gold braid. He was quite high up in the service.”

“Strange,” mused Lieutenant Trant, his expression deceptively ingenuous. “I’ve talked to the navy yard in New York and in Philadelphia. We’re checking up with every naval station from Boston to Norfolk, and with every ship in these waters. From what we’ve discovered to date, it seems extremely improbable that there was any red-haired naval officer answering to your description in New York the night before last.”

“But there must have been,” I insisted feebly. “I saw him.” I thought a moment. “Couldn’t you trace him somehow through the post office and the special delivery letters?”

“I’ve been to the Wentworth post office. They do happen to remember those letters for Grace Hough because there were so many of them. They think most of them were mailed right here in Wentworth.”

I stared at him in amazement. “You mean he had been hanging around the college?”

Trant did not answer that question. “I called the people Grace stayed with in Baltimore. Dr. Wheeler told me that Grace hadn’t been any too well while she was with them and had gone out very little. He was positive that she hadn’t met any naval officer there—with or without red hair.” He turned abruptly toward me. “Where did Grace meet the man? Where and how? Tell me that.”

I couldn’t, of course.

He moved suddenly nearer, alert and tense. “Forget the naval officer, Lee Lovering. Do you know anyone right here in Wentworth who could have been writing those letters to Grace?”

“No,” I said decidedly.

“Not Dr. Hudnutt, for example? Or that student—what’s his name—Steve Carteris?”

“No, no, that’s absurd.”

“Suppose the naval officer was just a chance acquaintance—someone Grace picked up at the theater—doesn’t that make more

sense? That she was murdered by someone right here in Wentworth?"

"But he wasn't just a chance acquaintance," I said heatedly. "I talked to him. Grace introduced him as her friend."

"Even so, there's nothing to prove he drove her home, that he ever came within miles of Wentworth."

"But there is. He did drive her to Wentworth. He was seen at the service station just outside the village."

I had blurted it out because I was confused and angry.

Instantly Lieutenant Trant was his old casual self again. There was an inscrutable smile in his eyes as he stared down at the piece of paper which I still held crunched in my hand.

"You've given me a most important piece of information, Lee Lovering. I'd be interested to know if it was among the items which you can tell Lieutenant Trant or one of those you can't."

My smile probably looked pretty sick. "I suppose it's one of the things I *can* tell you."

"Excellent."

I described what had happened at the service station, about the naval officer's disappearance and Grace's amazing drive to the quarry. I didn't mention Steve's name, of course, or the telephone call to the Hudnutts or the letter to the Dean of Women.

"And who told you all this?" he asked quietly.

I shook my head. "I'm afraid that's on the other side of the page."

He grinned then. But he made no attempt to press me. "So this person whose name you refuse to divulge drove Grace from the service station to the quarry?"

"Yes."

"Then he was the last person to see her alive?"

"No, he wasn't. Grace told him she was meeting someone else at the quarry."

"We have nothing but your friend's word for that."

"He's telling the truth," I said stubbornly. "If he had had anything to do with the murder, he—he wouldn't have been such a fool as to ask



me to tell you all this. You're just trying to make me mad again in the hopes of getting me to admit things I don't want to admit."

He was looking at me in a very queer way. "You fooled me, Lee Lovering. I was naïve enough to think you'd want to help the police find out who murdered your roommate."

"Of course I want to help the police," I said, "when they don't try to insinuate beastly things about—about people who couldn't possibly be guilty."

"And who couldn't possibly be acting more guiltily," added Lieutenant Trant, without smiling. "In other words, you'll help the police so long as the police are obliging enough to look for the murderer outside your own particular circle of friends."

I think I blushed a bit. "Then our partnership is washed up?"

He didn't speak for a moment. When he did, his voice was almost affectionate. "On the contrary, I'm rather glad you're a cagey little liar with a point of view of your own. In the long run a policeman finds out most from a person who's trying to hold things back on him."

He looked me straight in the eyes. "But just one word of advice, Lee Lovering. A first murder is often followed by a second murder. And the second victim is usually the person who finds out too much and out of misguided loyalty to friends either keeps it to herself or tells it to the wrong people." He showed white teeth in a smile. "Don't go and make a foolish mistake like that just as I'm getting fond of you."

Of course, I thought he had just said that to scare me. I had no means of telling then how prophetic his warnings would be.

Trant's eyes dropped once again to that piece of paper which was still clutched, utterly defenseless, in my hand.

"So you won't tell me the name of this person who drove Grace Hough to the quarry?"

I shook my head. "And I'll probably fight like a demon to keep you from getting this piece of paper."

"Okay."

Lieutenant Trant was watching his own thumbnail with that bland concentration which I had learned to suspect. “Apparently I’m all balled up on your love life, too. I thought Jerry Hough was the lucky guy, but judging from the way you’ve been protecting him, I guess I should have plumped for Steve Carteris.”

“What makes you think it was Steve?”

Trant shrugged. “Oh, I’ve known that all along. I checked up at the college garage. I knew Carteris’ car didn’t get in till after four in the morning.”

“All right. I admit it was Steve.”

“I suppose you realize this is by far the most important thing that’s come out to date?”

“What does it matter what I realize?” I asked wearily. “Talk it over with Steve. That’s what you’re going to do anyhow, isn’t it?”

“It is,” he said quietly. “But there’s something else first. I want you to come with me to that quarry—to see what we can see.”

He took a sudden step toward me. Before I was prepared for it, he had tugged my precious piece of paper out of my fingers. For a second he stood with it crumpled in his hand. Then, very deliberately, he tore it into tiny pieces and gave them back to me.

“In future, Lee Lovering, I’d advise you to keep all your information in your head. That makes it so much harder for the detective—and for the murderer. And you never know who will fasten on odd bits of paper like this.”

Nothing Lieutenant Trant could do or say startled me anymore. But there seemed only one reason why he should deliberately have passed up a chance to find out so much.

Lieutenant Trant must have known far more than he pretended. He must also have known that there was real danger for me.

And that the danger was right there at Wentworth.

## XIII

Trant was very quiet as we drove away from the campus and headed down the narrow, almost private road which connected Wentworth with the New York highway. We did not speak until the ribbon of macadam ahead of us took a sharp curve to the right.

“Somewhere near here, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” I said shakily. “It’s just beyond the bend.”

He drew the car up at the roadside. We got out and walked the twenty or so yards to the bend in the road where the mouth of the quarry loomed, dark and desolate. •

We turned into it. The quarry itself was set back about thirty yards and the highly banked drive that opened it up went around in a horseshoe bend so that anyone actually inside would be invisible from the road. They had got stone from it years ago when the college had first been built. Now it was completely neglected.

As soon as we left the road we stepped into an eerie half-darkness caused by the rocky banks at our sides and the tangle of overhead vegetation. Trant seemed strangely disembodied, like a tall shadow. Still he did not speak. That was one of the most unnerving things about him. When you wanted him to say something, he was always lost in that withdrawn silence of his. He had come to an abrupt halt about six feet from the mouth of the quarry and was halfway up the bank, his eyes moving to left and right, searching....

I didn’t know what he was looking for. That made me even more jittery. I hated the shadowy half-light; I hated the dank smell of cold stone and weeds.

Suddenly Trant bent and picked up something.

“Lee Lovering.”

I scrambled up the few feet of bank to his side. There was a grim but satisfied smile in his eyes. He was holding toward me a small

black pocketbook with a rhinestone clasp. He didn't have to ask the question. That pocketbook was only too familiar.

With a twinge of apprehension I said: "Yes, that's Grace's."

Carefully Lieutenant Trant pushed open the clasp. I stood at his elbow, gazing down into the bag. I saw Grace's small pink handkerchief, her cheap fountain pen, two theater stubs and some small change. There was also a folded sheet of notepaper. Trant pulled it out and opened it. I think that he, like myself, had expected that piece of paper to tell us something. But it didn't. It was a single sheet of college stationery, absolutely blank.

Without a word the detective snapped the clasp and slipped the bag into his pocket. I looked at him curiously.

"So Grace was here at the quarry?"

"It looks that way."

Lieutenant Trant swung down the bank and started along the overgrown driveway, deeper into the cutting, his eyes fixed intently on the ground. I hurried to catch up with him, but stopped dead when he said sharply:

"Don't move."

His voice echoed around those drab walls of stone so that it didn't sound like a human voice. As I came to an abrupt halt, he dropped to his knees and peered intently at something. Without glancing up, he said:

"Look."

I moved to his side, looked down and saw a queer regular pattern stamped on the bare patch of ground.

"Tire tracks!"

Lieutenant Trant did look up then. "Not just tire tracks. Something more than that—recent tire tracks. And made during or just after the last heavy rain. In other words, just about the time Grace was killed."

"You don't mean you can tell when a tire track was made?"

"For someone consistently bent on obstructing justice, Lee Lovering, you ought to learn more about modern police methods." There was a trace of a smile in his eyes. "I happen to have checked

up on the Wentworth weather. It's been very dry here. Only one short heavy storm recently. That was around three-thirty last Wednesday night. Those tracks could only have been made about that time. With everything parched as it was, the ground would have been bone dry again an hour later.

I said faintly: "And you—you can tell from a track whose car it was that made it?"

"Ever hear of a moulage?" Trant's voice was very quiet. "A plaster cast of these tracks—a check-up with local cars. It shouldn't be difficult to find out who was here."

He started forward again, looking for more tracks. I followed around the curve of the driveway. He did find another set of marks, clearer and larger than the first. He began whistling softly.

We were in the deepest part of the quarry now, right under the tall scarred rock face. To our left was a large pile of rubble and stones which had collected through the years. Trant moved toward it.

I shall never know whether it was the detective or I who saw that particular jagged rock first. I really think we must both have seen it at the same moment because, just as I gave a little gasp, his high intoned whistle cut in the middle of a note and he dropped to his knees again in front of the pile.

I stood by, twisting my gloves in my hand. I had barely looked at that stone, but I knew with cold certainty what it was we had found.

Trant's fingers were moving carefully over its surface. It was a large stone, but not so big that a man or woman could not easily have used it as a lethal weapon. The top part was gray and smooth. It was the lower part, the jagged base which had been half concealed behind the other stones—that was the part which was stained.

Slowly Lieutenant Trant lowered the stone back into its place. He rose. We looked at each other.

"Blood," he said quietly.

Of course, there might have been a thousand different explanations. But I knew there was only one. Trant knew it, too.

“So we know now,” he said, “exactly where Grace Hough was killed.”

## XIV

Before ever Lieutenant Trant and I went on that expedition, I should have been prepared for the shock of what we had just found. But I wasn't. It came as a stunning blow to me to realize that it had actually been here, at the quarry, hardly a mile from the campus, that Grace had been killed.

As I followed the detective's slim figure through the gloom and out to his waiting car on the road, I couldn't think of anything but that—of how someone must have come here ... have lured Grace back, into the cavernous darkness of the quarry ... have picked up that gray, jagged stone ...

It was quite warm in the car but my hands were numb. I tried to open my bag for a cigarette, but my fingers would not work.

"Here." Trant passed me a cigarette and then the glowing lighter from the dashboard. Heaven knows how he had guessed what I wanted.

I found it easier to think now. From the beginning the detective had noted down in that terrifying little book of his how cars and their movements were of the most vital importance. And now he had found tire tracks which would almost certainly enable him to discover what car had been there to make them.

The whole panorama of facts which I had kept back from the police flashed through my mind. Robert Hudnutt's car, Marcia's car, Penelope's car ... in spite of the overwhelmingly suspicious circumstances surrounding those three midnight drives, I had stubbornly persisted in maintaining, even to myself, the innocence of those three people. But would I be able to feel the same way if Lieutenant Trant did succeed in proving that one of those three cars had been in the quarry?

I glanced sideways at the detective, trying to catch his face off guard. But he turned from the wheel, smiling his grave ironic smile.

“Well, Lee Lovering, this makes it look bad for your Southern friend Carteris. It’ll look worse if those tracks are his.”

In my worry about the Hudnutts and Marcia I had forgotten Steve. Now, with hurting anxiety, I realized how he, far more than anyone else, had been spotlighted by this latest discovery. If he persisted in refusing to tell where he had been during those long hours after leaving the Amber Club, his story, when the police heard it, would sound pitifully weak. Steve, who had left his own party to go on some unspecified mission; Steve, who had actually driven Grace to the quarry and had admitted to me that she was holding something over his head—something which might cause serious trouble to himself and his family.

It was shockingly easy to think of Grace standing there at the mouth of the quarry, jeering at Steve, ready to ruin him just as she had been ready to ruin Robert Hudnutt and Marcia Parrish. A jagged stone ... one blow struck half in fury, half in fear ... it might so easily have happened that way.

My cigarette suddenly tasted acrid, sour. I rolled down the window and tossed the half-finished stub out onto the road.

We reached the college gates and turned into the campus. Ahead of us the academic buildings showed stern and impersonal in the lowering gray of the late afternoon.

I had expected Lieutenant Trant to drive straight to Broome Hall to pick up Steve Carteris. But he headed the car toward Pigot and stopped in front of the entrance. He got out and opened the door for me.

“You’re going to talk to Steve now?” I asked shakily.

“I’m afraid not.” He held out his hand. “I’m just going to say good-by.”

“Good-by?”

“If you remember my notebook, Lee Lovering, one of the most vital questions on the left hand page was the actual locality in which the crime was committed. We know now, almost for certain, that Grace was killed in Wentworth. I may still be working on the New York end,



but the murder of Grace Hough has become a problem for the Wentworth police.” His hand was still in mine as he added: “I hope they’ll find you as co-operative as I have.”

“Then you won’t be coming to Wentworth any more?”

“One never knows.” A smile played around the corners of his mouth. “Perhaps they’ll ask me to plant a tree. Or perhaps they’ll send me an invitation when they erect a monument to you for services rendered the college.”

He got into his car. “Meanwhile, if you should happen to need a policeman in your life, you can always reach me through Centre Street, New York City.”

That evening the President gave a short, oblique address in chapel urging students and faculty alike to “carry on through this darkest hour in Wentworth’s history.” It was all pretty grim. It was even grimmer when, just as Steve and I were out again on the campus, a detective from the county police stopped us with the news that Chief Jordan wanted to talk to him at the courthouse.

After they had driven off together, I wandered aimlessly about, fighting back a feeling of acute anxiety. I think I half expected that Steve would be arrested.

That’s why it came as such a surprise when Steve returned in just over an hour. He looked very pale and there was a frozen, bewildered expression in his eyes. He told me Chief Jordan had merely asked him to corroborate the facts I had already passed on to Trant.

Next morning life resumed routine. Marcia gave lectures, Robert Hudnutt gave lectures, I attended them, and Penelope was outwardly the same brisk, competent Dean of Women. But the normalcy was horribly skin deep. I know now how it must feel in the South Sea Islands during those few taut hours of stillness that herald the hurricane.

I thought the hurricane had come when a car arrived that afternoon to drive me to the courthouse where they were holding a second inquest "In the County where the Deceased met her Death." But that drab, formal session skirted carefully around all danger zones. I answered questions I had already answered before. Mr. Appel, Dean Appel's father, gave what information was needed about Grace's financial background.

The jury again returned the verdict of murder at the hand of person or persons unknown.

As I left the courtroom I was waylaid by a mild, gray-haired man who represented the insurance company which covered Grace's policy. He kept me talking a long while in some dingy little room, suggesting with a great amount of delicate vagueness that, in spite of the jury's verdict, Grace might have committed suicide. As Lieutenant Trant had prophesied, he stressed the importance of the letter Norma had torn up and hinted tactfully that it could have been a note from Grace informing her brother of her intention to take her own life. I assured him that I had read the letter and could swear to its having no implications of that sort whatsoever.

That evening Jerry left the infirmary. Dr. Barker was rather doubtful about his walking on an ankle that was so recently healed, but Jerry refused stubbornly to stay in bed any longer and they let him go. I was with him when he left, a crutch under his right arm, his young face gaunt and very set.

He'd heard about our discovery in the quarry, of course. By now everyone knew that Grace had almost certainly been killed at Wentworth. As I walked with him over to Broome, I felt an overwhelming desire to let him know all the other things I knew, to pour out to him the innumerable confidences that were sitting so uneasily on my conscience. But I managed to check myself.

Just as I was leaving Jerry on the steps of Broome, he called me back and asked in a voice that was very quiet if I would go with him to the funeral tomorrow.

At his urgent request it had been kept as secret as possible to prevent crowds of morbid sightseers. The press were kept out of it and no one at the college was asked to attend. Jerry and I drove alone to the local church, heard the brief service and saw the coffin lowered into the quickening spring earth.

On the return journey Jerry and I sat in the back seat, close together and still. The warm sunlight sprayed through the window onto Jerry's short blond hair and his profile with its square jaw and pale, firm lips.

Suddenly, as we turned through the iron gates into the campus, he asked: "They think it was someone here at Wentworth who did it, don't they?"

It was horribly hard to know what to say. "It's possible, Jerry."

As I spoke I noticed his hand lying on his knee. His strong fingers had curved inward, pressing fiercely into his palm.

When the car dropped us at Broome Hall, I went up the few steps with him, my arm on his, helping him. He hesitated at the door, swinging round on the crutch so that he was facing me.

"Lee, there's something I want to ask you. Something I've been wanting to know for a long time." His eyes, blue and searching, were fixed on mine. "Are you in love with Steve Carteris?"

"In love with Steve!" The idea was so completely new to me that for a moment I couldn't think of anything to say. "Why, Jerry, I'm terribly fond of him. But I'm—of course I'm not in love with him."

The anxious line of his mouth relaxed slightly. His blue eyes dropped from mine and he was staring at his own sleeve. "I'm glad about that. Steve and I had quite a spat, you know, and ..."

"It was about Grace, wasn't it?"

"In a way, I guess." Jerry's voice was different, awkward and rather reluctant. "She was quite keen about him for a while. She thought he felt the same way, too. He started confiding in her about girls he'd fooled around with in New York. Asked her whether she thought that sort of thing would stand in his way with a decent girl. Of course Grace thought he meant her, that it was a lead-up to telling her he'd

fallen for her. Then it all came out that he just wanted her advice because it was another girl he was interested in.”

He paused, adding suddenly, “That hurt Grace quite badly. I felt he’d kind of led her up the garden path myself. I told him so. That’s why we stopped rooming together.”

So I knew now just what it was that had caused the rift between Steve and the Houghs.

“That’s why I asked you how you felt about Steve,” Jerry went on jerkily. “Guess I didn’t want you to get led up any garden path.” A slight, rather bitter smile twisted his lips. “There’s so much damn unhappiness going around. I couldn’t stand it if you got caught up in it, too.”

I shook my head. “No, Jerry, I won’t get caught up in it.”

For a moment we stood there, looking at each other. Suddenly I found I could ask the question I had never been able to ask before.

“And you, Jerry. Do—do you still feel the same way about Norma?”

His eyes went very hard. “Did you see that photograph of her in the paper—the photograph and what she said about Grace?”

I nodded.

“And you ask me if I feel the same way about Norma Sayler.” He gripped my arm, drawing me a little closer. “Things like this,” he said roughly, “make you realize who the really important people are.”

As he gazed at me his face lost its savagely guarded control. He looked like a little boy again, a helpless little boy, frightened and a long way from home. “Lee, I’ve been such a hell of a fool. I’ve got so horribly far away from the old days. Do you think you could help me to get back again?”

## XV

The afternoon slipped by in a dream. Before I realized, it was evening and then the next day. For the first time Grace's death and all its ghastly aftermath ceased to dominate my thoughts. It became something almost meaningless—just a remote series of events which by a miracle had brought Jerry back.

And then Lieutenant Trant reappeared.

He was waiting in his car by the entrance to the classrooms as I came out of one of Marcia's lectures.

"So they did ask you to plant a tree, after all?" I said.

"No tree." He shook his head very gravely. "As I told you when I saw you last, I've ceased to have any official connection with Wentworth College, its trees or its murders."

As a remark I held that highly suspect. "Then what are you doing here?"

"I've been talking to your Dean of Women. She thinks I'm a wholesome influence for female students. She has given me permission to take you for a drive."

"Where do we drive to?" I asked doubtfully.

He threw out his hands. "Anywhere you like—within reason." He opened the door of his car. "Jump in."

I didn't protest. I'd given up protesting when Trant suggested anything. He drove to Pigot and stopped.

"Hat and coat," he said.

Meekly I hurried to the top floor and came down again in my outdoor things. He looked at me with eyes that were appraising and faintly amused.

"Very nice," he said. "Very nice indeed. No wonder you attract such charming friends. Jump in again."

I jumped in again. Although I was supposed to be choosing the route, Lieutenant Trant swung through the college gates and headed

the car very purposefully toward New York.

He glanced casually from the wheel. "I suppose the galyak fur coat hasn't turned up, has it?"

That question surprised me. It had never occurred to me that my fur coat could possibly reappear at Wentworth. But when I told him it hadn't come back, he looked puzzled as if something hadn't worked out quite as he had anticipated.

"And how about your nice friends, Lee Lovering? Have they been going in for any more girlish confidences?"

He was smiling. I smiled back. "Do you really expect me to answer that question?"

"I'm afraid I don't. You have a singular lack of respect for other people's curiosity." As if struck by a perfectly haphazard idea, he added: "How about taking in a matinee?"

"That would be very nice," I said politely. "But as a matter of interest, what's the real reason for this unexpected outing?"

"That can wait."

From then on he talked charmingly about nothing. Actually, I felt no new stirrings of suspicion until we turned off Broadway and Trant found a parking place almost immediately opposite the Cambridge Theater. Not ten feet away the canopied entrance to the Amber Club spanned the sidewalk. It brought back rather uncomfortable memories.

As he guided me across the street which Elaine and I had navigated so perilously on the night of Grace's death, I jumped to the conclusion that his devious mind was planning some reconstruction of the crazy happenings at *Phèdre*.

But I was somewhat reassured when I saw that Roulane's distinguished production had folded up and the Cambridge was dark and deserted. Lieutenant Trant had bought a paper and was gazing solemnly at the theater announcements. At length he said:

"Care for Gilbert and Sullivan?"

"I love it," I said. "Back in Newhampton we once gave the *Gondoliers* as a Christmas treat for the Ladies' Aid or something. I

played Tessa.”

“How nice for the Ladies’ Aid.” Trant took my arm and started past the Cambridge down the sidewalk. “They’re giving *Pinafore* this afternoon at the Vandolan.”

As we entered the foyer of the Vandolan, the place seemed dimly familiar to me, but it was not until Lieutenant Trant had gone over to the box-office that I realized why. Elaine and I had arrived at the wrong theater in our hectic attempt to reach *Phèdre* for the first intermission. Now I recalled the black and red posters with their bold lettering which announced: *H.M.S. PINAFORE* followed by *COX AND BOX*.

“It’s pretty full,” said Trant, appearing at my side again. “But I managed to get two seats in the balcony.”

We were later than I thought, for the second and last act of the play had already begun as we pushed past protesting knees and apologized our way to our seats.

Although I had never seen *Pinafore*, it had the same nostalgic brightness of the other Gilbert and Sullivans. I forgot Grace; forgot Lieutenant Trant and his subtly laid plots. I just sat back and enjoyed the show, remembering rehearsals for the *Gondoliers* in the Newhampton. Assembly Hall; remembering my moment of triumph when Jerry, a very young and handsome gondolier, had rushed me out for an ice cream soda after our performance, completely forgetting a date with the local siren, Emily Clarke.

Even the story of *Pinafore* was reminiscent of the *Gondoliers*, all hinging on misalliances and mistaken identities. There was a gallant captain, a lovelorn daughter and a gallant, but low-born tar who was equally lovelorn. The captain discovered the romance and threw the sailor in irons. And then, at the crucial moment, an old nurse revealed the fact that the captain and the sailor were mixed up at birth and it was the common tar who was really the well-born one. And so, despite obvious discrepancies in their ages, there was a jubilant switching around. The captain became demoted to a sailor

and the sailor got made captain with the captain's daughter thrown in as a bonus.

It was only then, toward the very end, that I really started seeing the play as a show running on Broadway, with live actors who were not just pleasant ghosts from my own past. And, as I began to take the right sort of interest again, realized with a slow stirring of alarm just what had been behind Lieutenant Tram's quixotic invitation to the theater.

The old nurse had just made her announcement. The chorus were grouped around the center of the stage. Suddenly they parted and the actor who had played the common sailor made his entrance from the rear. His sailor slacks and blouse had been replaced by the full dress regalia of a captain of "the Queen's navee."

Until this moment I had not noticed that particular actor. I had not looked at his name in the program, and it had never occurred to me that I might have seen him before.

Now, of course, there was no shadow of doubt as to when or where I had seen that almost too glossy reddish hair, that obviously handsome profile, that trim naval uniform with its golden arm bands and braid.

The most elusive of all the figures in the obscure tragedy of Grace Hough had materialized at last. The man who might so very easily have murdered my roommate was an unknown operatic actor. He was there on the stage in front of my eyes—singing a gay love song on the stage, his arm round the waist of the captain's daughter.

I felt Lieutenant Trant's gaze fixed on my face. I felt his fingers on my sleeve. Then his voice, very quiet, very sure of itself, whispered:

"Am I right?"

Everyone was singing now. The stage was a blaze of light and color. The orchestra tripped frivolously into the finale of *H. M. S. Pinafore*.

"Yes," I whispered back, "you're right. That is the man who was with Grace at the Cambridge Theater the night she died. That is the—naval officer with the red hair."



## XVI

As I stared in fascination at the red-haired actor, I realized just why I had felt that instinctive distrust of him when I had first seen him with Grace Hough on the steps of the Cambridge Theater.

Grace's mysterious date had been with an imitation naval officer—a comic-opera sailor!

Lieutenant Trant had produced his hat from under the seat. "We're going," he said, and obediently I followed him past the protesting knees again and down the dark aisle toward a glowing Exit sign.

Outside the theater we turned down a bleak little alley which led to the stage door. Lieutenant Trant said to the doorman: "Mr. David Lockwood." When the man looked doubtful, he flashed his detective badge and I heard an instant: "First room at the top of them stairs. He'll be off in a minute."

We found the dressing room. It was small, rather squalid. A pair of sailor pants and a sailor blouse made a white pool on the floor where the red-headed actor had tossed them after his quick change into officer's uniform. Stuck around the mirror were several flattering portraits of that too-familiar face, signed in a large, flourishing hand—David Lockwood.

I turned to Lieutenant Trant and asked: "But how on earth did you guess?"

The detective tapped a cigarette against the top of a powder box. "I suppose it's what you would call *deductio ad absurdum*. I was puzzled from the beginning by the fact that Grace's naval escort left the theater without a hat. I learnt on the best authority that Uncle Sam's naval officers just don't run around in full dress uniforms without hats. That gave me the idea of looking for our friend either among the guests of a fancy dress dance or in some theatrical show. When I examined the theatrical notices for the Wednesday in question and found that *Pinafore* was playing that night at the

Vandolan—right next door to the Cambridge—well, it was fairly simple, wasn't it?"

Measured in actual time I couldn't say how long it was we sat there in that dressing room, waiting for David Lockwood. For me it seemed hours—uneasy hours recreated from the past. In my mind I was living through stray scenes with Grace Hough. I thought back to that time, just after the Christmas holiday, when the extraordinary special delivery letters started to arrive from that unknown admirer. I thought of the strange, excited gleam in Grace's pale eyes as she used to rip open the envelopes and sneak off by herself to read those close-written pages.

At that point in my reflections the door was pushed open. A man strode in, a red-haired youngish man in full naval uniform. His eyes fixed Lieutenant Trant with a blank stare, then they moved to me, recognition slowly dawning....

I had never seen a man's expression change like that. The greasepaint seemed suddenly to harden and to set in deep lines running from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth.

"I expect you've guessed, Mr. Lockwood," said Trant quietly. "We've come to talk to you about Grace Hough."

"The police!" David Lockwood's hollow laugh was in the best dramatic tradition. "So you've caught up with me at last."

"Before you make any statement," said Trant in that soft, level voice of his, "it is my duty to warn you that you're under no obligation to talk to me or anyone except the Wentworth police."

"Why shouldn't I talk?" With extreme facility David Lockwood had assumed an arrogant composure. He flourished a match to a cigarette. "My dear fellow, I can't possibly keep it bottled up inside me any longer. If I don't talk I'll—I'll go stark, staring mad."

"You might," suggested Trant mildly, "have saved yourself from insanity by coming forward a little earlier."

"How could I possibly come forward?" Lockwood ran a hand through his thick red hair and started pacing furiously up and down the room. "I'm an actor, I'm playing repertory, I have performances

and rehearsals continuously, *Patience*, *Gondoliers*, *Mikado*, *Pirates*. When could I get the time to go to the police?" He kicked savagely at the limp sailor pants on the floor. "You know how the police are—so confoundedly muddle-headed. They keep you sitting for hours in smelly rooms waiting for the right person to turn up."

"You seem to have considerable experience of police methods," said Trant drily.

"Good Lord, no." He swung round. "No more than anyone else. Dog licenses—an occasional ticket for speeding. But I'll be perfectly frank with you. There's another reason. A girl in Philadelphia. I'm engaged to her and—well, perhaps you don't know how girls in Philadelphia are. But she's Main Line—society and all that. It wouldn't look so good in print."

"I can imagine," remarked Trant, "that it wouldn't look so good in print or out of print to any girl you were engaged to—in Philadelphia or out of Philadelphia. You'd have had a tough time explaining that theater date with Grace Hough."

"A date with Grace Hough!" David Lockwood's cigarette hung poised in mid-air. "That is an arrant lie."

"I suppose you never wrote her any special delivery letter either?"

Trant's voice was terrifyingly casual. I leaned forward in my chair, my pulses stabbing, as I waited for Lockwood's reply.

He was staring at the detective, his eyes wide with exaggerated astonishment. "My dear man, it has never during the whole course of my natural or unnatural life occurred to me to write a special delivery letter to Grace Hough."

"Indeed?" said Trant.

"And what is more, I deny ever having heard of that wretched girl's existence before last Wednesday night when she accosted me on the steps of the Cambridge Theater."

"So that is your platform, Mr. Lockwood?" he said quietly. "It makes things rather interesting."

"Newspapers blazing headlines about a mysterious naval officer. The police suspecting me of performing mayhem, murder and

heaven knows what. My voice going to hell through sheer, nervous exhaustion. And the man calls it interesting.” Lockwood dropped into a chair, holding his head in his hands. “Well, I’ve learnt my lesson all right. Never be moved by the pathos of lonely young females.”

He looked up, his face a study in cynical resignation.

“I’ll tell you what I know about Grace Hough. Then try and make out I could have come forward and unbosomed myself to the police.”

David Lockwood was at the dressing-table again. He plunged his fingers into a bowl of cold cream and started smearing it over his face.

“It was all because I was crazy to see Roulane’s work in *Phèdre*. Our matinees clashed and it was utterly impossible for me to get to the Cambridge except on *Pinafore* nights. The management here run *Cox and Box* after the main show and that lets me out just before ten. Last Wednesday I decided to make a dash for it and catch the third act of *Phèdre*. I didn’t wait to get out of this uniform. I just ripped off the epaulettes, discarded the captain’s peaked hat—or whatever you call the damned thing—and sprinted over to the Cambridge.”

He began rubbing cold cream into the sides of his nostrils. It gave his voice a weird, blurred intonation.

“I hadn’t the slightest idea that anything so crazy was going to happen. I got to the Cambridge just before the second act was through. The foyer was empty. Suddenly I remembered that I hadn’t got a pass to go in and, what was worse, I didn’t have a nickel in these darn pants. Then, like an answer to prayer, a girl came out of the theater, a girl in a light fur coat.”

“Grace Hough,” put in Lieutenant Trant.

“As I learnt later—to my cost.” Lockwood gave a throaty laugh. “She didn’t mean anything in my young life then. I figured the uniform must have puzzled her, for she stopped and stared in a queer sort of way. It was a bit embarrassing, so I thought I’d better explain I was a Savoyard. That got her all excited. She fumbled around in her

pocketbook and got out a bit of paper and a fountain pen. She said she collected autographs. Wouldn't I please give her mine."

"But," I broke in involuntarily, "that's crazy. Grace didn't collect—"

"There wasn't anything crazy about it," he said stiffly. "I am constantly being asked for my autograph. I did give this girl my autograph and, since she appeared to be leaving the theater, I asked her if I couldn't have her ticket for the last act. She said she wasn't leaving, but she had an extra ticket and I was welcome to it. She fished it out of her bag."

As his story progressed Lockwood became increasingly dramatic.

"Until then our Grace had behaved like a civilized human being. Imagine my surprise when she clutched at my arm without the slightest warning and said: 'Some girls I know are at the Amber Club and they'll be over here any minute. Please, please talk to me as if you knew me and—since you're an actor—play up to whatever I say. It's desperately important.'"

He tossed back his chestnut hair and eyed me with a kind of vague distaste. "A short time later this young lady—Miss Lovett, or whatever her name is—came pushing through the crowd toward us. Grace Hough introduced me to her. I did my best to talk naturally to Miss Lovett, but as soon as she was gone I demanded an explanation. Grace explained. And a very touching little story it seemed to me then.

"Apparently these other girls and Miss Lovett knew she had been coming to the theater to meet a boy friend. This friend hadn't been able to turn up at the last minute, and Grace had been desperately eager for the other girls not to know that she had been stood up."

"So after Grace made that explanation, Mr. Lockwood, the two of you went in to see the final act of *Phèdre*?"

"We did, and Roulane was superb, one of the greatest experiences the modern stage has to offer." Lockwood's voice took on an ecstatic note. "When it was over I decided I simply had to drop round backstage and pay my respects. I hoped to shake off the Hough girl. But, oh no, Grade wasn't missing a trick. She wanted

Roulane's autograph, she said. Couldn't she come too? I had to give in, though it was a bit too much when she kept me hanging around after the show while she dashed off to talk to Miss Lovett again."

That "Lovett" was making me want to scream.

"My name is Lovering," I said as patiently as I could.

He frowned at me as though I were far too inconspicuous to have the right to any name at all. Then he turned to Trant. "Finally we did get backstage, officer. La Roulane was delighted to see me of course."

"Just a minute," broke in Trant hastily. "Did Roulane give Grace her autograph?"

"Of course. As a rule she's very difficult with autographs, but anyone she meets through me—" His shrug expressed just how intimate he was with the great Roulane.

"She signed her name on the same piece of paper as you?"

"I imagine so. The Hough girl pulled it out of her bag."

"And she put it back in her bag?" asked Trant.

"Presumably." Lockwood's tone was impatient.

For a moment I did not see why Trant had asked those questions. Then I understood. When we had discovered Grace's pocketbook in the quarry it had contained no autographed piece of paper. That was what was worrying the detective. To me it seemed just another of a dozen unexplained details. I had no means of telling until later just how vitally important those missing actors' autographs were destined to become.

Lockwood had removed most of the paint from his face now. Without it he looked older and less handsome. "Roulane was really responsible for what happened next. She got it into her head that the Hough girl was my fiancée from Philadelphia. Before I had time to explain, she invited herself to my apartment to throw a party in honor of my engagement. I suppose I could have made her see she'd got it all wrong but—" he flushed—"well, it's quite an honor having Roulane come to one's place. So I let it stand, planning to straighten it out later."

David Lockwood swung himself onto the radiator. "That girl clung like a leech. I hoped to give her the slip when I came back here to change into civilized clothes. But she was hanging around outside the stage door all right and she tagged along to my apartment. We sat there waiting for Roulane, waiting for hours and hours. At last I couldn't bear it any longer. I guess it was about one-thirty. I called Roulane's suite at the Waldorf. And imagine! She'd forgotten all about it. Her maid told me she'd gone to a supper party given for her by Guthrie McClintic and Kit Cornell."

Lockwood pushed himself off the radiator and resumed his caged animal progress up and down the small room. "By that time I was getting pretty worried about the Hough girl. Not that she didn't seem quite a decent sort then. But I didn't want to have her on my hands for the rest of my life. I went back to her, told her about Roulane; that gave me my let-out. I said hadn't she better go home? She didn't answer right away. Then she said she'd have to be going soon, but could she have a drink first."

That remark, trivial as it sounded, was one of the strangest of all the strange things I had heard in that dressing room. I had known Grace Hough for twenty of the twenty-two years of her life. And I knew that she disapproved of liquor as staunchly as she disapproved of cosmetics. And yet, on the night of her death she had not only worn make-up, but she had also asked for a drink. What was the extraordinary sea-change that had come over my roommate in her long, fantastic trail toward disaster?

"I got her a highball," Lockwood was saying. "She gulped it down as if she darn well needed it. I guess I'm soft-hearted, but I felt kind of sorry for her. She seemed dejected and lonely. That's where I made my big mistake. I started sympathizing, said I knew it must be tough to have been stood up by her boy friend."

He whistled. "Did that make her mad? You wouldn't have known her. I guess maybe it was partly the highball, but her eyes were simply blazing. She said she hadn't been stood up at all. It was just that this friend of hers had had a previous engagement. I tried to

soothe her, but I didn't get to first base. Finally she dashed across the room to her fur coat and pulled a letter out of the pocket. 'Read that,' she said, 'if you don't believe he's crazy about me.'

I drew in my breath. It seemed forever before Lieutenant Trant asked the question I knew he was going to ask.

"You saw the envelope? It was a special delivery letter?"

"I think so. It had a lot of stamps on it."

"And you read it?"

"I glanced at it, yes. It began *Grace Dearest* and went on about how she was to try to forgive this fellow and how she was the only girl in his life."

"You saw the signature on the letter, Mr. Lockwood?"

"No, I didn't. I only looked at the first page."

It was as if a window had been half opened onto daylight and then drawn shut again. I found it horribly tantalizing. Grace had shown this complete stranger one of the letters which she had guarded so zealously from me.

Lieutenant Trant started moving bottles and pots on the dressing-table in an absent-minded game of checkers.

"From what you read and from what Grace said, did you form any idea, however shadowy, of the personality of this man?"

"Too bad I'm not more inquisitive." Lockwood gave a sickly grin. "I didn't get the slightest angle on him except that presumably there had been some kind of a quarrel which they'd patched up. And—well, I had the sort of feeling the affair was pretty clandestine. But I didn't bother much about it then, for as soon as Grace got the letter back, she finished her drink, put on her coat again and said she was ready to leave. That was swell by me. Just as I was breathing a fervent sigh of relief, she burst another bombshell. She told me she had a date that night in Wentworth. The last train was gone, she announced. I—I was to drive her out there to her date!"

Some of David Lockwood's old theatrical flourish had returned. He flung out both arms like a dying Pagliacci. "Imagine that! Grace had drunk my liquor; she'd ruined my evening; she'd just made use of my



apartment as a place to stay in until the time came for her date. And then she expected me to drive her thirty miles in the middle of the night! That was too much.”

He gave a loud, ringing laugh and gestured at me. “Heaven forbid I should ever meet up with another Wentworth girl. If they’re all like Grace Hough, that place must be a congregation of female vipers. Guess what that creature did? She stared at me without batting an eyelid; and she said: ‘You are going to drive me back to Wentworth. And if you refuse, I shall start to scream. And when the other people in the hotel come running in here, I’m going to tell them you asked me to a non-existent party and then you—you forced your attentions on me.’”

David Lockwood snatched up a comb and ran it distractedly through his hair. “What was I to do? I took that girl by the shoulders and I said: ‘Listen to me, young woman, I’ll take you to that date of yours. And do you know what I hope. I hope your date will take you by the throat and choke every particle of breath out of your body.’”

Trant said very evenly: “Did you ask who her date was with?”

“I certainly did. While I was driving her back, I said: ‘I suppose this crazy date is with that crazy boy friend of yours?’”

“And she said?”

“Can you imagine Grace Hough ever saying anything with a what or a when or a who in it?” snapped Lockwood. “She just smirked and said wouldn’t I like to know? All the same, I had a pretty strong hunch it was the boy friend. Otherwise she wouldn’t have been so het-up and sort of tense. She was on edge all the time.”

I noticed a rather odd expression in Lieutenant Trant’s eyes. Then he said simply: “Go on, Mr. Lockwood.”

“We were on the outskirts of Wentworth when I ran low on gas. Luckily there was a service station. We stopped. The place was closing up....”

Until then I had been carried away by the story, thinking of Grace and Grace only. Now, as David Lockwood approached the crucial point of the whole narration, I started feeling afraid again. I thought of

what Marcia had told me about the telephone call, of what Steve had confessed about his part of the episode at the service station. I was horribly afraid this actor would say something that conflicted with the stories I had heard from Steve and Marcia, something that might shake my stubborn belief in their innocence.

Lieutenant Trant said suddenly: "At the service station, Mr. Lockwood, Grace made a telephone call, didn't she?"

I stared at him in astonishment, wondering how he had unearthed that fact which I had tried so very hard to keep from him. He returned my stare with a grin. "That wasn't very difficult, Lee Lovering. All I had to do was to talk to the attendant at the service station." He turned back to Lockwood. "Did Grace tell you whom she was calling? Or why?"

"Didn't tell me a thing, not a darn thing. I just took it for granted she was calling that impossible date of hers. But I must have been wrong, because just as she was phoning, her date arrived."

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Lockwood?" Trant asked.

"Just that her date arrived. A car swung up to the service station. A young man was in it—a dark, good-looking chap. Grace came right out from phoning and went to his car. She said something or other to him, then hurried over to me. She poked her head into the window and said: 'It's all right, Mr. Lockwood, I shan't need you to take me any farther.'"

Lockwood was pacing the threadbare carpet once more. "Needless to say, I didn't do much hanging around. Fate had delivered me from Grace Hough. As soon as I got filled up, I shoved off and drove back to New York like a spirit released from purgatory."

"Do you have anything more definite than your own hunch that the man in the other car was the person Grace had been planning to meet?" Trant queried mildly.

Suddenly I couldn't stand it any more, couldn't bear to hear this man accusing Steve of something when Steve wasn't there to defend himself.

“It isn’t true,” I broke in unsteadily. “You’ve no right even to hint that Grace had an appointment with this—this man. Steve couldn’t have written those special delivery letters. He—he wasn’t in love with Grace. He ...”

“If he wasn’t in love with Grace,” said Lockwood coolly, “I must say he was surprisingly solicitous. It had started to rain just as I quit the service station. Grace was standing by this guy’s car. They were talking. Then ...”

Lieutenant Trant had turned to face me. There was a curious expression in his eyes. In a quick moment of clairvoyance I knew what David Lockwood was going to say next and I felt the blood draining from my cheeks.

“Then?” prompted Trant quietly, his eyes still on me.

“It was the last I ever saw of Grace Hough.” Lockwood tossed back his head. “This tall young fellow had helped her off with her fur coat and was holding out a raincoat which had been lying in the back of his car. It was a red raincoat—a bright red slicker.”

## XVII

From the start the case against Steve had been frighteningly strong. Now that he was known to have had that unidentified girl's slicker in his possession, to have taken the galyak fur coat, it was infinitely stronger. But for me the shock went deeper than that. Steve had sworn he had told me everything he knew about Grace Hough and yet he had kept back that most vital fact. Steve, whom I had always thought of as the straightest person at Wentworth, had deliberately lied to me.

At first that seemed to point only one way and it was a way I couldn't force myself to accept. Then another idea struggled up through the chaos of suspicion and fear in my mind. Steve was in love with someone, someone he wouldn't tell me about. Suppose the slicker belonged to that girl; suppose, somehow, that she too had been involved, that it was for her sake he had been so desperately eager to hold back....

"Mr. Lockwood, you would, of course, be ready to swear you saw Mr. Carteris with the red slicker?"

Lieutenant Trant's words cut into my thoughts. They brought home to me violently just what was going to happen next. I saw then why the Wentworth police had never questioned Steve's story although they knew just how threadbare it was. Lieutenant Trant had suspected about the red slicker from the beginning. He had made them wait until the trump card was in their possession. Now they were ready.

That's what made up my mind for me. I didn't try to measure the way I felt against any logical yardstick. I only knew that somehow I had to warn Steve before Lieutenant Trant could pass the news on to the local police.

With a cunning born of desperation I said: "If Mr. Lockwood's coming to Wentworth with us, he'll have to change out of that naval

uniform. Hadn't I better wait outside?"

Lieutenant Trant glanced over his shoulder and murmured: "Good idea."

I made a dive for the door. Somewhere backstage in a theater there must be a telephone. I started along the dingy passage; it came to a dead-end by a gray, unplastered wall. I hurried back and down the iron steps to the lower level. Then I saw a phone booth right beside me. I hurried into it, sliding the door shut after me.

I was just fumbling in my pocketbook for a quarter when someone tapped on the glass panel of the door. I spun round. A boy with a pale, curious face was staring at me—a call-boy, I supposed.

I swung back the door.

"Miss Lovering?" he asked.

I nodded. To my utter surprise he handed me a quarter. "The man in Mr. Lockwood's dressing room told me to give you this, and to say it would just about cover your telephone call to Mr. Carteris."

While I was gazing in utter bewilderment the boy consulted a piece of paper in his hand. "The man also says this. He says when you talk to Mr. Carteris you better tell him the police know who the red slicker belongs to and isn't it time he came clean about the fur coat?"

The boy scurried away.

Of all Lieutenant Trant's exhibitions of wizardry, that hit the top. For a moment I was too completely dazed to do anything. Then stubbornly I slid the quarter into the slot and dialed long distance.

At last I got through to Steve. I blurted out to him everything Lockwood had said about the red slicker.

"And Lieutenant Trant knows who the raincoat belongs to," I concluded urgently.

He didn't speak right away. When he did his voice was husky, very tired. "Thanks, Lee. It's swell of you to let me know."

"But what are you going to do? They're coming to question you. Steve, you've got to tell them the real reason why you left the Amber Club, and all the things you didn't tell me. It's the only way."

“The only way!” He gave a rather desperate laugh. “I wish it was. There are so many only ways. That’s the hell of it.”

“And my fur coat, Steve...?” I began.

But I never finished the sentence, for the door of the booth was pushed open and Lieutenant Trant was standing there with David Lockwood at his side.

As I dropped the receiver back on the hook, the detective smiled that quiet, maddening smile of his.

The three of us drove back to Wentworth together. At the courthouse David Lockwood stalked complainingly away with a detective to make his statement, while Lieutenant Trant disappeared into Chief Jordan’s office. I was left alone in the drab waiting-room.

In about ten minutes Trant’s cool voice from Chief Jordan’s office called: “Lee Lovering.” I went. Chief Jordan himself, looking very gray and woebegone, sat behind the desk.

Lieutenant Trant was standing by the window. In his hand he held a queer-looking object made out of plaster of paris. He glanced up when I entered, his face very grave.

“Remember those tire tracks we found in the quarry, Lee Lovering?”

Did I remember the tire tracks! Those faint, regular patterns on the bare ground which meant so horribly much to someone!

“Thought it might amuse you to see this.” Lieutenant Trant held the thing toward me. I saw the little ridges and pits symmetrically stamped on the whitish substance. I knew then, of course, what it was. A plaster cast.

“Turned out very well,” commented Lieutenant Trant, his eyes still on mine. “Very clear. In 1931 a guy called Heindl published a swell book on the classification of tire patterns. Since then police work checking up on tracks has been one hundred per cent more efficient.”

Chief Jordan cleared his throat uneasily. I prepared myself for the shock of hearing that the tracks in the quarry had been identified. But it didn’t come. With a sudden smile Trant put the plaster cast down

on the table and said to Chief Jordan: "Okay, I'll do that for you right away." He took my arm and led me out of the courthouse to his waiting car.

As we started toward the college, I asked wearily: "I suppose you're going to pick up Steve?"

"That's what Chief Jordan asked me to do," replied Trant.

"You—you haven't counted Lockwood out altogether, have you?" I said hesitantly. "I mean, just because he says he left Grace at the service station that doesn't mean he couldn't have come back again and met her at the quarry, does it?"

"I am inclined to count Mr. Lockwood out. Largely because he has an alibi."

"An alibi?"

"I happened to check up on his movements before I took you to the theater. The doorman at his apartment house saw him leave with a girl in a light fur coat at two-thirty. He saw him return alone just about half-past four. It's a good hour's drive from his place to the service station at Wentworth. Greyville is more than thirty miles out of his way. He couldn't possibly have taken Grace there to the river and got back in New York at half-past four."

That, of course, was one of those remorselessly hard facts that no one could get around. Feeling rather numb, I began: "Then ..."

"Exactly," cut in Trant. "There's only one place now to look for the murderer of Grace Hough. And that's on the Wentworth campus."

We turned through the gates as he spoke. I was far too wrapped up in my own gloomy thoughts to notice Dean Appel striding down the drive toward us. I started when Trant stopped the car with a sudden jolt and called out of the window:

"Dean Appel, have you any idea where Steve Carteris should be at this time of day?"

The Big Appel blustered up to the car and stood by the running board. "Carteris? Afraid you've just missed him. The poor boy's been called away very suddenly. Sickness in the family."

The Dean of Men produced a crumpled telegram from the pocket of his tweed jacket and handed it to the detective with a cluck. "The news came in about an hour ago. Mrs. Carteris, the Governor's wife, has been taken ill. Of course I gave Carteris permission to leave immediately. He went off in his car about three quarters of an hour ago."

Lieutenant Trant was fingering the telegram. Very solemnly he said: "I can relieve any anxiety you may feel with regard to Mrs. Carteris' health, Dean. This wire was sent in Wentworth."

"In Wentworth?" The Big Appel snatched the telegram back, an indignant furrow on his brow. "You mean Carteris wrote it himself, that he has been deliberately hoodwinking me?" He paused.

"But this is disgraceful. I mean—do the police want him for some reason?"

"At the moment," said Trant, "all the police want is a telephone."

"The Administration Building," I said.

We left the Dean of Men and drove to the Administration Building; Trant didn't say anything, but I caught the quiet twinkle in his eyes and it dawned on me with sudden exasperation that he had guessed this would happen from the very beginning. For some devious reason of his own he had deliberately let me telephone Steve in order to force him into doing—just what he had done.

The detective came out from the Administration Building almost immediately. He got back into the car. "Well?" I asked. "Have you called out the bloodhounds?"

Lieutenant Trant smiled. As the car slid forward, he added: "But I'd stop worrying about Steve Carteris for the time being if I were you. You're going to need all your emotion for something else."

"Something else?"

"I've promised Chief Jordan I'd do some dirty work for him," continued Lieutenant Trant. "He's kind of friendly with the people around here and he's not too keen on having to do this particular job himself. That's why he roped me in."



I had the horrible feeling that I wasn't going to be able to stand much more.

"And what is this particular job?" I faltered.

Lieutenant Trant glanced at me without altering his expression. "You saw that plaster cast at the station. I forgot to tell you that the tracks in the quarry have been identified. They were left by one of the college cars."

He paused and added briskly: "By a car belonging to one of your many best friends, Lee Lovering."

## XVIII

Lieutenant Trant swung down a narrow drive which led only one way. I might have guessed it. We stopped outside the quiet stone façade of the Hudnutts' house.

"I want you to come in, too." The detective took my arm and led me down the flagged path with its border of pink and white tulips to the front door.

A maid showed us into the wide living room. Penelope and Robert were standing together by the mantel with spindly cocktail glasses in their hands. Marcia Parrish was there, too, leaning back in a chair, her eyes fixed on a huge vase of snow white freesia.

Penelope took a brisk step toward us. Her straight gaze fixed on Lieutenant Trant. "Miss Lovering has identified this man—this actor in naval uniform?"

"She has, Mrs. Hudnutt. The police have his complete story."

Penelope's voice, very clipped and English, asked: "And he has confessed?"

I saw Robert Hudnutt's slim shoulders tense. Marcia stood up, a dark, slender shadow against the gold parchment of the wallpaper.

"I think," murmured Lieutenant Trant, "that for the moment at least we can count David Lockwood out as the murderer of Grace Hough."

The silence that followed that remark was far too alive. Robert moved to a low table and poured cocktails from a silver shaker. With the faintest hint of irony in his voice, he asked: "And what did this actor have to say that was so convincingly innocent?"

"The most innocent thing about him is a very good alibi, Dr. Hudnutt. The other most innocent thing about him is the fact that he probably never saw Grace Hough before the night of the murder and almost certainly never wrote her those special delivery letters. He was guilty, of course, of holding back important evidence from the police. But I'm afraid he isn't the only person who's been doing that."

Lieutenant Trant had caught the subtle pulsing in the atmosphere and was deliberately sustaining it. When Hudnutt brought him a cocktail, he moved with it to a chair from which he watched the little group at the mantel with an interest which wasn't at all obvious and yet was terrifyingly acute.

"I want to tell you several things and ask you several things. At last Grace Hough's movements are more or less accounted for from the moment she arrived at the Cambridge Theater until the time much later that night when she came back to Wentworth. The basic reason behind everything she did is still obscure but we do know her immediate purpose in returning to Wentworth was to keep an appointment. We presume that the appointment was to have been with a man, a man she had been expecting to meet at the theater, a man who had been writing her a series of letters which we believe to be love letters. The appointment almost certainly took place at the quarry."

He paused, twisting the fragile stem of his cocktail glass. "We know she made a telephone call from a service station. We know she was driven to the quarry where she was killed. You will understand how very important it has become to discover whether or not the man with whom she had been carrying on that passionate correspondence did actually keep his appointment."

I thought that Marcia flashed a glance at Penelope. I thought the tight line of the Dean's mouth had drawn a little tighter but I couldn't be sure. It was Robert who broke the delicate silence.

"You are suggesting that this man killed her?" he asked thinly. "You will pardon my obtuseness, but if he were writing her passionate love letters, he presumably loved her. What motive would he have to murder her?"

"Surely it's not hard to imagine a motive, Dr. Hudnutt. Since no one, not even Miss Lovering, was taken into Grace's confidence, we may assume that the relationship was a clandestine one. Perhaps this man killed her because he was a married man and she had begun to endanger his social position. Perhaps he killed her for

some financial motive which has not yet come to light.” The detective looked at his thumbnail. “Or perhaps he killed her because she had found out something about him which he was desperately anxious to keep unknown—something which she held over his head so that he could never break with her in any other way than by murdering her.”

There was a queer tone in his voice as he said that, a tone which made me wonder with acute anxiety whether he could, by some miracle, have discovered the tragedy in Robert’s past and guessed that Grace had threatened him with exposure—as actually she had done.

Lieutenant Trant had looked up again. He was smiling at Marcia. “Or, there again, perhaps that man didn’t kill her at all.”

“And what does that mean?” asked Marcia calmly.

“The relationship between this man and Grace Hough was obviously reaching some sort of a climax. Suppose there was some other woman in his life, a woman whose own happiness and career was menaced by Grace, and who had found out about the appointment in the quarry. That woman or some other woman—or perhaps some other man. We don’t know how many people might have been vitally concerned with that rendezvous, do we?”

Penelope Hudnutt said jerkily: “We don’t know anything at all, Lieutenant. Knowing things, surely, is rather more your province.”

“Exactly, Mrs. Hudnutt. And I’m beginning to realize that Grace Hough was far more complex than she seemed, far more potentially dangerous to a great many people here at Wentworth.”

He put down his cocktail glass. Its clatter echoed startlingly loud. “When I last spoke to you all, you implied that none of you saw Grace Hough that night after you had left the theater. Are you still prepared to stand by that statement?”

“Of course we do,” said Penelope quickly. “It’s the truth.” Trant shrugged. “It just occurred to me that the telephone call Grace made from the service station might have been to this house.”

Penelope snapped: “We know nothing about a telephone call and it’s absurd to suppose any of us could have seen Grace again.”

“That’s strange, Mrs. Hudnutt.” Trant smiled sadly. “You see, I happen to know that one of you *did* leave the college that night. Miss Lovering and I found tiretracks in the quarry, tracks which could only have been made during the rainstorm that occurred on the night of Grace’s death. The car which left those tracks is owned by one of you three people.”

“One of us!” Penelope’s voice came taut and high. “But it’s simply not true.” Her sharp gaze moved to Robert and Marcia. “Robert, Marcia, tell him it isn’t true.”

Neither Robert nor Marcia spoke. Lieutenant Trant looked up from his hands, letting his gray, gentle gaze settle on Robert Hudnutt. “I’m afraid it is impossible for anyone to deny it. I also think it is extremely unwise for the person involved not to admit it. Don’t you agree, Dr. Hudnutt?”

“Robert!” Penelope spun round toward her husband. I was looking at Hudnutt, too. His face was a hard white mark except where the narrow scar, suddenly visible on his forehead, showed livid and pulsing. He made a little gesture of resignation with his hands.

“Very well, Lieutenant, I might as ...”

“Robert! Don’t!” The words came from Marcia like a pistol shot.

“What’s the point, Marcia? He’s found the tracks.” There was absolutely no tone in Robert’s voice. “I admit that I did drive into the quarry.”

“You, Robert? You drove into the quarry?” It was Marcia who spoke, her voice dry, husky. “You never told me. I—I never knew that.”

She took an impulsive step toward Robert only to stop dead when Lieutenant Trant murmured:

“I did not know it, either, Miss Parrish, although I am very grateful to Dr. Hudnutt for informing me. He must have driven in before the rain had been falling long enough to make the ground muddy. You see, the tracks in the quarry weren’t left by his car. They were left by yours.”

I saw, of course, how diabolically clever Lieutenant Trant had been. He had deliberately held back what he knew, deliberately thrown that challenge at Robert in the hopes of forcing just this admission from him. In one second he had sent spinning to the ground the whole flimsy house of cards which Marcia and I had built. And he had done far more than that. With a sudden feeling of hopelessness I realized how he had shown Marcia up as lying to me. Marcia, who had seemed so nakedly frank and yet, like Steve, had kept back the one really vital fact—that both she and Robert Hudnutt had driven into the quarry.

Penelope broke the silence.

“Robert,” she said and her voice was superbly unmoved, “it really was very silly of you not to tell me about this.”

Marcia moved to her side, laying a light hand on her arm. “We didn’t tell you, Penny, because there wasn’t any point.”

She turned to Trant. “If anything we knew could have helped solve Grace’s murder we would have told you. But neither Dr. Hudnutt nor I saw Grace that night. Did we, Robert?”

“We did not.” Robert’s voice was almost inaudible.

Marcia continued: “I suppose it was stupid trying to keep it back. But we had a reason.” Her eyes were on Penelope again. “Grace did telephone this house. Robert and I happened to be downstairs alone. It was very late. If we told the truth, all that would have come out. Everyone knows Robert and I were engaged once. Everyone knows, too, just how a scandal founded on nothing can blaze around a college campus. We wanted to save ourselves that senseless embarrassment.”

All the time she spoke, the two women had been watching each other. Gradually I saw the tiny creases deepen around the corners of Penelope’s eyes.

I knew what that frown meant as certainly as if the Dean had spoken. Marcia’s insistence that there had been nothing between herself and Robert was just a little too emphasized. Penelope suspected it. And she had given her hand away to me. She was

jealous of Marcia, desperately jealous of what she knew or guessed had been her relationship with her husband.

Lieutenant Trant's gaze was still on Robert. He said: "Perhaps you would tell me just what you did do on that night, Dr. Hudnutt."

And then Robert was talking, his voice very quiet and steady again. He was telling the story of that dreadful night just as Marcia had told it to me—the telephone call from Grace asking for a lift, his drive to the service station and his finding Grace not there.

Marcia broke in at that point, telling how she had followed Robert and how she, too, had found the service station deserted. She did not mention the letter from Grace to Penelope, that second of Grace's three last letters with its cruel revelations and its implied motive for murder.

I gripped the arms of my chair, waiting for the detective's next question. It came, very cool, addressed to Marcia. "And how about the little side excursion to the quarry, Miss Parrish?"

"That is simple to explain," said Marcia deliberately. "You have to pass the quarry on the way back from the service station. It's right there on the bend of the road. I was worried about Grace's disappearance after she'd telephoned. I saw the mouth to the quarry. Robert had told me how he had met Grace there in the afternoon. I suppose that made me associate the place with her. I just turned in on impulse."

Lieutenant Trant nodded abstractedly. "Wouldn't it have been rather odd for Grace to have gone to the quarry after she'd called Dr. Hudnutt to drive her back to Wentworth?"

"Of course it would have been odd," agreed Marcia. "I merely went into the quarry as one of the few places where Grace might possibly have been."

"And you, Dr. Hudnutt?" The detective was watching the Dean's husband. "Is that why you turned into the quarry, too?"

Robert looked back at him. "It is."

"You went to the quarry before Miss Parrish, of course, Dr. Hudnutt?"

“I did. In fact, just as I was inside, I heard a car pass along the road. I presume that was Miss Parrish on her way to the service station.”

“And neither of you saw Grace at the quarry?”

Dr. Hudnutt shook his head bleakly.

Marcia said: “We did not.”

“So that is what happened,” murmured Lieutenant Trant.

It was impossible to guess what he was thinking. Of course, I myself had no way any more of telling whether they were speaking the truth. But I could see how pitifully weak Marcia’s claimed reason for going to the quarry had been. Why should she have been worried about Grace when she had arrived at the service station *after* Robert? Naturally she should have taken it for granted that he had already taken Grace home. Knowing as I did of the spiteful letter which had really urged Marcia to follow Robert, I could see why she might have turned into the quarry for quite another reason. She might have been afraid that Grace had forced Robert to take her there to discuss her cruel determination to expose the California tragedy. I could see that. But Lieutenant Trant didn’t know about that second letter which I myself had destroyed.

Or did he?

The detective’s eyes were fixed with rapt concentration on the cloudy mass of freesia by Marcia’s chair. “There are a great many remarkable coincidences in this case,” he offered suddenly. “You realize, of course, that Grace was killed less than an hour after that telephone call was made at the service station. During that time at least three people, all of whom claim complete innocence, went to the quarry.” He paused and added thoughtfully, “How carefully did you search the quarry for Grace Hough when you turned in, Miss Parrish?”

“Oh, not at all carefully.” Marcia gestured with a cigarette. “It was raining very hard at the time. And—well, I was just looking for a car and there wasn’t one.”



“Then Grace might have been there alone on foot and you wouldn’t necessarily have noticed her?”

“That’s true.”

Trant nodded slowly. “In other words, Miss Parrish, when you arrived at the quarry after Dr. Hudnutt, Grace might already have been lying there on that pile of stone—dead. She might already have been murdered.”

Marcia’s face went suddenly blind, her eyes slowly contracting into pin-points of horror. I saw, of course, just how Lieutenant Trant had tricked her.

Penelope crossed to her husband’s side and put her hand, white but very steady, on his arm. Marcia somehow managed to be in control again.

Very firmly she said: “I suppose you are implying that Dr. Hudnutt murdered Grace Hough. That is not possible. He left Wentworth in his car about twenty minutes before I did. When I returned to the Hudnutts’ house after another fifteen minutes, Robert’s car was back in the garage. I saw it through the open door. He could not possibly have killed Grace at the quarry and have taken her to Greyville in thirty-five minutes.”

“If that is so, Miss Parrish, I agree with you that he couldn’t have taken her to Greyville straight away.” Trant’s tone was quite unyielding. “It is not pleasant for me to say this but I’m sure Dr. Hudnutt understands that it is my duty as an officer of the law to point out unpleasant facts. It would have been perfectly possible for him to have killed Grace, left her in the quarry, driven back to Wentworth and then—at some later time that night—gone out again and carried the body to Greyville.”

A few seconds ago I had been reassured that Robert’s alibi was perfect. I saw now how Trant had ripped it wide open. All of us, I think, were staring at Robert.

But it was Penelope who spoke. She gazed icily at Trant.

“Before you continue with this hypothetical accusation, Lieutenant, I think you owe it to yourself to produce a motive. I know that at one

time Grace Hough had an adolescent infatuation for my husband. Infatuations of that sort are an inevitable feature of college life. But surely you, as an intelligent man, do not consider that a motive for murder.”

“I can see how it might have something to do with a motive for murder, Mrs. Hudnutt,” replied Trant evenly. “But you must remember Grace was not too normal. Dr. Wheeler, the neurologist, told me some very interesting things when I called him up on the phone last week. He’s a family friend of the Houghs, I believe.”

I knew then with blinding certainty that what I had suspected from the beginning of the interview was true. Lieutenant Trant did know of Robert’s tragedy in California. Probably he knew about him and Marcia, too. For days, probably, he had known just how strong their motive for murder had been.

“Dr. Wheeler? I know of no Dr. Wheeler.”

Penelope was staring, her eyes flat with incomprehension.

Lieutenant Trant was speaking again: “Miss Parrish, you told me you saw Dr. Hudnutt’s car was back in the garage through the open door?”

“Yes,” said Marcia faintly.

The detective turned to Hudnutt. “Is it a habit of yours to leave the garage doors open at night when you don’t intend to use your car again?”

Robert’s face was drained, of all color. He was like a drowning man, struggling to save himself from a vast wave which had swept him away at a moment when he had been utterly unprepared for it.

“I—that is—” he began.

“No, Robert, don’t you talk.” It was Penelope once again who had broken in. There was something splendid about her as she stood at her husband’s side, her face set and regal as the face of a carven statue. “You will probably think that point less important, Lieutenant, when you know that both my husband and I are utterly haphazard in the way we use our cars. We hardly ever close the garage at night.”

“I see,” said the detective thoughtfully. “Even so, that does not alter the fact that it would have been perfectly simple for Dr. Hudnutt to have acted in the way I suggested, to have driven back to the college, waited ...”

I suppose I was carried away, out of the realms where common sense had any control. During those ghastly moments I only knew that Trant had managed to corner Robert and that I had in my possession one solitary fact which might change the whole course of the investigation. That’s why impulsively and so very unthinkingly I blurted out:

“There’s another explanation. The garage was left open. The keys were left in the Dean’s car. Don’t you see how easy it would have been for anyone else in the college to have gone to the garage after Dr. Hudnutt and to have taken out the Dean’s car? The murderer, if he did come from the college, would have gone off some time between Dr. Hudnutt and Marcia and—and that’s just the time I saw the Dean of Women’s car going by Pigot Hall.”

Of course I could have cut my tongue out as soon as I’d said that. I could feel them all staring at me, the Dean very cold and still, Hudnutt with a sort of frantic unconcern, Marcia, her mouth drooped and rather forlorn.

But it was Lieutenant Trant I noticed especially. There was that faint smile in his eyes which I knew so well.

The detective said: “Now that is something I didn’t know, Lee Lovering. Mrs. Hudnutt’s car did go out that evening?”

It wasn’t any use doing anything about it now. “Yes,” I said. “The rain woke me up, coming in through the window. I went to shut the window. That’s when I saw it—a yellow sedan. I recognized it. I—I thought, it was the Dean going out. I didn’t realize ...”

“Well, Mrs. Hudnutt,” broke in Trant, “do you know anything about this?”

Penelope’s gaze, returning his, was amazingly level. “I know absolutely nothing about it.”

“Lee must be right,” said Marcia desperately. “Someone else must have gone to the garage and taken Penelope’s car after Robert had gone.”

Trant said: “I would very much like to see that yellow sedan. Chief Jordan’s men reported on having examined only Dr. Hudnutt’s car from your garage. Why was that, Mrs. Hudnutt?”

There was another of those harsh, grating silences. Then, with quiet dignity, Penelope said: “If Chief Jordan had asked me, he could very willingly have examined my car. But I heard nothing from him so it never occurred to me they would be interested. As a matter of fact, it’s not here. It’s been sent to New York for some—some alterations.”

“What alterations?”

“I had grown rather tired of that bright yellow shade. I had decided to have it sprayed some other color. I was having the summer slip-covers put on at the same time.”

You could never have told from her voice that she realized—that she must have realized—just how damaging those few words of hers had been.

Trant was looking at her. Marcia, her shoulders sagging, had moved away and was gazing blindly out of the window. Hudnutt, vepy gaunt and pinched, moved to Penelope’s side.

“In case you are under a misapprehension, Lieutenant, it was purely my idea to have the car gone over. I suggested it to my wife. And it was I who arranged to have it taken away.”

“And just when was it taken away?” asked Trant. ~

I sat there, twisting my fingers together, wishing I were dead.

“As I remember,” said Penelope Hudnutt quietly, “it was sometime last Thursday.”

“The day after the murder,” murmured Trant without altering the tone of his voice at all.

## XIX

My memory fuses the minutes that followed into a vague background for the figure of Lieutenant Trant, tall and lithe in the center of the room, his right hand gleaming in the near darkness as he scribbled in his notebook. He took the address of the New York garage where Penelope's car had been sent. Quietly, almost apologetically, he reminded them that he had no official connection with the case any longer. He suggested Robert and Marcia should go to the courthouse to make official statements.

But I wasn't fooled by his tone. As I sat, dejected and forgotten in a corner, I was miserably conscious of the destructive part I had been playing in the affair.

Lieutenant Trant had moved to the door when I started really listening again to what he was saying. "Yes, Mrs. Hudnutt, of course I appreciate how unfortunate this is for the college. I only hope the police will be able to clear it up quickly. Meanwhile, I suppose you'll try and keep things going as normally as possible?"

Penelope was very much the Dean of Women now. "The President is anxious for us to do our utmost, Lieutenant. Certain members of the Board of Trustees wanted to cancel the Senior Ball tomorrow, but the President has managed to persuade them that it is far better for the college to hold it as usual. I agree with him." Lieutenant Trant drove me to Pigot. He stood a moment by the running board, watching me very intently. "I've given up expecting much moral cooperation from you, Lee Lovering," he said with a slow smile. "But here's something I'd like you to think about. Should your galyak fur coat turn up at Wentworth, remember that the last special delivery letter may still be in the pocket. Also remember that the person who wrote it is probably the murderer of Grace Hough."

That's all he said. He drove away.

Suddenly I felt an overwhelming desire to be with Jerry, to cling to the one person who could keep me steady. And, after dinner, I met him, limping across the campus with Elaine's boy friend, Nick Dodd. He didn't use the crutch any more.

He stopped when he saw me. Nick said: "It's swell of you to help us out, Jerry. So long," and went on.

"I've been trying to find you, Lee." Jerry was gazing at me, his jaw very set. "Steve's left Wentworth. He went this afternoon in a hurry. Do you know why?"

I couldn't bear to tell him the truth, that Steve had disappeared because he had become so hopelessly involved in Grace's murder. I said: "I think his mother's sick."

For a moment I saw relief in his eyes. Then they clouded over. "You've been to New York, haven't you, Lee, and they've counted out the naval officer. Dean Appel told me." He gave a short, grating laugh. "Dean Appel keeps me so very much up to date on what's going on. Ever since there's been a chance of my getting that insurance money, I've been his favorite student—a potentially rich client for his father."

Of all the things Grace's death had done to us, it hurt me most to see the harsh bitterness it had given Jerry. Abruptly he said: "They're giving the damn dance tomorrow."

"I know."

"Prexy talked to me this afternoon. He's very anxious for me to go. Put on a front for the sake of the college. I can't dance, of course, not with this bum leg. But I've just promised I'd help Nick Dodd with the lighting, the way I did last year." He added hesitantly: "You were going with Steve, weren't you?"

"I was," I said softly. "But I guess I won't now. I don't particularly feel like dancing. You're—Norma was going with you, wasn't she?"

Once again he gave that hard little laugh. "That's all over and done with. Norma's not interested in going to a dance with a partner who doesn't dance." He was gazing straight at me. Suddenly he was the shy gangling little boy who in the old days at home had pleaded to

borrow my tin soldiers—and later had wrested them from me by brute force. “Lee, will you do me a big favor? Will you come with me?”

“You—you really mean that, Jerry?”

There was the slanting smile on his mouth again. “If you say no I’m going to break into Pigot and drag you over there by your hair.”

I said very softly: “I’ll come.”

Lights had winked on now in all the academic buildings around us. We seemed caught up in a little patch of darkness of our own. He took my hands in his rough, warm fingers. We didn’t say anything. There wasn’t anything to say.

I was going to the Senior Ball with Jerry!

Next morning the whole atmosphere of the campus had changed. The students weren’t talking about Grace any more; they were making plans for the dance. Norma and Elaine were swept away on this new wave of frivolity. In the afternoon they set off together in their maroon sedan to pick up new gowns in New York.

It’s strange how you can forget things that are so completely unforgettable. As the day wore on toward evening the little problems of the ball crowded everything else back into the recesses of my mind. At the last minute I found my black taffeta had to be fixed. I took it to Wentworth’s one and only dressmaker. By the time she had it right it was past seven.

When I hurried back to the campus, the gym was already sparkling with lights. The air was sweet with lilac and the small, unobtrusive scent of narcissi. I could hear the orchestra tuning up, and students were moving together across the quiet lawns, the girls’ dresses gay patches of color under the drooping shade trees.

It was all so horribly as if nothing had happened.

And then I saw Norma. She was coming away from Pigot, her hand slipped through the husky, black-coated arm of the Captain of

Football. I don't think I had ever seen her so beautiful. She was streamlined to the last inch in a daring gown of golden lamé.

She saw me and smiled. It was a strange smile, excited and malicious.

"You're in for a pleasant surprise, darling. Don't let it overwhelm you too much. And, by the way, give my love to Jerry."

Her white hand, with its gold-lacquered nails, clutched more tightly to the Captain's arm and they strolled away toward the Gym.

I hadn't any idea what she meant. I didn't bother much about it, either. I just hurried to my room, took a quick shower and slipped into the full-skirted black taffeta. At the mirror I pinned on the spray of camellias.

I crossed to the closet for my jade evening wrap. I pulled open the door, glanced inside and took a sudden, involuntary step backward. What I saw in that closet was utterly incredible.

My entire attention was fixed on the center of the closet where, smooth and sleek as on that ghastly night when I had lent it to Grace Hough, hung my cream galyak fur coat.

I was still in a daze while I tugged it off its hanger and laid it out on the bed. As I stared at it and my eyes registered little stray facts, that it was clean and dry and exactly as it had always been, I could think only one thing. Grace wore this on the night she was killed.

Suddenly I remembered Lieutenant Trant and his warning. He had hinted the coat would turn up, he had said: "*Don't forget that last special delivery letter may still be in the pocket.*"

My fingers shaking, I started a feverish search of the coat. The right hand pocket, the left, the inside pocket. Everywhere. But—I might have guessed it.

The letter wasn't there.

"So you have found it, Lee."

I spun round. The door had opened and Elaine was there, in lamé like her sister but of shimmering silver.

She came right up to me, gripping my arm tensely. "It was Norma. She found it. When we came home from New York with the dresses



she opened up the luggage place at the back of the car. And there it was, stuffed in with the tools.”

“But the letter,” I said urgently. “Was there a letter in the pocket?”

“There was. My dear, that’s the appalling part of it. The special delivery letter Grace got that night.” Elaine flourished her arm dramatically. “We both saw it at once, poking out of the pocket I made a grab at it, but Norma got it first. And she positively refused to let me see it.”

“But what’s she done with it? Has she taken it to the police?”

“My dear, it’s absolutely fantastic. I said at once it ought to be taken to the police. She turned on me like a panther. She said how could we possibly take it to the police before we read it. For all we know it might involve us. And anyway they would think it frightfully suspicious, the coat being in our car.”

“But, Elaine darling, tell me—did she read it?”

“She read it all right. Dashed back here and read it in our room. She locked the door so’s I couldn’t get in, too, until she was good and ready. When she did let me in, she’d hidden the letter, of course.”

“And she told you about it—what was in it, who wrote it?”

Elaine’s eyebrows tilted upward. “Can you imagine her telling me? She was standing there by the mirror in that grisly gold lamé of hers. There was a sort of gloating smile on her face and I knew she’d found out who wrote the letter and, for some reason, it just delighted her. I said again that she had to take the thing to the police. And she laughed a typical Norma laugh and said she might let them see it later on. But there was something she was going to do first. She was going to have a swell time, she said—talking to the person who had written the letter!”

I stared in amazement. “But, Elaine, that’s mad: Lieutenant Trant says the person who wrote it is probably the person who ...” “I know. That’s what I said. But you know how Norma loves playing with dynamite. She’s taken the letter with her to the dance, in her purse. She says she’s going to talk to the person concerned; heaven knows

what she's going to say or do. I dashed over to the gym to Nick and Jerry. I told them. Jerry says somehow I've got to let Lieutenant Trant know."

For a moment we stood there in the middle of my room staring at each other. I'd never seen Elaine that way with her eyes so very bright and that blank anxious look.

"Lee, you've got to call Lieutenant Trant."

I suppose part of me did realize then how I was facing the most crucial of all the crucial moments of those terrible days.

If I called Lieutenant Trant and if any of the people who meant so much to me at Wentworth had written that letter, then the police would have damaging evidence against them. If I didn't call the police, then there was Norma—what sort of a mess would she get herself into?

But I never really hesitated. I knew I had to get in touch with Lieutenant Trant. I hurried out into the passage to the telephone. I got through to New York and Centre Street. At last I heard Lieutenant Trant. I blurted out everything to him about the coat coming back, the letter and Norma's insane decision.

For one second Lieutenant Trant did not answer. Then his voice came, sharp and taut as a whip.

"Listen to me, Lee Lovering, I mean this more than I've ever meant anything in my life. Get around to that dance, keep an eye on Norma Saylor and for heaven's sake stop her doing anything—suicidal. Meanwhile, I'll get in touch with the local police."

"And you?" I faltered. "What are you going to do?"

"I was coming to Wentworth anyway. Now I'll just come—that much more quickly."

## XX

As soon as Elaine knew that Lieutenant Trant was coming, she shook off her anxiety and resumed her normal exuberance. I felt immensely relieved too.

And yet, as we hurried together across the dark spring campus, the vague fluttering of uneasiness persisted. The dance music throbbing from the gym, the evening star pale and silver over the library, the faint echoing of laughter ... it was all too gay. Wentworth had no right to be gay.

And somehow, I felt, it wasn't going to get away with it.

We were quite late for the dance. Already the couples, boys very black and white and spruce, girls looking far more sophisticated than they were, had drifted out into the campus to be alone, fading until they were nothing but two burning cigarette ends in the dark.

Elaine said: "Darling, even if the heavens are falling, Nick's done marvels with the lights."

And she was right. Usually when one went to the gym to tie oneself into knots on the parallel bars, it had a sort of gaunt draughtiness. That night it was completely transformed. Dim blue and crimson lights around the walls gave a hazy, exotic glow. Only the high gallery which ran the whole length of the building was brightly lit—a warm amber.

We found Jerry and Nick Dodd. They came toward us, skirting the polished floor and the dancers. Jerry was still limping.

Elaine grabbed Nick's arm enthusiastically and they swirled away into the kaleidoscope of dancers. Jerry and I walked back into the soft blue light under the gallery.

"Lee, did you get Trant?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, he's coming. He'll be here in an hour or so."

"Thank heaven. He did—did think the letter was important?"

“He thinks it’s terribly important. He thinks it was probably written by the person who murdered Grace.”

“That’s what I thought. That’s what I told Norma.” Jerry’s mouth went very grim. “She’s crazy, Lee. I don’t know what we ought to do.”

“Then you’ve talked to Norma, Jerry? Here, at the dance?”

“I’ve talked to her all right,” he said fiercely. “I cut in on her just now. She didn’t like it very much, but I made her go out with me—out there into the formal garden. I told her she darn well had to give that letter up to the police. When she tried to get funny about it, I told her she was not only being idiotic, but she was acting fairly low, too.” He looked down at his clenched hands. “After all, Grace was my sister.”

“Wouldn’t she listen to you?” I asked.

“Of course she wouldn’t listen. She told me in so many words to mind my own business.” He gave a rather savage laugh. “I can see what she’s driving at. She knows who wrote that letter to Grace all right and she seems to be getting a big kick out of it—just as if it gave her a hold over someone she wants to hurt.”

With a sudden twinge of alarm I thought of that scene between Norma and Penelope in Commons after Norma had posed for the newspaper photograph. If Elaine’s description had been accurate, Penelope had humiliated Norma in public then. I knew Norma would never be able to forgive that. Could that be the explanation?

Rather shakily I said: “Where’s Norma now?”

“I don’t know. She said she couldn’t talk to me any more because she had a date out there in the formal garden.” Jerry looked at me, his eyes suddenly questioning. “I left her there. Just as I was coming back to the gym I saw someone go up to her, talk to her. It was Dr. Hudnutt.”

Robert Hudnutt with Norma in the formal garden! I could feel the vague alarm in me sliding over into panic. I started searching tensely with my eyes through the thronged, softly lit dancers, searching for Norma’s gleaming gold dress and her gleaming gold hair. I caught a glimpse of silver flashing past. That was Elaine. And then the tall,

erect figure in black velvet. Yes, it was Penelope Hudnutt, very white and expressionless.

For the first moment I couldn't see her partner. Then they turned, and I saw him, saw the tall, slightly stooped figure with the remote, ascetic face. I breathed a sigh of relief. At least Robert was back again out of the formal garden.

But where was Norma?

I turned back to Jerry. "We've got to find her," I said impulsively. "Somehow we've got to get that letter away from her."

"I've done my best." He shrugged. "You see what you can do."

"Yes, I will. I must."

I left him, hurrying along the side of the dance floor. The exit to the formal garden was right at the back of the orchestra. It seemed horribly far away, and suddenly I had the crazy notion that speed was all-important.

I ran to the little door which led out into the dark shrubbery. I hurried down the path. Ahead I could hear the gentle gurgle of the fountain, see the soft glow of light from the baby spot Nick had put up there, filtering through the branches of rhododendrons. The path curved to the right. Suddenly I was free of the bushes, and the formal garden stretched in front of me, bathed in false moonlight from the concealed spot.

Norma Sayler was there. She was sitting on the stone bench where I had sat with Steve Carteris on the evening following Grace's death.

She was talking to someone—someone who stood looking down at her from behind the bench. That second figure was half hidden from me by the trailing arms of the forsythia. Then a stirring of wind moved the branches and I recognized her at once—recognized that dress of pure white satin, the dark hair, the slender arms.

The person who was talking so intently with Norma Sayler was Marcia Parrish.

I was screened from them by the bushes so that they could not see me. I was sure of that. I couldn't hear what they were saying, for

their voices were drowned by the spattering of the fountain spray as it dropped down on to the lily pads. And there—between me and those two—crouched like a malignant eavesdropper, was the little German manikin.

I stood there a moment looking at them, uncertain whether to approach them. Just as I had decided to go away, a movement from Norma set my pulses quickening. Her fingers had pushed back the clasp of her gold evening purse and I saw her bring out an envelope.

Marcia leaned nearer. I saw Norma lifting the letter as if to give it to her. I thought I detected the slight movement of Marcia's hand.

And then, suddenly, I wasn't looking at them any more, for I had heard a faint crackling of twigs from the bushes at my left.

Someone was moving quietly in my direction along the path behind the rhododendrons.

I told myself it was crazy to be afraid. It might so easily have been anyone—any student from Broome coming late for the dance. And yet I felt certain that someone had been there listening to what Norma was telling Marcia—someone who had now become conscious of my presence so close in the darkness of the bushes.

The footsteps were barely three feet away from me now. Through the thick branches I caught a glimpse of a tall, lean figure in black with a white shadowy shirt-front.

Then, very noiselessly, a man stepped around the bushes. He came right up to me without hesitation. He took both my hands.

He said: "Darling, this is the second time we've met around a rhododendron."

For a moment surprise took my breath away.

"Steve! So you're back!"

And it was Steve Carteris standing there in front of me, immaculate in white tie and tails, with that slow, nonchalant smile in his dark eyes—exactly as if he had never been away—exactly as if nothing had ever happened.

I had forgotten Norma and Marcia. I was thinking only of Steve, uneasy questions tumbling over each other in my mind.

I said shakily: “Steve, but where have you been? What have you been doing? You must tell me.”

He was still smiling. It was amazing how that bleak, hunted look had gone from his face.

“Where I’ve been and what I’ve been doing are matters of the most extreme unimportance. There’s only one thing to think about now. I invited you to the ball.” He gave a small, slightly ironic bow. “And here I am—late but very limber.”

Steve had come back to take me to the ball. And I was there with Jerry. Before I had time to explain, he had taken my arm and was leading me very purposefully back toward the gym and the jagged rhythm of the dance orchestra.

I tried to stop him. “You’ve got to be sensible, Steve. You can’t go in there. Dean Appel will see you. He’ll tell the police.” Then, suddenly I remembered. “And Trant is going to be here any minute.”

“That’s swell. It’ll save me a trip to the police station.” Steve grinned down at me. “I’m no longer a fugitive from justice, Lee. Just a guy with a story for the police—but it’s a story that’s damn well going to wait until I’ve had a dance with you.”

There it was. I couldn’t do a thing. He had drawn me away from the formal garden and was opening the little back door to the gym before I realized that I had never seen whether or not Marcia had taken that special delivery letter from Norma.

And I had completely neglected my real object in coming to the formal garden. I had done nothing to warn Norma of her danger.

I danced with Steve. It was a weird sensation, as if we were snatching a few minutes back out of the past, as if this were any other Senior Ball and Steve was just Steve and I was just Lee Lovering—two kids who hadn’t even heard of murder.

I don’t know how long that queerly suspended moment lasted. The orchestra ended in a clash of cymbals; there was a sputtering of applause and then the rhythm broke out again. We were somewhere in the center of the floor when I saw a large male hand settle on

Steve's shoulder and I looked up to find Dean Appel staring at us with a mixture of astonishment and indignation.

Steve smiled his slow smile and said: "I'm afraid I'll have to relinquish you to Dean Appel, Lee. He wants to cut in."

"I do not wish to cut in," said Dean Appel coldly. "I want an explanation of your behavior, Carteris."

"Okay. I'll be right with you." Steve gave a shrug, then turned to me, a new, almost tender look in his dark mocking eyes. "Thanks, Lee. Thanks so much. That was one of the nicest things that ever happened."

He went away, following Dean Appel's determined progress through the dancers.

And he took with him the queer spell that he had cast on me. Suddenly I was back again in the tangled problems of the moment. I realized how hopelessly I had reneged on my duty to Norma. I began to feel desperately anxious to find her—to convince myself that nothing had happened. But I was even more anxious to get back to Jerry.

It was strange how, once again, I had been left alone in the very middle of the dance floor. Always that night, at the most crucial moments, I was destined to be cut off in that bright, impersonal throng of people.

It was like one of those nightmares where it is desperately important to get somewhere and always there is a barrier between you and your goal. This time it was a barrier of smiling faces, swirling dresses, dark dinner jackets, and girls' bare arms.

I started away from the orchestra, back to the corner where I had left Jerry. I passed the Captain of Football dancing with his arm round the waist of a girl. That girl was not Norma.

I thought I caught a glimpse of Robert Hudnutt somewhere. Then there was the flash of a silver, backless dress and an arm, waving vigorously. It was Elaine pressed against Nick Dodd's shirt-front.

"Lee, darling, why on earth are you buzzing about like a lost bee? Jerry's looking for you."



“I’m looking for Jerry,” I said.

I tried to ease my way past them, but Elaine grabbed me round the waist and the three of us were caught up in the stream of dancers and swept on.

Once again I felt that absurd sensation of panic, that I was being deliberately held back from Jerry. Elaine went rattling on about her back; didn’t I think she beat Norma when it came to backs, even if Norma won on all points from the front view. Nick was making a bet, she said, that he could get twelve people in the room to say that she had the prettiest back in Wentworth. Couldn’t they rope me in?

It all seemed completely crazy, dancing a threesome like that and talking about Elaine’s back.

“If you’ll let me go, darling,” I said at last, “you can have my vote for your back or any other part of you.”

At last, I did manage to slip away and continued on my tortuous pilgrimage. I was almost clear again when I saw Marcia Parrish. She was ahead of me, hovering on the edge of the floor. Her arms hung straight down at her sides, her lovely face was white as the white satin of her dress. She must have come in from the garden, I thought. But why did she look as though she had seen a ghost? And where was Norma?

I struggled toward her and was almost by her side when a quiet voice behind me asked:

“Might I have the pleasure, Miss Lovering?”

I spun round. Robert Hudnutt was standing behind me, a slight, forced smile on his lips. For one second, while I hesitated, I saw his eyes move over my shoulder and I knew he was looking at Marcia. Then his arm was around my waist and he was drawing me back on to the floor, back into that whirlpool of dancers from which I had tried so hard and so fruitlessly to escape.

He did not speak at all, and when I looked up at his face I saw that it was set in an expression of mechanical courtesy, as though he were just doing his duty by a student.

That dance seemed endless. I was praying for someone to cut in, but apparently nobody had the nerve to cut in on a faculty member. Around again ... again ... surely it was more than an hour since I had come to the gym. Why hadn't Lieutenant Trant arrived? If only I could see those level gray eyes and know that the responsibility of Norma's safety was no longer on my shoulders.

And then—at last—the music stopped. That interminable rhythmic pulse of dancing was broken. The crowd which had been a relentless, elemental force was now just a lot of college students again, laughing, talking, strolling away from the floor. Dr. Hudnutt and I went with them. He led me to one of the chairs around the wall, gave me a stiff little nod and murmured:

“Delightful, Miss Lovering. Thank you.”

He moved away, and immediately I forgot everything, for Jerry was there, limping anxiously toward me.

“Lee, where on earth have you been?”

“Everywhere. I've been trying to find you.”

“And I've been trying to find you. Did you talk to Norma?”

“No. I couldn't get near her. Where is she now?”

“I haven't seen her. I've been looking around, but I haven't seen her.”

He stopped suddenly, staring away from me, his blue eyes wide and blank.

“You, Steve! I never knew you were back.”

Steve Carteris was at our side, watching the two of us with that quiet, slightly mocking smile still in his eyes. Jerry gazed back at him, stubbornly. Incongruously I remembered that this was the first time I had been with the two of them since their quarrel about Grace.

“Yes, I'm back. I've been hauled over the red-hot coals by the Big Appel. But I'm in circulation again on sufferance.”

That was the last I heard. With a whole-hearted sense of relief, I saw Penelope Hudnutt threading her way toward us, accompanied by a tall, slim young man in a very stylish New York dress suit.

I might have guessed that Lieutenant Trant would have had the tact to dress for the occasion.

The two of them came straight up to us; Penelope's handsome face was set and rather grim, but Trant's was cool and detached. His eyes, settling for an instant on Steve, showed not the slightest surprise at seeing him. He nodded at Jerry and then turned to me.

"Where's your friend Norma Sayler?" he asked.

"I don't know." I glanced at Jerry, then at Penelope. "We've been trying to find her but we haven't seen her. That is ..."

"Looking for Norma?" broke in Steve casually. "I saw her just now up in the gallery with a lot of stags." He turned. "Yes, she's still there."

We all turned, following the direction of Steve's eyes which were fixed on the high, illuminated gallery. It was crowded now with students, tired of dancing, standing around in groups with plates or glasses of punch in their hands. At that distance it was like a bright stage massed with smartly dressed extras for the finale of a modern opera. And it was dominated by one figure—a girl with her back turned to us, surrounded by a thick cluster of men. Her dress gleamed golden and metallic as the gold-blonde hair.

The prima donna with her flock of swains. There was no need to worry about Norma Sayler. I breathed a sigh of relief.

Lieutenant Trant seemed to feel the same, for he had turned away from the balcony and was looking at Steve again. "Since Miss Sayler seems quite adequately protected, we might leave her to enjoy herself for a while. You probably want to see me, Mr. Carteris."

"The sooner the better," Steve murmured.

They went off together. Penelope had disappeared too. At last Jerry and I were alone—without responsibilities.

We moved together to the downstairs supper tables, partly because it was bad for Jerry's newly healed ankle to climb to the gallery, partly, I felt, because we both of us wanted to avoid running into Norma who had become a symbol of all the things that neither of us wanted to think about.

Jerry brought glasses of punch and plates of lobster salad. That should have been festive. But it wasn't. Other students, trying to be sympathetic with Jerry, made a point of coming over and talking about nothing. For almost half an hour we were in the middle of a cheerful crowd.

At last Jerry took my arm. "Let's get the hell out of here," he breathed.

We left the gym, found the little back door, made our way through the shrubbery and out to the formal garden.

The moon had come now, a new moon, thin and clean, tilted in the placid spring sky. With its coming, Nick's spot had been switched off, like a candle fading before the moon. The garden was darker but lovelier with its blacks, its soft pearl grays and the faint cream of the forsythia.

No one was there. At least there was no movement or shadow in the quiet walks around the fountain. Jerry and I moved to the stone bench which for me had been the symbol of so much that was uneasy and fearful, but which now was just a stone bench by a fountain—for Jerry and me.

Jerry slipped his rough, warm fingers over mine. "I didn't know Nick was going to turn off this spot."

I said: "I'm glad he did. It's lovelier this way."

"As lovely as anything can be—now." He turned so that he was looking straight at me. "I guess it's all over, Lee. Trant will get that special delivery letter from Norma. He'll know who wrote it, probably know who killed Grace. Then everything's supposed to break even. A tooth for a tooth."

I thought of it that way, too. Even now perhaps the police had that damning evidence against someone. Someone!

He said suddenly: "Lee, have you any idea who did it?"

"Ideas—sometimes. But they're ideas I don't want to have. So many people might have done it, but they couldn't because they're people who just couldn't do anything so brutal and ghastly." I gave a

little shiver. “And then I realize that one of them must be different from the way I think. And it makes me afraid.”

His hand slid from mine moving over the cold back of the bench so that his arm was around me. There was a slight, husky catch in his voice: “I was terribly fond of Grace, as fond of her as I could be of anyone because—well, we’d been through such a lot together. But sometimes I wish this ghastly business wouldn’t ever get any further. Someone killed Grace. Hound that person, catch him, kill him. And then what?” In the dim light I could see his mouth set hard. “Sometimes I think it would have been so much easier to take if Grace had committed suicide.”

The dance music was always there, a steady throb in the still spring darkness. I said bleakly: “But she didn’t commit suicide.”

“So everyone says—everyone except the insurance people.” He laughed a quiet dry laugh. “They saw me again today. They’re still harping on that letter Grace wrote me from the theater, the letter Norma tore up.”

“She tore it up in the infirmary, Jerry. Maybe she never did burn it. Maybe the pieces are somewhere. Have you asked her what she did with them?”

“I’d rather not get a cent of insurance money than ask Norma for anything.” Then the stubborn, grating tone left his voice and he added: “No, she got rid of those letters all right. Norma wouldn’t give anyone else a chance to read them. They hit too near home.” He hesitated. “You see, there was that other letter she tore up, the one I told you about that Grace wrote me several days before it all happened. That one said pretty slighting things about Norma too.”

“You never told me what Grace did say in it, Jerry.”

“I know. I wasn’t ever going to tell.” He was gazing down at his hand which gleamed broad and pale, on his knees. “I can hardly tell you now. You see, Grace said so much that was true and that I hadn’t realized. It made me such a hell of a fool.”

The pressure of his fingers on my shoulder tightened.

“She wrote about you, Lee. She said I was crazy to bother about Norma. She said you were the swellest person at Wentworth and that if I had any sense I’d see that you—you might like me.” He paused: “God, Lee, I’ve made such a mess of myself. I’ve tried so hard to get what I don’t want and I’ve bungled so terribly trying to find out what I do want. And now when Grace’s dead and everything’s gone—”

He stopped suddenly as if it hurt just to say some of the things that were in his mind. It hurt me, too, to feel all his trouble and uncertainty, but it was a hurt that couldn’t really matter, because I was happy, happier than I ever dreamed I could be, there on the threshold of something which I had thought could never be more than—a threshold.

Jerry got up, pulling me with him so that we stood together at the brink of the fountain. Some of the delicate spray veered in a tiny breeze, spattering my hair.

“Lee, I’m nothing any more. Probably I won’t have a cent. No prospects for the future. Ghastly things to look back to—Dad’s death, Grace’s murder ... But the way I feel for you, it’s been inside me all these years. I didn’t recognize it, but I do now. It’s about the only decent, permanent thing in my life. I need you so damn badly. Is there any chance, after so long...?”

“Jerry, darling, is there a chance! Has there ever been anything else—ever?”

His arms found their way around me; his lips moved, stumbling across my cheek to my mouth.

With the touch of his warm, hard lips on mine, the years fell away like a pack of cards. And I was back again at the most thrilling of all moments, at my sixteenth birthday party, when he had led me out into the scented summer darkness, taken me in his angular boy’s arms. That first clumsy kiss that had tasted so sweet. And now this—the second.

Gradually his lips softened their pressure against mine, his arms, tense and trembling, slackened around me. I drew away.

I was looking at the fountain.

I saw the lily pads, dark, faintly gleaming with the bubbles of water on them, catching the moonlight—silver. But something surely was missing. The little manikin, the iron dwarf with the beard and the pointed cap—where was he? I looked again, peering through the veil of water. Vaguely I could make out one small red-toed shoe thrusting up pathetically from among the lilies in the pool.

Someone must have knocked him over.

Jerry's hand found mine and gripped it tightly. I stretched out my other hand, letting the soft spray cool it. And I saw the silver glints again in the water. Silver and, deeper under the surface, gold.

"Look, Jerry," I whispered, "how the moonlight turns the water to gold."

It was all so lovely. I felt a queer little stab of pity for the painted dwarf which had once seemed so sinister but which was now nothing but a forlorn shoe thrusting upward. I leaned forward, trying to reach him, to put him back on his stand by the pool's edge. My fingers slipped into the water, past the cool leaves of the lilies, feeling downward ... downward. Then I touched something smooth and soft, something that shouldn't have been there in the pool. I bent so that I could see down into the dark water, see down to that vague undersurface of gleaming gold.

And I saw. I saw the thing that was there.

For one terrible second, I couldn't speak, I couldn't think, I couldn't see. There was nothing in me but one vast, overwhelming horror.

I screamed.

Jerry's hand wasn't in mine any more. There would never be anything in the world to steady me. Jerry had sprung forward. I saw his arms plunge up to the elbows into the pool. His shoulders were tensed with the effort of lifting, lifting .... I saw his face in profile, drawn, distorted like his own face in a nightmare.

And then I caught a glimpse of gold out of the water. I saw the body of a girl in his arms, her head drooping backward with its

streaming gold hair, a girl with white, bare shoulders above the gown of shimmering gold lamé.

I said it then, said the words that were hammering in my brain like pistons.

“It’s Norma—Norma Sayler.”



## XXI

Even now I can't remember the moments that followed with any coherence. I have forced them back, deep into my mind, so that they have no shape, no sequence. They are nothing but a cacophony of sounds, images, sensations—the memory of Jerry's kiss still warm on my lips and then my own voice screaming, hoarsely out of control. Jerry stooped over the pool, Jerry lifting a girl's body out of the water, his shoulder squared, his muscles tense. The moonlight gleaming on the golden lamé of Norma's dress as he laid her down on the soft turf at the fountain's edge.

I tried to make myself think. I had to get to the gym. Somehow I had to find Lieutenant Trant. I turned my back on the fountain and started stumbling through the moonlight toward the swaying rhododendrons.

That's when the second phase of blurred memories begins. Suddenly there were people—people streaming through the bushes toward me, burning cigarettes, glimpses of bright dresses, voices, hoarse, curious. "Did you hear the scream?" They came up to me and past me. I couldn't stop them. Then I felt a hand clutch my arm. I turned dazedly and Elaine was there, her face white, startled in the shadowy light. Nick Dodd was with her.

"Why's the spot turned out, Lee? What's happened?"

Her hand still on my arm, Elaine started forward again. I tried to drag her back.

"Elaine, stop. You can't go there. Nick, stop her."

Then, somehow, all three of us were on the edge of that group which was staring across the lawn at the ghastly tableau of Jerry stooped over Norma's body.

Someone gave a stifled cry. Everything was an uproar of harsh voices and quick moving figures. The music had stopped, breaking

in the middle of a bar. Then there was a tall man pushing through the throng, hurrying to Jerry's side.

His voice clear and taut echoed above the babel. "Everyone get away from here at once—everyone."

Lieutenant Trant!

It was amazing how instantly he was obeyed. Girls and boys started backing away. I lost Elaine and Nick in the near panic of that retreat. All the students were gone now and other men were hurrying up, men in day clothes. The local police.

The voices around me were brisk and official. A flashlight blazed downward, swinging to left and right. In its beam I saw someone hurrying toward me. It was Jerry, his coat stripped off, his shirt gleaming white. He put his arms around me, holding me close.

"Lee, darling."

"Jerry."

"Trant says we've got to wait. Hudnutt's coming. We're all to go to his house."

Then Marcia was there at our side, a slim white shadow in her white satin gown. "Lee, Jerry, come with me. Penelope has Elaine. She's driving her back to their place. Robert's getting my car. We're all to go, too."

The three of us hurried around the gym, pushing through the jostling crowds of students who were pouring out from the dance which had so suddenly and terribly been abandoned. Robert Hudnutt was waiting with Marcia's car. We swung away from the gym, through the campus, down the narrow path to the Hudnutts' house.

When we all trooped into the Hudnutts' long living room, I was still in that state of numbed shock where nothing seemed to mean much. I was vaguely conscious of Jerry's hand still in mine, of Marcia moving to turn on a single light.

I could feel Jerry's fingers in mine trembling and I realized suddenly that his shirt and trousers were wringing wet. Somehow that cleared my head a bit.

"Jerry, you've got to put on some dry clothes."

He didn't seem to hear, but Robert did. He took Jerry away with him and when they came back Jerry had on gray flannel trousers and a high-necked sweater. But there was still that bluish pallor to his lips as if he never could be warm again.

I don't know how long the four of us waited there in pinched silence for Trant to come and to bring what news there was. At some stage Dean Appel arrived, very pink and flustered. Behind him, his dark face showing a sort of perplexed anxiety, was Steve Carteris.

He moved quickly to Jerry and laid his hand on Jerry's arm. He didn't say anything.

And then Penelope appeared, erect, cool, handsome. It was amazing that just by coming into the room, she managed to make everything seem normal and under control.

She said to Marcia: "I've left Elaine upstairs with Nick Dodd. I think it's best that way, poor child." She crossed to me, putting a firm hand on my shoulder. "I don't want you to go back to Pigot tonight either, Lee. I'd like you to sleep here with Elaine."

I don't think I ever admired Penelope quite as much as I did at that moment. In spite of everything she could still be the Dean of Women. She could make all the proper arrangements just as if we were seven ordinary people presenting ordinary executive problems.

Seven ordinary people! When each of us really was there for only one reason—because we were under suspicion of double murder.

A few minutes later Trant arrived alone. He was incongruously cool and immaculate in his white tie and tails, but there was a marked change in him. The deceptive surface of casualness had been stripped away, leaving his face grim.

"Chief Jordan will be here as soon as he can make it. There's still a great deal to be done." His gaze had instinctively picked out Penelope as the dominating factor in the room. "Meanwhile he's asked me to talk to you people. I know it's tough, but it's got to be done."

"Of course," agreed Penelope. "There is only one thing I must insist upon. I will not have Elaine Saylor bothered by any questioning

tonight.”

“That should not be necessary, Mrs. Hudnutt.” Trant dropped into a chair close to where Jerry and I sat together on the couch. “At the moment there is one question of extreme importance. I want to know whether Norma Sayler gave any of you people the special delivery letter which she found this afternoon in the pocket of Grace Hough’s borrowed fur coat?”

I was back again at my first visit to the formal garden—when I saw Norma Sayler take the letter from her purse, saw her hold it toward Marcia and then saw no more in the sudden astonishment of Steve’s reappearance. I turned to look at Marcia.

She didn’t speak. Nor did anyone else.

After a pause Trant said: “Then there’s no doubt as to the motive for this second murder. Norma Sayler was killed because of that letter and what it told her. Chief Jordan’s men have retrieved her purse from the fountain. The letter is not there.”

I had known that must be the motive, of course.

“The medical examiner has not had time yet to give us details,” Trant continued, “but we know that Norma Sayler was not drowned. Like Grace Hough she was struck on the back of the head before she was thrown into the water.” He looked down at the soft gray carpet. “We have already found the weapon—a small iron statue which used to stand by the edge of the pool. It had been thrown in the water, too. There will be virtually no chance for fingerprints.”

The little bearded dwarf! The manikin which had seemed to listen so sardonically that night when Steve and I were together in the garden, the manikin whose red-pointed shoe I had seen thrusting out of the water.

Trant’s voice cut into my thoughts again. “There’s another thing Chief Jordan wants to know. During the earlier part of the evening a small spotlight played on the garden. At some stage it stopped working. Mr. Hough, I believe you helped with the lights? Do you know anything about that?”

Jerry said: "Lee and I noticed it. I was surprised. Nick had told me earlier he was going to keep it on all the evening."

"That's what I thought," said Trant. "You see, the spot wasn't switched off from inside. The wires had been cut through—presumably by the murderer of Norma Saylor."

The detective looked up, his face very drawn, as near to giving away his feelings as I had ever seen it. "I want to admit to you all that the police are partly responsible for what has happened. Miss Lovering reported to me immediately she found out that Norma was holding back that letter. I came here as quickly as I could. When I arrived, instead of going to her immediately, I thought it even more important to hear what Mr. Carteris had to tell me. Although I guessed there might be danger for Norma, I never dreamed it was as real as it turned out to be."

He said: "It was the same with Chief Jordan. He has been at Wentworth College all evening. He knew about Norma but he was busy investigating something else which has just come up—something which seemed of vital importance to him." Trant smiled a thin, humorless smile. "We all showed a tendency to mistake the fiddling for the burning Rome."

His voice was suddenly clipped, impersonal again. "Mrs. Hudnutt, Mr. Hough, Miss Lovering, Mr. Carteris and I all saw Norma Saylor in the gallery just as I arrived. Did any of you see her after that time?"

Dean Appel swung one large leg over the other. No one spoke. "Presumably then she was killed very soon after she left the gallery—while I was talking to Mr. Carteris." The detective glanced at Steve, adding quietly: "Alibis for those moments may be rather important later on. Meanwhile I understand from Miss Lovering that Norma did not take that letter to the police straight away because she had a reason for wanting to talk first to the person who wrote it. I should be most interested to know which of you people were alone with her at any time during the dance."

I could feel Jerry's arm tense beneath the soft wool of the sweater. There was still that blind remembrance of horror in his eyes but his

voice was doggedly in control as he told the story of his talk with Norma as he had told it to me—how he had made her go out into the formal garden, had urged her to give the letter to the police and how she had paid no attention.

“I left her by the fountain. She wouldn’t go in with me. She—she said she had a date.”

It’s strange how I could feel a sudden tautness in the atmosphere although I’m sure nobody moved.

Trant was saying: “And Norma told you who the date was with, Mr. Hough?”

“No. But as I was going away, I saw someone move toward her from the direction of the gym. I don’t ...”

“There isn’t any need to have him say it,” interrupted Robert in a small, tired voice. “I’ll admit it was I. I was the person whom Miss Saylor insisted upon seeing in the garden.”

Neither Penelope nor Marcia stirred and I knew then that they knew whatever it was that Robert had to tell.

Trant said, “And why did she insist on seeing you?”

“Surely you must know by now that anyone who gets murdered invariably insists upon seeing me first.” Robert gave a savage little laugh which showed me more than anything just how near the breaking point he was. “Norma Saylor had a very good reason for wanting to see me. She had read that special delivery letter which had been sent to Grace Hough. She was under the impression that it was I who wrote it.”

“She had a reason for that assumption, Dr. Hudnutt?” queried Trant quietly.

That long, suspended pause was almost more than I could bear.

Then Robert said: “I can tell you what Norma Saylor told me, Lieutenant. I went out to the garden. She was waiting there by the fountain. She seemed in a highly excited state. She produced a letter from her bag. It meant nothing to me until she told me it was the special delivery which had come for Grace Hough on the night of her death. My first instinct naturally was to tell her to give it to the police

right away. She said: 'I'm surprised you should advise me to do that. You of all people!' I didn't have the slightest idea what she was driving at. Then she took the letter out of the envelope, held it in the path of the spotlight and started to read passages out loud. They were passages of an extremely ardent nature; one was extolling Grace Hough in comparison with Norma Sayler; the other spoke of a quarrel in the afternoon, of forgiveness, of an appointment at the theater later in the evening. She asked me if those sentences didn't strike a chord in my memory. It was then that she accused me of writing the letter myself."

Robert Hudnutt threw out his hands in a gesture which expressed far more than any words could have done. "What was I to say? I denied it, of course. I had never written a letter to Grace Hough. But Norma Sayler insisted that it could have been written by no one else. She said it was signed: Robert."

I expected to hear Lieutenant Trant's quiet, relentless voice. But he did not speak. He sat bent slightly forward in the chair, brushing a speck of ash from the sharp creased trousers of his dress suit.

"Since she had made that accusation," continued Robert, "I thought I had the right to see the letter. But she would not give it to me. Finally I did persuade her to show me the envelope and I pointed out that even if she thought the style was mine, at least she must realize that the writing was not." He gave that slight, dry laugh again. "After all, there are a great many other Roberts in the world. But Norma continued to accuse me of having had some clandestine relationship with Grace Hough. Finally she said she intended to show the letter to the police eventually but she felt it necessary to show it to my wife first."

His eyes, so vague and defenseless, moved to Penelope's. "During these last days all of us have become so deeply drawn into this terrible business that I have given up trying to fight against circumstance. I told Norma Sayler that if she wanted to do that senseless, unfair thing, it was not in my power to stop her. I left her

and went back into the gym to Penny and Marcia. I told them what Norma Sayler had said and what she was planning.”

If you believed him, there was something pitiful about that story. It was pitiful for Robert, who had been hounded remorselessly from the very beginning of the affair. It was pitiful for Norma, too. There was no question now that she had held that letter back out of a spiteful desire to avenge the public reprimand Penelope had given her that day in Commons.

Trant was looking at the Dean of Women now. “And Norma did come to you after she made that extraordinary accusation against your husband?”

Penelope nodded. “She did.”

“Let me tell, Penny.” It was Marcia Parrish who had broken in. “You’d better hear it from me, Lieutenant, because I was the one who talked to Norma. She came into the gym just after Robert had told us what she’d said. She asked to speak to Mrs. Hudnutt. I knew she bore the Dean a grudge and I knew it would be impossible if she was allowed to have the scene with her she wanted. I insisted on Norma’s speaking to me instead. It was her idea to go out in the garden again. She wouldn’t stay where people might overhear us.”

Marcia moved forward so that she stood in the path of light from the shaded lamp ... serene, lovely, very much mistress of herself. “I didn’t stay with her long. I told her what I thought of her behavior. Even if she did honestly believe Robert had written the letter, she had no right to satisfy her spite by being deliberately cruel.”

Marcia paused. “She went on claiming over and over again that Robert must have written the letter even if the writing was different. She took it out of her bag and asked me to read it if I didn’t believe her.”

Once again there was a sudden sharpness in the atmosphere.

“Did you read the letter, Miss Parrish?” asked Trant.

“I did not.” Marcia’s voice was very calm. “I just told her to take it to the police.”

“And she said she would?”



“No.” Marcia gave him a rather queer look. “She said something that was a little odd. She said she’d just realized how the whole matter might have quite a different explanation.”

Trant asked incisively: “What did she mean by that?”

“She didn’t tell me anything more. And she refused to return with me to the gym. I couldn’t force her back against her will, so I left her. But I telephoned the local police immediately. They told me Chief Jordan was already at Wentworth.”

“This, of course, was some time before I arrived?”

“About half an hour, I’d say.”

Trant’s eyes had moved to Dean Appel. “Well, Dean, did you speak to Norma at any time?”

“I?” echoed Appel hastily. “Indeed no. At least, I had a few moments dancing with her earlier in the evening. But one of the boys cut in almost at once. Hardly spoke two words to her.”

“Mr. Carteris?”

Steve started as if he had been shaken out of some train of thought of his own. “I? No, I never was near Norma. I just caught a glimpse of her in the garden with Miss Parrish when I met Lee. That’s all.”

It was my turn then. Rather shakily I told of my own frustrated attempts to get to Norma, how I had met Steve and gone back to dance with him and later with Dr. Hudnutt, how finally I had reached Jerry again. We’d been together then right through the moment of Trant’s arrival down to the time I had made my frightful discovery in the fountain pool.

The detective listened intently. Then he said: “Well, that seems fairly clear. It’s also very clear that the murder was committed after I arrived at the dance and we saw Norma in the gallery. I can account for Mr. Carteris during that time. He was with me right until the alarm was sounded. Mr. Hough and Miss Lovering were having supper together and can account for each other.” He paused and the implications of that pause were obvious. “But if anyone else had gone out again into the formal garden after ...”

He left the sentence there, his eyes moving slowly from one face to another with a gaze which wasn't accusatory, but which somehow had the effect of putting the emphasis of suspicion on each person in turn.

Dean Appel gave a nervous little cough. "You can count me out too, Lieutenant. At the time of your arrival, I happened to be dancing with the President's wife. I saw you come in with Mrs. Hudnutt. I remained with the President's wife chatting until the news of the tragedy was brought to us."

Marcia said softly: "I saw you come in, too, Lieutenant. I was dancing with Dr. Hudnutt. After that we went upstairs to supper. We were still up there together when the music stopped and everyone started hurrying out."

Trant's eyes widened very slightly. "In that case, it seems that everyone in this room will be able to establish a definite alibi." He paused, his gaze traveling to Penelope. "Except you, Mrs. Hudnutt. Or can you produce one of these excellent alibis too?"

Penelope returned his stare steadily. "As a matter of fact I cannot, Lieutenant. At the time to which you are referring, I went out alone to the formal garden."

It was rather frightening the way that one remark concentrated every atom of attention on Penelope. Robert half rose, his eyes dark with anxiety.

Only Penelope herself was calm.

"I had a very definite reason for going there. I had been worried about Norma ever since Marcia told me of her talk with her. Although you had arrived, Lieutenant, you had gone off with Steven Carteris. Neither you nor the local police seemed to be paying any attention to Norma." I thought I detected a faintly challenging tone in her cool voice. "As Dean of Women I felt it my duty to make sure she was safe. I went up to the gallery where we had seen her. She was no longer there. I found Elaine Saylor up there but she didn't know where her sister was, either. Since I couldn't locate her on the dance

floor, there was only one other place to look. That is why I went to the formal garden.”

“And...?” asked Trant very softly.

Penelope lit a cigarette, watching him over the spurting match flame. “She wasn’t there. So far as I could see, no one was there.”

“The spotlight was on or off, Mrs. Hudnutt?”

“I really couldn’t say. I have the impression that it was quite dark. Yes, I think the spotlight was off.”

For a moment the Lieutenant did not speak. He was looking at Penelope thoughtfully. “You realize, of course, that what you’ve told us puts you on the scene just about the time we suppose the murder was committed?”

“I do,” said Penelope.

The detective stirred slightly in his chair. “There are several points which I would like to take up with you, Mrs. Hudnutt. I would mention them now, but I expect you would rather wait until we are alone.”

“On the contrary,” said Penelope, “if you have anything to ask me I would prefer to have you ask it in front of these people.”

“Very well,” said Trant. If Penelope noticed the subtle undertone of menace in his voice, she gave no sign of it. “You agree, of course, Mrs. Hudnutt, that what happened tonight is the direct result of what happened to Grace Hough. I’d like to go back to that other night for a moment. Mr. Carteris has just told me with extreme reluctance that he delivered a letter at this house shortly before the time Grace must have been killed. That letter was from Grace Hough and addressed to you. You never mentioned a letter to me.”

For the first time Penelope was unsure of herself. “Letter?” she echoed. “What letter do you? ...”

“I must take the blame for that,” cut in Marcia, her dark eyes meeting mine. “Mrs. Hudnutt doesn’t know about that letter. I found it in the mail-box. I read it and deliberately kept it back from her.”

“That’s true,” I added. “Miss Parrish showed it to me. And I—I burnt it. Mrs. Hudnutt never saw it.”

“Neither did the police.” One of Trant’s eyebrows moved slightly upward but he made no other comment. “Well, that covers one point, Mrs. Hudnutt. Now I wonder if you would be good enough to refresh my memory on your actual movements that night. After you returned from the theater with your husband and Miss Parrish, I believe you went straight to bed, didn’t you?”

Penelope nodded. “I did.”

“There’s a telephone extension in your room, isn’t there?”

“There is.”

“Then it’s perfectly possible that you could have overheard Grace’s call to your husband from the service station?”

“I disconnected the extension before I went to sleep. But you have only my own word for that. Go on.”

Trant’s voice was extremely polite. “If at any time you had moved to the head of the stairs, you could have overheard the conversation which was going on in this room between your husband and Miss Parrish about Grace Hough. You could have heard them discussing the fact that she had threatened to expose a very serious ...”

“There is no need to be tactful, Lieutenant.” Penelope’s tone was brisk, rather impatient. “Robert has told me about—a certain incident that happened to him in California. The only reason he didn’t mention it to me months ago was that it is a subject he has extreme reluctance in talking about. But, when Grace Hough was killed, I knew absolutely nothing about the California episode or the fact that Grace had some silly notion of bringing it to light again.”

“But you could have heard about it if you had listened at the upstairs landing,” persisted Trant almost sadly. “If you had, you would have overheard something which would have made you bitterly angry with Grace Hough. You would also have known where she could be found alone that night. Miss Lovering has established the fact that your yellow sedan did leave the college before Miss Parrish’s—just about the time of the murder. Someone must have been driving it. Do you still deny going out that night to meet Grace Hough?”

Penelope's lips were tight. "I most certainly do."

"And yet, the very next day, you sent your yellow sedan away to New York to be repainted and re-upholstered. Isn't that a curious coincidence?"

"It may be. But that is what happened."

Lieutenant Trant was looking at his left thumbnail. I knew that of old as the most ominous of all his mannerisms. "I've already told you the case took on a new development this afternoon. We had your car taken from the place where it was being repaired, Mrs. Hudnutt. Men from the police laboratories have given it a thorough examination. It was the result of that examination which brought Chief Jordan here tonight and made him devote his time to searching your garage when he might possibly have saved Norma Sayler's life."

His voice stopped. I didn't know what he was going to say next, I didn't have the slightest idea. But I could tell from the faint curl of his lip that Lieutenant Trant had found the exact moment to play his trump card.

"Yes," he said, "the men at the laboratory have examined your car, Mrs. Hudnutt. On the upholstery of the back seat they have discovered several small stains. Those stains have been analyzed and proved to be blood—human blood of the same type as Grace Hough's. I think there is absolutely no doubt now that yours was the car which drove Grace's body to Greyville."

For one long drawn moment there was absolutely no reaction from anyone. Then slowly I could see the different expressions sliding into the faces around me—Jerry and Steve, their eyes going grim, guarded; Dean Appel's mouth dropping open, registering incredulity and outraged decorum; Marcia with the color draining from her cheeks.

But it was Penelope, of course, who was submitted to the acid test.

Her gaze never once faltered as it fixed Lieutenant Trant.

"You are accusing me then, Lieutenant Trant, of having murdered Grace Hough?"

The detective's fingers played slowly over the arm of his chair. "I am afraid it looks very much that way, Mrs. Hudnutt."

I don't remember having noticed Robert until then. He was suddenly there in the center of my consciousness, moving across the room to his wife's side. His shoulders were stooped as if there was some invisible burden, far too heavy for him to carry, which was weighing them down. He took Penelope's hand and held it a moment without speaking. Then very slowly he turned to Lieutenant Trant.

And I saw his face.

It was very still with the arid stillness of a man who has suffered too much to be able to feel anything any more.

"It is fantastic to continue with this accusation, Lieutenant. I know you do not suspect my wife. I know this is just another attempt to force me into saying what you have been trying to make me say for days. It will come to you, of course, as a pitiful anticlimax. But I am ready to admit it at last."

He gave a slight, weary gesture with his hand.

"I killed Grace Hough."

## XXII

I had reached a stage now where nothing could really shock me any more. My mind just went on working mechanically, listing facts like an automatic adding machine. It was all over now. We were going to hear the tragic riddle of Grace's death and Norma's.

"Thank you, Dr. Hudnutt. I am glad to hear you say that at last."

Trant's voice was quiet and oddly respectful. For the first time since the beginning of that harrowing session I was relieved to hear him speak.

I looked up, expecting to see on Robert's face the expression of gaunt, tortured suffering which I had caught there the very first day when he heard the news of Grace's death. Instead, I saw him standing there by his wife, his eyes rather wistfully on her face, and looking absurdly boyish despite the gray hair at his temples and the dark shadows beneath his eyes.

"I'm sorry, dear," he said, speaking to Penelope in a low, intimate voice which seemed to shut the rest of us out entirely. "I should have told you. But I hadn't the courage to ask you to share this thing with me. You see, it was I who took your car that night. Simply because mine wouldn't start."

His tired eyes turned to Marcia, who was watching him with a sort of desperate blankness. "I should have told you, too, Marcia. I meant to that very next morning. But I'm afraid you tempted me. You took it for granted I had gone to pick Grace up in my own car and then you told me you saw my car in the garage when you got back from your trip to the filling station. And so you gave me an almost perfect alibi. You would have been able to swear—without perjuring yourself—that there would have been no time for me to have taken that ghastly trip to Greyville."

"But, Robert!" Marcia's hand moved slowly to her throat. "You can't ..."

“I’m afraid I can and—must. I was a fool even to think there was any other way out of this ghastly maze.” Robert turned to Trant, a bitter smile twitching the corners of his mouth. “You probably don’t set a great deal of score by my word of honor, Lieutenant. But I want to tell you this. I admit that I did kill Grace Hough but, as God is my witness, I did so unintentionally and without either malice or premeditation.”

Trant broke in there. His voice was strangely different as he suggested rather than warned that Robert was under no obligation to admit to anything that he might regret.

“Thank you, Lieutenant.” Robert’s voice was very firm now. “But I would prefer everyone in this room to hear what I have to say. I have caused them all needless suffering by my vacillation.

“You probably all know the circumstances that led up to this tragedy. Grace’s childish feeling for me that turned so suddenly to malice; that scene in the quarry; that later scene at the theater; and finally the telephone call from the service station.

“I went to the service station alone to pick Grace up, partly because there seemed no other alternative, partly because she had asked me to.” Robert gave an imperceptible shrug. “I was upset and nervous and I couldn’t start my car. That’s why I took my wife’s. I drove along the road that leads from the college to the New York highway. I wasn’t speeding, but I was going fairly fast. It had started to rain, a slight drizzle it was then—only enough to make the surface of the road skiddy.”

He passed one of his finely shaped hands across his forehead.

“I suppose I slowed up when I got to the curve by the quarry. But I don’t remember much about those moments. I only know that I had put out a hand to turn on my windshield wiper. The rain had misted the glass quite considerably. That’s why I didn’t see exactly what happened—why I didn’t know anything until I felt that violent jolt. I knew then that I had hit something just as I rounded the corner. I stopped the car. I got out.”



Once again his hand went to his forehead, covering his face as if to shut out some horrible memory.

“I saw at once what it was I had struck. There was a girl lying by the side of the road, her head flung back against the stones at the mouth of the quarry—a girl in a red raincoat. Grace Hough ...”

In the vibrant silence that followed I was dimly aware of the muted tapping of the wistaria against the window pane.

An automobile accident—a hit-and-run driver! After so much suspicion had been cast on so many of us, Grace’s death had been an accident. Vague fragments from the medical report at that first inquest at Greyville drifted into my mind. The doctor hadn’t thought it could have been an automobile that killed Grace ... the wound had been at the back of the head ... not the type usually caused by a car. Then, in my memory I was back again in that cold, dank quarry with Lieutenant Trant as he picked up that jagged stone from the heap beneath the face of the rock. I began to see.

If Grace had fallen backward, if she had struck her head on a rock at the edge of the road, a rock which someone had later carried into the quarry...!

I clung to the thought that it might have been that way—an accident. It should have brought relief with it. But it didn’t. What if Robert could prove Grace’s death had been accidental? There was Norma to think of now. Norma had been murdered. No one could possibly deny that.

Robert Hudnutt’s voice had shattered the porcelain silence.

“For a moment I didn’t move. I just stood there, staring at her—at that hunched, limp body in the red raincoat. Then I saw a rock, a small, jagged rock about a foot away from her head. I picked it up. The light from the headlights showed there was blood on it—wet blood, gleaming. I dropped it. I remember that clearly, the stone and the blood and the thin, driving rain.”

He was staring at Trant and through him with those dark remote eyes. “I was in another car accident once before. I have never really gotten over the shock of that. And then this! Perhaps that will explain

a little why I acted as I did. It was all like a nightmare, something from the grave of memory. I bent over Grace. I felt her pulse. I did all those things mechanically, and I knew that there was no life left.”

Hudnutt paused a moment. “It was only gradually that I began to realize just how appalling my position was. For the second time in my life, I had killed a girl. That was terrible enough in itself. But it was far worse than that. I had killed Grace Hough who had had an absurd—I suppose you would call it a fixation—on me; who had pestered me, threatened that very night to expose the one thing I had been trying to forget. Miss Lovering had been a witness to part of the pleasant little scene which she made at the theater. I could not know exactly how much she had overheard. Miss Parrish knew that Grace was a menace to my position here and to my domestic happiness. She knew I had insisted on driving out alone to meet her. Both of them would be forced to admit I had every motive, every opportunity to murder Grace Hough. And there she was—dead by the side of my car.”

“One moment, please, Dr. Hudnutt,” broke in Trant, his voice still very soft. “I want you to tell me if you saw Grace there in the road before your car struck her.”

“No. As I said, I was just turning on the windshield wiper. I didn’t see anything, didn’t know anything except that my car had struck some object.” Hudnutt slipped back again into that quiet, spell-binding story. “I remembered that first accident with its ghastly consequences. I just knew that I couldn’t ever let anyone know what had happened. I lifted Grace into my car. Her clothes were damp from the rain. I wrapped a rug round her. I remembered the stone. That couldn’t be left there. I picked it up again. Even then I realized the rain would wash away whatever—whatever traces might be on it. I drove into the quarry as far as I could go from the road. I put the stone among a pile of other stones.

I went back to my car and Grace. Then I heard a faint droning from the road and I knew another car was coming. I switched off my headlights.”

He had half turned toward Marcia. “I know it sounds completely inconsistent, but I had a sudden revulsion from what I was doing—an overwhelming desire to get to that car, to stop it and have everything over and done with. I hurried to the mouth of the quarry on foot. I saw that car coming from the direction of the college. I was just about to step out and stop it when I recognized it as Miss Parrish’s car. I checked myself just in time. I couldn’t bring her into it; couldn’t shift any of the ghastly responsibility on to her. It wouldn’t have been fair.

“When her car went by, my last chance went with it. I guessed Miss Parrish would be going to the service station. She might perhaps look into the quarry on the way back. I had to get away before then. I drove out of the quarry. The dim idea came to me that I should take Grace to the college infirmary, but somehow I couldn’t do that. And I couldn’t drive toward New York without meeting Miss Parrish. I remembered there was a hospital at Greyville. I knew a doctor there. It was a quiet side road.

“It was only when I reached the bridge outside the town that I began to realize exactly what I was doing. I was driving a dead girl to a hospital more than twenty miles away from the place where she had been killed. How could I possibly explain that away? People would ask why on earth I hadn’t taken her to Wentworth Hospital or the college infirmary. They would think perhaps that Grace had not been killed instantaneously in that accident—that her life might have been saved if I had rushed her to the nearest doctor. But I had brought her all the way to Greyville and she was dead. No one could possibly believe I was innocent of deliberate murder. I saw in a flash what it would mean to my wife—to our positions here at Wentworth.”

His tongue came out to moisten his lips. “I stopped the car and got out. Then I looked at Grace once more. I felt her pulse again.” His eyes turned to Jerry. “You must believe me, Mr. Hough, that if there had been the slightest flickering of life, I would have taken her to the hospital. I am not excusing myself for what I did to your sister, nor can I ask you to forgive me. I can only say that I took the foolish

cowardly path, because there seemed no tolerable alternative. I lifted Grace from the car. I carried her to the water's edge. I ... I don't think you will want to hear any more, Mr. Hough...."

Jerry was gazing back at Robert Hudnutt, his face above the turtle neck of the sweater white as stone, his eyes reflecting some of the horror of that terrible story. Very huskily he said:

"I can see how it was for you—how hard it must have been."

"Thank you." A faint warmth kindled for a moment in Robert's spent eyes. "You know the rest. I drove home. I went to bed.

My wife was asleep. She knew nothing of all this—nothing at all. I did intend to tell Miss Parrish next morning, and to ask her advice. But, when she jumped to the conclusion I had gone out in my own car—when she made it so easy for me to tell one little lie in exchange for an alibi—I let myself be lulled into a false sense of security. There was only the car to think of then. I suggested to my wife that it should be done over. I had the vague idea someone might have seen it, so I had it painted a different color. I'm afraid that was another of the criminally stupid things I did."

He paused a moment and when he spoke again his voice was firmer, more resolute. "There is one thing that I want you all to know. I should most certainly have come forward if there had been the least question of an innocent person being accused. I want you also to know that I never gave Grace Hough any cause to think I was interested in her in any way except as a promising student. I never wrote any letters to her, and—" he gave a slight shrug—"you must believe me when I say I have not the slightest idea who killed Norma Saylor."

I had been completely carried away from that long shadowy room back into those terrible hours in Robert's past. Now that he had stopped speaking the spell was broken.

I realized suddenly that Robert's harrowing confession had not really solved the mystery of Grace Hough. It made her death a senseless accident broken away from the real pattern. It did not explain who wrote Grace those innumerable special delivery letters;

who it was that she hoped to meet at the theater. Above all, it did not explain the identity of that mysterious person whom Grace had gone to meet at the quarry later that night, and it shed no ray of light on the grim puzzle of Norma's death.

Robert's voice broke in again. "Well, Lieutenant, I'm ready."

"Wait a minute, Robert." Penelope had sprung up from her chair and was walking briskly across the room to the telephone. We all watched her purposeful movements as she lifted the receiver and asked for a New York number. While she was waiting, she looked at Trant, her eyes steady and controlled. "Chief Jordan will, of course, want statements from us at the courthouse?" Trant nodded.

"In that case," said Penelope quietly, "I should prefer my husband to have a lawyer present. There's no objection, I suppose?"

"Of course you may get a lawyer, Mrs. Hudnutt," replied Trant softly. "But before you call him, I'd like you to hear something—something which may make you change your mind."

Penelope's eyes were suddenly curious. For a moment she fingered the receiver uncertainly, then in a clipped, businesslike voice, she canceled the call.

"Dr. Hudnutt has been very frank with us," said Trant, "although he might have let us know all this earlier. Of his own free will he has admitted that he had a strong motive to desire Grace's death. He has admitted that he struck her with his car and disposed of her body. As a police officer I cannot officially approve either his action or his subsequent silence. But, as a man, I can only say I might have acted myself in a similar manner under those particular circumstances."

Trant was watching each one of us in turn now as if it were particularly important that we should appreciate what he was about to say. "In spite of those admissions, Dr. Hudnutt has denied several other things. He has denied writing those letters to Grace Hough; he has denied killing Norma Saylor, who was murdered for what the last of those special delivery letters told her; he denies that he was the

person with whom Grace had an appointment at the quarry; he has denied that her death was anything but a tragic accident.”

He paused. “But we know that someone did write Grace special delivery letters; we know that she was intending to meet someone at the quarry; we know there is still a person involved in this case who plays a vitally important role and who is not Robert Hudnutt.”

Trant was looking at Penelope again. “This is the point I want to bring to your attention, Mrs. Hudnutt,” he said very deliberately. “Surely the most essential part of your husband’s story is the fact that he was switching on his windshield wiper at the time when he felt that sudden jolt. He did not see Grace Hough until he got out of his car and found her lying there dead.”

I couldn’t really grasp what he meant, but I saw a sudden quickening of hope on Penelope’s drawn face. She turned to her husband. “Robert, don’t you see what he’s suggesting? You never saw Grace fall in front of your car. Perhaps she was already dead when you struck her. Perhaps someone had murdered her and arranged it so that she was lying there on the bend, someone who knew you would be driving along that road, who set a deliberate trap to make you believe you killed her. Perhaps it was some ghastly, premeditated plan.” Her eyes, bright and eager, met Trant’s. “Isn’t that what you mean?”

Lieutenant Trant was watching her with a slow smile on his lips. “I mean, Mrs. Hudnutt that I have been put in a rather extraordinary position. For days I have been doing my utmost to force your husband into admitting to murder. Now—”

His gaze moved to Robert who was leaning back, limp and pale against the soft fabric of his chair.

“I have the unusual and very pleasant task, Dr. Hudnutt, of assuring you that you were *not* responsible for Grace Hough’s death.”

## XXIII

It was then, at the most dramatic of the evening's many dramatic moments, that Chief Jordan arrived. He came into the room, followed by two plainclothes men, looking exhausted and utterly dejected. His kindly eyes moved from one to the other of us and finally settled on the Lieutenant. Trant got up. It seemed incredible that he could leave us knowing so much and yet so very little, while we were still stunned by his announcement that Robert had not been responsible for Grace's death.

But he did. Quietly he told Jordan that several of us had statements to make at the courthouse. And we were all trooping out into the spring darkness again—seven people in our smartest evening clothes going to the police station at one o'clock in the morning.

There wasn't enough room in the two police cars for all of us. Steve's car was parked outside Broome. Steve and I walked to it over the moonlit lawns and drove to the courthouse together.

A short time later we were all in the drab waiting room at the courthouse, sitting around on bare benches, silent and uneasy, waiting to be summoned in turn into Chief Jordan's office.

Steve was called in first. I found a place on the bench next to Jerry. After about five minutes Steve came out again and a plainclothes man beckoned to me.

In the office Chief Jordan was sitting behind the desk with a male stenographer at his side. It was all brief and formal. While the man took notes I gave a bald account of the reappearance of my galyak coat, my own movements at the dance and the actual discovery in the pool.

Steve and Jerry were sitting together when I returned to the waiting room. The shock of what had happened that night seemed to have broken the barrier between them. They were talking together in

low voices, looking just the way they used to be when they were the two closest friends at Wentworth.

And then Jerry was called into the office. I wanted to wait for him but Penelope told me to drive back with Steve and go to Elaine. She gave me the key to her house, and I was with Steve again in his car.

Neither of us spoke as we drove through the deserted main street of Wentworth. We reached the college garage and Steve headed through the open doors, past the solitary old night watchman and up the ramp to the third floor where all the college cars were kept.

It was eerie up there. The place was completely dark except for the fanwise beam from Steve's headlights. Ahead I could make out the little closed-in repair shop. The sliding doors were open and I saw the back of a low-slung tan sports coupe inside. Dean Appel's car was in the process of getting its summer coat of paint.

Steve turned into his own parking space and the lights showed the maroon sedan immediately next to it. It gave me a strange, desolate feeling to see Norma Saylor's car standing there, forlorn and empty, where it had always stood.

I was moving to step out of the car when Steve gripped my hand. "Don't go, Lee." A shadow of the old sardonic smile was in his eyes. "I know you don't give a damn what or why I've been doing the past couple of days. But I've got to tell you." He paused. "You've been thinking I fled from justice, haven't you? I'm afraid the truth is much less romantic. I've just been home, talking to Dad. Trant's heard all about it. He's an amazing guy. He seemed to know everything before I told him."

There was a musty, lifeless smell about that garage. "I don't have to be convinced of Trant's smartness," I said hollowly.

"But you've got to be convinced I'm not the lying son of a something you think I am," said Steve urgently. "I've kept a few things back from you, about the red slicker, for example. But everything else I told you there in the garden was true. I told you I got into a jam at the Amber Club; I told you I'd been dumb enough to



confide in Grace once; I told you she threatened to tell the world if I didn't drop her at the quarry. All that's true."

"And you're going to tell me what Grace had against you? And why you left the Amber Club, Steve?" I said, still not particularly caring.

"It all seems so damn sophomoric now." He pressed a little closer. "You remember that torch singer at the Amber Club, the girl who came right over and sang at me? It was as simple as that. In my old unregenerate days I'd had an affair with her. I'd used a phony name on account of Dad's position and she didn't know I was a Governor's son until Elaine got tight and gave her that crazy line about me. Then she started to get the idea there were some fancy pickings in it for her. She was the person that called me. I went to her dressing room and she had her campaign all worked out. There were some dumb letters I'd written. She said she'd go in for a breach of promise suit if I didn't come across with the dough. I was scared as hell, simply because I didn't have any dough to come across with and Elaine had given her the idea I was a millionaire playboy. I spent most of the night arguing, pleading with her to give me back the letters. I was hellish late getting back to Wentworth because I had to drive her home first. She left her slicker in my car."

There was something pathetic about that story, coming now of all times. Steve's face was close to mine, flushed, awkward. I'd always thought of him as one of those super-sophisticates who knew exactly how to handle his women. This new picture of him as a blundering kid in the toils of a cheap golddigger somehow made him far more human—and more attractive.

"You poor darling," I said. "And that's what Grace found out?"

"Sure. Remember how I told you I'd confided in her in the old days when we all used to pal around together? It was about that Amber Club girl. She was singing somewhere else then. I hadn't seen her for months until the night of the party. When Grace made me pick her up at the service station, she saw that red slicker in my car. Grace was damn smart about things like that. She cottoned on to it—

from the coat. That was her lever. She knew Dad was in the running for G. O. P. presidential nominee. She knew any sort of family scandal would cut his chances in half.”

“And she also threatened to tell the girl you’re in love with?”

“Yes.” Steve looked down at his brown knuckles. “She also threatened that. You see now why I didn’t tell you any more than I did. I was a fool. I should have had the nerve to spill it all to you. But I was so damn scared for Dad. If the police ever traced that red slicker to me, I knew the whole story would get out in the press. That’s why I held back. That’s why I couldn’t even tell you where I’d put your fur coat. And that’s why I scrambled so dramatically after you called me from the theater and told me Trant had gotten onto the slicker. There seemed only one thing to do then; and that was to give Dad the dope first and give him a chance to fix it. He was swell about it. His lawyer took it up with Sylvia and somehow scared the pants off her. My juvenilia are home in the family safe; the Carteris political future is unsullied by scandal—and I got out of it far more easily than I deserved.”

I was going to say something reassuring when, suddenly, he gripped my arm and said in a gruff kind of voice: “Let’s get out of this place.”

We walked down the ramp in silence, our footsteps echoing against the cold cement. There was no light to guide us except the dim illumination from the main garage downstairs. Steve called a quiet goodnight to the old colored man in the office and we headed up the short road which led to the north gate of the college.

I said: “There’s one thing you haven’t told me, Steve. Why did you put my coat in the back of Norma’s car?”

“Grace told me to. When she switched coats, she said she didn’t want to lug the fur coat all the way back to Pigot. She asked me to take it to you, to thank you and to tell you how sorry she was she’d torn the lining or something. I pointed out I could hardly break into Pigot at that time of night. So she said to leave it in Norma’s car and

you could get it in the morning. I put it in the luggage place because I thought it would be safer.”

“I see,” I said, thinking how all the things that had seemed so fantastic in the career of my galyak fur coat had actually been so mundane.

Steve slipped his arm through mine and we moved past the iron gates into the campus. Ahead of us Pigot loomed against the pale night sky, shrouded in respectable darkness.

When we had almost reached the porch, Steve paused, putting his hands on my arms, looking down at me.

“You know everything now, Lee. You know what a shoddy fool I made of myself and how I’ve come out of it intact when I should have been held up to public derision—the smart little sucker who was taken for a ride by the first cheap floosey that took the trouble. I’ve learned a heavy moral lesson, I suppose. But the only thing that really matters has been shot to hell-and-gone. I used to be a hundred to one shot with my girl. Now, when she hears about this, I’ll be right off the board.”

There was something so forlorn in his voice that I took his hand and squeezed it. “Darling, you’re not so hot on feminine psychology. Girls love men with tarnished pasts and repentant consciences. Up and tell her all. She’ll be thrilled.”

“You really mean that?”

“Of course. There’s only one thing that makes a girl mad and that’s being left out of what’s going on. Even I’m a bit mad about that, Steve. Why didn’t you tell me about the wicked, wicked torch singer from the beginning? Was it because you didn’t trust me?”

“Didn’t trust you!” He gave a short, odd laugh. “Your masculine psychology needs brushing up, too. Haven’t you guessed that I’d rather have you think I’m a murderer than just that sort of a fool. You see, you’ve always been two people to me, Lee. You’re the swellest person in Wentworth and my very best friend, but—” he broke off, adding quietly—“you also happen to be the girl I’m crazy about.”

I stared at him. I was too completely surprised to be able to think. Steve, who to me had always been the Governor's son with a past, present and future strewn with the least correct hat-check girls or the most correct debutantes, Steve who had always seemed too gay and irresponsible to care about anyone—Steve in love with me!

He had taken both my hands now and was drawing me toward him. "I don't want you to say anything," he whispered. "I know you've always been crazy about Jerry and I don't blame you. He's far more of a person than I am. It's been tough loving you so terribly and going on eating three meals a day. But I'm getting along nicely now."

He was looking down at me, a slim, tall shadow in his immaculate evening clothes. From the faint starlight I could see the wry smile on his lips.

"I've got enough sense to see I'm the one with the breaks. Jerry, Elaine, the Hudnutts, Marcia, they've all had something horrible come into their lives, something it's going to be damn hard to forget. All I have to forget is you. And that shouldn't be so difficult for a self-respecting young senior to whom Life is stretching out welcoming hands—as Prexy says at the end of term."

He bent suddenly and kissed me. His lips were warm, uncertain on mine—so very different from the quiet irony in his voice.

Very slowly he drew away.

"If ever you need a sucker already there on the hook, Lee, just reel in and you'll find me. Goodnight."

And he was gone, slipping away across the shadowy lawns toward Broome.

## XXIV

That feeling of surprise and incredulity stayed with me as I started up the dark stairs of Pigot to my top-floor room. I was very tired, far too tired to feel sleepy any more. The long skirt of my gown trailed against the wooden flats of the stairs and it was a conscious effort to drag it after me.

And I thought of all the things that had changed since I had put on that dress for the dance. Much more, in a sense, had happened to me in those few hours than had ever happened in my life before. The intoxicating thrill of being in Jerry's arms, of feeling his lips on mine, knowing he needed me; then the shattering contrast of our discovery in the pool; Norma murdered and the blinding forward rush of events which had caught up Robert Hudnutt and then miraculously seemed to have freed him again.

And now this, the latest and possibly the least expected outcome of that crazy night—Steve Carteris telling me he was in love with me.

If there had been just one thing less to jar on my emotions, I might still have been able to think coherently. As it was, only one fact stood out in my mind to demand immediate attention. Elaine was over at the Hudnutt's house, probably alone, after the shock of her sister's death. I had to go to her.

I climbed to the dark landing and made my way to the door of my room. I noticed vaguely that it was half open. That clashed with some obscure memory of having shut it when I last left it. But I crossed the threshold. My fingers went mechanically to the switch, then they froze there because I had seen a vague shadow against the bare window pane.

I could see it stooped intently over my bed with its back to me. It seemed incredible that he could not have heard me come in. And yet, for a few interminable seconds, he made no move.

And then, slowly, the figure straightened. It swung around so that it was staring through the darkness toward me. It loomed nearer.

I remember thinking: "He's coming toward me. An unknown man is in my room and he's coming toward me. I'm afraid."

But even then I didn't feel anything. My fingers were still resting on the switch. Very deliberately, as if working on their own initiative, they pressed the switch down and the room was flooded with light.

I laughed with a hoarse, queer laughter which rattled around the room, prolonged and pointless. I suppose it was relief that made me laugh.

The man standing in front of me, tall and quiet, was Lieutenant Trant.

He came up to me, gripping my arms roughly. He shook me. "Stop it, Lee."

I knew he was shaking me because I was hysterical. And, somehow, knowing that, I wasn't hysterical any more.

Trant was saying: "I was a fool. I forgot how bad all this would be for you. You've got to go to bed."

Suddenly I was fierce and stubborn. "I'm all right. You haven't got to worry about me. I'm going over to the Hudnutts' house to be with Elaine."

Then before I realized it his arms had slipped around me and I was burying my face against his shoulder, the tears streaming down my cheeks. He led me to the bed, pushing the galyak coat aside from the sprawled position where I'd left it.

His hand was moving over my hair. It was extraordinarily gentle and light. "Poor kid, you've got such a hell of a lot of emotion to give away, haven't you? And now the well's running pretty dry. This case seems to have so much heartbreak in it and whatever happens I guess it's going to be toughest for you. You've made yourself care for so many people. That's a damn dangerous thing to do, you know."

I was steady again then. "It can't ever be as bad for me as it is for Penelope and Robert—and Jerry." I found a handkerchief

somewhere and dabbed at my eyes. “Did you really mean that about Robert? That it was all some ghastly plan, that in spite of what he thought, he didn’t kill Grace?”

Lieutenant Trant was smiling slightly. “No more leading questions tonight, Lee.”

“But I’ve got to know. It’s so much worse to guess and be in the dark and worry.”

Lieutenant Trant’s gray eyes played intently over my face. He said: “And you’re only going on twenty-one. Someone ought to stop writing about the effete younger generation. Okay, Lee Lovering. I’ll give you the works. I do not think Robert Hudnutt was responsible for Grace Hough’s death and I’m getting a fairly good slant on who was. Someone wrote Grace special delivery letters. Someone was to have met her at the quarry. That person turned up all right.”

“And—and killed her?”

Trant said very slowly: “I think so.”

“But you don’t know who that person was—the person who killed Grace and Norma?”

“I should have to answer yes and no to that. Yes, because I am practically certain I’m right. No, because Chief Jordan’s men have checked up on movements at the dance and have established a perfect alibi for the person I suspect, so far as Norma’s death is concerned.”

He got up from the bed and started walking restlessly up and down the room. “I think the only way to break this case is to retrieve the clues. There are four clues of major importance. All four of them are letters and not one of them has ever reached the police. There’s the special delivery which Norma had tonight and for which she was killed. And there are the three letters Grace wrote at the theater and Carteris delivered at Wentworth. Norma tore up the one for Jerry. You and Miss Parrish between you disposed of the one for Mrs. Hudnutt. And the third is still missing. We know Grace wrote it—and that’s absolutely all we do know about it.”

He paused, looking down at me. "Quite a few of you people have read quite a few of those letters. But I think there were probably clues of real importance in them which you overlooked. That's why I want to reconstruct as many of them as possible.

The special delivery has gone. The person who killed Norma has most certainly destroyed it. But David Lockwood, who glanced at the first page, established the fact that it was a love letter. Norma read two passages to Robert Hudnutt. One said rude things about Norma, the other referred to a quarrel and a date later in the evening. We also know that it was signed *Robert* and yet it wasn't written by Dr. Hudnutt." He paused, watching his thumbnail in that funny, absorbed way. "I don't think we need the special delivery letter any more. Those few glimpses tell us all we need to know about it."

They told me nothing, of course. But I didn't ask questions. I knew there was still a point beyond which Lieutenant Trant would not confide in me.

"At the courthouse," he continued, "Miss Parrish scribbled down the gist of Grace's letter to Mrs. Hudnutt as she remembered it." He took a piece of paper from his wallet and passed it to me. "Does that check with you?"

In Marcia's straight handwriting I read her shortened version of that venomous letter giving references to the California newspapers which had reported Robert's trial for homicide and drunken driving. There was nothing about the Wheeler Sanitarium episode.

"It was very much like that," I said.

Trant took the paper back, brought out a pencil and prepared to write on the other side of the sheet. "Now there's the letter to Jerry that Norma tore up. Could you make a stab at reconstructing that?"

I tried to concentrate on that morning in the infirmary when Jerry had shown me Grace's letter which had come during the night. Slowly phrases formed themselves in my mind and I passed them on to Trant.

"... I've got to warn you against Norma Saylor. She's absolutely rotten ... always humiliating me ... that's why she's trying to make



you fall in love with her ... couldn't love anyone but herself ... she'll make you unhappy ... I couldn't bear to have you suffer the way I've suffered ..."

Trant copied the phrases in silence. "Jerry tells me Grace wrote another letter earlier that Norma destroyed, too. Can you give me a slant on that?"

I remember what Jerry had told me about it that evening at the fountain. With slight embarrassment, I said: "I think it was mostly about Jerry and me. Jerry could probably give you the details."

Trant nodded. "And Norma tore up both those letters at the infirmary. I wonder if there's any chance she never destroyed the pieces."

"I've thought that too," I said. "If only I'd asked her what she'd done with them."

"It would have helped me and it would have helped Jerry a lot with the insurance people if someone had traced those letters." He put the piece of paper back in his pocket. "Anyway we've restored quite a bit of damage. Now for the third letter Grace wrote, the letter which I think may possibly give us the clue to the whole mystery."

I stared at him with astonishment. "You don't mean you know where it is?"

"I have a notion." He was smiling again, that slow amused smile. "You never asked me what I was doing here in your room, breaking the law by searching without a warrant."

"You can't think the letter's right here in this room."

"That's my idea. I didn't have time to put it to the test before you arrived." Very calmly Trant dropped down on the bed next to me. His fingers smoothed out the galyak fur coat so that the expanse of beige lining stared upward.

"Young Carteris told me something rather odd. Maybe he told you, too. When Grace gave him this coat to take back to you, she asked him to apologize because she had torn the lining. You told me once that Grace was very careful with borrowed clothes. It struck me as odd that she managed to tear the heavy lining of a fur coat."

“You mean...?”

“I mean she might have wanted Steve to draw your attention to that tear for a very definite reason.”

His fingers were moving carefully across the silk. “Here it is.”

I gazed over his shoulder, feeling sudden apprehension. I saw a slit in the lining just by the bottom hem. It was a long, clean slit.

“It’s almost as if ...”

“Grace deliberately cut it,” finished Trant. “Exactly. If she had wanted to get a letter to you without trusting to Steve, this would have made a very effective cache.”

Leisurely, as if he was positive he would find what he wanted to find, Trant slipped his fingers through the slit in the lining of my galyak fur coat. They came out again with an envelope, a white familiar envelope. Without a word Trant held it up so that I could see the name scribbled on it in Grace’s large, sloping writing.

That name was—Lee Lovering.

The Lieutenant was still smiling but there was a subtle change in that smile now.

He said: “The last and most vital letter in the case was meant for you.”

Trant slit the envelope and took out a single sheet of paper. In complete silence he read it, his eyes going very grave.

“Does it tell you anything?” I faltered.

“I think it tells me,” said Lieutenant Trant, “who killed Grace Hough and who killed Norma Saylor.”

That was rather staggering. My voice sounding faint and dry, I said: “And you’re going to let me read it? It’s addressed to me.”

“Yes, it’s addressed to you. But I am not going to let you read it.”

“So the clue was in my coat all the time,” I said weakly. Then a rather terrible thought came. “If Steve had brought me the coat that first day, if I had found the letter then, perhaps Norma wouldn’t ever have been killed.”

Tram’s lips were rather pale. “If Carteris had brought you this coat on the first day, things would have been different, Lee Lovering. But

in only one respect. You would probably have been murdered instead of Norma Saylor.”

He took my hand suddenly. When he spoke the quiet earnestness in his voice was rather frightening. “Listen to me. We’ve a long way to go before we’re out of this wood. This letter I have here in my hand is dynamite. There’s nothing I can do yet because I can’t be sure. I have no evidence. But there’s one thing I can tell you. Someone knows, this letter was written to you. It must have been driving them crazy for days wondering if you’d found it. Now Norma is dead and they won’t be taking any chances.” He paused. “If they’re as desperate as I think they are, they’ll probably do their darndest to get you or the letter or both.”

And I knew he meant it.

“I’m telling you this as a policeman, but I’m also telling you because I’m a man and you’re a swell girl. You’ve done a lot of rash and dangerous things trying to protect people. From now on there’s one person to protect—Lee Lovering. You’re going to give all your time to that, see? You’re sleeping over at the Hudnutts’. That’s fine. And you’re going to stay there and never leave that house until I come tomorrow morning. Do you understand?”

I said rather shakily, not meaning it at all: “I understand.”

“All right.” His lips relaxed their tense, set line. “Now get your toothbrush. I’m escorting you to the Hudnutts’.”

But I didn’t move for a second. I was standing there close to him. He was still holding Grace’s letter in his hand. And I had caught one word scrawled on the end of a line in Grace’s handwriting. That word was a name, a familiar name but one which seemed crazily out of place in that letter which meant so very much.

The name was—Appel.

## XXV

Lieutenant Trant walked with me to the Hudnutts' house. Marcia Parrish let me in, looking tired and dispirited. As soon as the detective had gone, I asked: "Are the Hudnutts back?"

"Not yet, but I think they will be soon." She managed a faint smile. "At least there's one good thing to be said for tonight. It looks as if it isn't going to be too bad for Robert."

She took me upstairs. "I'm spending the night, too. Penelope wants you to be in with Elaine. I've given the poor kid something to help her sleep. Try not to wake her, won't you?" She laid cool fingers on my arm. "And, Lee, what I told you about me and Robert—I want you to forget it. I've been damn jealous of Penelope.

I admit that. I've almost hated her sometimes for being so exactly the right wife for Robert. But after what happened tonight—well, I think she acted in about as grand a way as any woman could act. And I realize there's no more of Robert left over for me."

She squeezed my hand and moved away. I slipped into the darkened room and undressed without turning on the lights. From my bed I could see the outline of Elaine's figure and could hear her soft, regular breathing. I knew she was asleep.

The house was very still as I lay there between the cool sheets, too tired to sleep or think. Only once was the stillness broken when I heard the sound of the front door and then muted footsteps passing my room. Robert and Penelope were back and on their way to bed.

And suddenly I wasn't sleepy any more. My thoughts, sharp and vivid, started moving round and round in the old relentless circle. In my mind I saw the shadowy figure of Grace Hough making that last devious pilgrimage whose every step had been gone over and over again, but whose purpose was still shrouded in impenetrable mystery

I think it was only then that the delayed shock of Norma's death really made itself felt. All through the evening it had been something ghastly and impersonal that had pulled us deeper into chaos. Now, at last, I saw it from the direct, human viewpoint. Norma was dead. Norma who had so much to look forward to had been murdered before she was twenty-one.

I saw her again as she had been that day in my room when I had accused her so shrilly of having murdered Grace. Norma in that smart brocaded housecoat; Norma so cool and poised with her final retort: "*If you get Jerry Hough, it will be over my dead body....*"

How appallingly prophetic those words had turned out to be.

My thoughts slid even farther back now to the first day after Grace's disappearance, the day when I had been with Jerry in the infirmary and Norma had breezed in, so sure of herself and so devastatingly lovely looking. "*Hello, darling, I've brought you the campus rag....*"

I must have dozed off at exactly that point in my reflections, for when I regained consciousness some time later, I was still saying in my mind: "... *the campus rag.*"

I sat up in bed, wide awake again. Norma had gone in to see Jerry with a copy of the *Wentworth Clarion*. While she was with him she had torn up those letters from Grace to Jerry because they said mean things about her. Later on, when I had gone back to the infirmary, I could not remember seeing a copy of the *Clarion* on Jerry's bed table.

But Norma had torn up those letters, and taken the pieces away with her. Wasn't it ... wasn't it possible that she had dumped them in the college magazine and carried them out that way?

And her car had been waiting outside because she was going to the hairdresser's. Wouldn't she have thrown the magazine somewhere in the car? And Norma was the most casual of persons. It was more than probable that she had forgotten all about those letters of Grace's when she came from the hairdresser's. Suppose the *Clarion* had been left in the Sayler car?

When I had told Lieutenant Trant it was possible the fragments of those two letters might still be in existence, I had not realized how strong that possibility had been. He wanted them as clues in the case; Jerry needed them in order to establish his claim to the insurance money.

But, would not the police have searched Norma's car already? I remembered how I had seen the maroon sedan that night still in its normal place in the garage when Steve and I had gone up to the third floor to park his car. At any rate they hadn't taken it away, and they would have had no reason to look for those pieces of letters.

And as I debated the question, another thought came to me. If those letters were important to Trant and to Jerry, might they not be important to the murderer, too?

That decided me.

I slipped out of bed and, having made sure Elaine was still asleep, I groped my way to my clothes. The excitement of Trant's visit to my room in Pigot had made me forget to bring any outdoor things, but I found my black ball dress and got into it swiftly and quietly. Somehow I still felt that urgent desire for speed.

It seems crazy to me now. But it was not until I had stolen out of the room into the passage that I remembered Lieutenant Trant's warning. He had told me on no account to leave the house; he had warned me of danger for myself. For one instant in that still darkness I felt a twinge of apprehension. But I fought it back. If those letters were there at the garage, I had to get them quickly—before the murderer had a chance to destroy them.

And I had thought of something which stopped me being afraid. There was no need to, go alone. I could call Jerry at Broome. He could go with me. With Jerry along nothing very terrible could happen.

I knew there was an upstairs extension in the Hudnutts' house. But it was in Penelope's room. I would have to use the one in the hall. I started downstairs, my hand on the bannisters, easing myself down step by step.

I could make out the telephone, dark and vague on a little side table. I had to switch on a lamp to dial, but I turned it off again and waited in the darkness with the receiver to my ear, listening to the insistent drone from Jerry's floor in Broome.

No one answered for what seemed like hours. My arm ached from holding the telephone, and every nerve was tense, on the alert for some sound in the darkness around me. And then, as I shifted the receiver to my left hand, I thought I heard something—a faint creaking from the shadowy obscurity of the stairs.

But I wasn't sure and at that moment a sleepy voice said "Hello" from the other end of the wire.

"Can you please get me Jerry Hough?" I whispered.

"Lee, what on earth are you doing at this time of night?"

I recognized Steve's voice and said: "Please, Steve, give Jerry a message. It's terribly important. Tell him to meet me by the North Gate—now, as soon as he possibly can."

"But, what...?"

"Please. I can't explain."

I had slipped the receiver back on to the stand and was moving toward the front door when the creaking sounded again from the stairs. There was no mistaking it now. I spun round, staring uneasily through the darkness. I could just make out a white figure, descending, coming toward me.

I had one crazy moment of alarm. Then I heard Elaine's voice, vague, uncertain.

"Lee, where are you? What are you doing?"

I hurried to her. She seemed half dazed with sleep and the sedative which Marcia had given her.

"I heard you telephone Jerry. And you're dressed still. Where are you going?"

"It's all right, darling. Don't worry. Just get back to bed."

I took her arm and led her up the stairs. She was docile as a child. Almost before I had tucked the sheets round her, she had fallen asleep again.

For the second time I tiptoed out of the room and down the stairs. With a hideous clanking of locks I got the front door open.

Out on the campus it was cold and dark. The moon had gone and the stars were dim. Only a dirty puddle of light behind the chapel gave a hint of dawn.

I hurried past the gray buildings and over the grass, damp with dew, to the North Gate. Jerry arrived almost the same time, limping down the drive from Broome. He had put on an old pair of corduroy pants and a wind-breaker. There was something large and infinitely comforting about him.

I slipped my hand into his. "Jerry, you must think I'm crazy dragging you out at this ungodly hour. But I've just thought of something frightfully important."

I told him everything then; how Trant had found that letter in the lining of my coat; how he thought he had the solution at last; and how it had suddenly occurred to me that the fragments of the letters Norma had destroyed might still be in the Saylers' car.

"There's just a chance," I concluded.

He didn't answer for a moment. He seemed still, in the grip of sleepiness. Then, very quietly, he said. "I remember now. Norma did take the *Clarion* out with her. Maybe we will find those letters in the car. But Trant said it was dangerous for you, Lee. I don't want you to take any fool risks."

"But there's no risk so long as I'm with you."

He took me suddenly in his arms and kissed me, his lips staying warm on mine. Then he drew away.

"Let's get going," he said gruffly.

We left the campus and started down the road to the village.

I shall never remember at exactly what point it was that some instinct warned me that we were being followed. The conviction seeped gradually into my consciousness with nothing tangible to support it. There was no sound behind us. And yet I had that obscure feeling of alarm and I was certain that somewhere back there in the darkness someone was moving stealthily forward.



I didn't pass on my suspicions to Jerry. They seemed too fantastic. But once I turned and glanced sharply over my shoulder. Nothing was visible except a white cat scurrying silently to cover.

But that queer sensation did not leave me. And I thought with sudden apprehension how almost anyone could know that Jerry and I had gone out together. Steve knew; Elaine knew; there was that upstairs telephone at the Hudnutts' house; and Jerry, I knew, had been obliged to pass Dean Appel's rooms when he left Broome.

Jerry's pace quickened as we caught sight of the college garage at the very end of Wentworth's modest main street.

It looked exactly as it had a few hours before when I was there with Steve. One weak light burned in an unshaded bulb from the middle of the ground floor ceiling; the gray cement of the ramp sloped upward into darkness; the solitary old night attendant sprawled forward on a chair in the office, sound asleep.

"Don't wake him," I whispered. "I know where the Sayler car is."

Quietly we crept up the slope. Jerry's right foot dragged slightly.

We came to the second floor where the ramp turned sharply right. Then we were groping our way up even higher to the third floor where the college cars were parked.

At the head of the ramp we paused, staring forward into the impenetrable darkness, trying to get our bearings.

Jerry's hand was in mine. "There must be a light somewhere."

"It doesn't matter. I know the way. We can use the dashboard light on the Sayler car."

And I did know the way then. Straight ahead was the little closed-in repair shop where I had seen Dean Appel's coupe in the process of being painted. Eight cars down on the left side was Steve's automobile; and then next to it, between it and the repair shop, came the Saylers' maroon sedan.

Very slowly we made our way forward, keeping to the left. I let my fingers slide along the backs of the cars, counting each in turn. One, two, three ...s

I counted to eight. That was Steve's. Then we were at the ninth. I felt for the door handle, pressed it down, squeezed into the front seat and found the ignition key. Then I switched on the dashboard light.

"I'll search in front, Jerry," I whispered, "and you take the back."

I heard Jerry climb into the back seat; heard the click as he switched on the ceiling light; then the back of the car sprang into dim illumination.

With fingers none too steady I started to search. First the cubby hole in the dashboard; then the right side pocket; then the left. I found a rag, some maps, a half empty package of stale cigarettes and an old lipstick which I recognized as Elaine's—nothing more than that. Behind me I could hear Jerry fumbling with the upholstery. I followed his lead, feeling down behind the seat. My hand squeezed along the groove, touching nothing at first. Then, suddenly, it reached something hard. Shakily I pulled the thing out. I saw rough yellow covers, a woodcut of the college library.

"I've got it, Jerry," I exclaimed. "It's the *Clarion*."

Jerry jumped out of the back seat and was at my side. "And the pieces of the letters—are they still inside?"

He flicked the magazine open. Then he drew in his breath.

There, between an amateur poem and the report on the Wentworth Debating Society's activities, lay a thick wad of torn scraps of notepaper. The faint light from the dashboard shone down on them. It revealed fragments of Grace's large, back-sloped writing which, during the past hectic days, had become so horribly familiar.

Jerry was staring down at them, his face very grim. I was the first to speak.

"Jerry, what ought we to do? Ought we to try to piece them together, or...?"

"The police had better see them," he cut in. "Right away. Come on, let's get out of here."

He closed the magazine and leaned back over the seat to switch off the ceiling light. I switched off the light on the dashboard. For one instant we sat together in the pitch darkness.

Just as I was feeling for the handle, Jerry gripped my arm.

“Don’t move. Someone’s coming up the ramp.”

And I heard it, too. It seemed incredible that I could have been so engrossed with what we had discovered not to have heard it earlier—that faint sound from the ramp—that cautious, hesitating sound of footsteps.

Suddenly my old dread of that unknown pursuer came rushing back. If this were the garage attendant coming toward us, why should he be moving so furtively? I heard those uncertain footsteps nearer now ... nearer ... and I knew with blinding certainty that I had been right. Someone had been following us from the college.

And the person who followed had not lost our track.

The footsteps had reached the head of the ramp now. They seemed to hesitate there—nine cars away from us in the thick darkness.

Jerry whispered in my ear, voicing my own thoughts: “If it’s the attendant he’ll switch on the lights now.”

We waited tensely, pressed close together on the front seat of Norma’s car.

No lights were turned on. And the footsteps had started forward again. I seemed to feel their vibration rather than hear them on the concrete floor.

Jerry’s hand was still warm on my arm. Once again his voice came, soft and close: “I’m going to see who it is. Stay here, don’t move and keep your head down. He won’t think of looking in the cars.”

“Jerry, you mustn’t...!”

But his lips had found mine, keeping the words back. He squeezed my hand and then, noiselessly, so that even I scarcely heard him, he slid open the door on his side and was out in the darkness, close to the rear wall and the repair shop.

I was alone in the car. I slipped down in the seat so that my head would not be visible through the window. I had stopped being afraid

for myself. I was just desperately anxious for Jerry out there in the darkness, facing the unknown menace of those moving footsteps.

And I was sure that there was menace in that slow, stealthy progress toward us. The wild idea that it might be one of Trant's men flashed into my mind, bringing momentary relief. But it went as soon as it had come. A policeman would have turned on the lights; would have asked who was there. No, it was far more likely to be the person who had followed us from Wentworth. But why? Trant's warning scudded through my thoughts. Was that the explanation? Was there really danger for me—danger so great that someone had seized the first opportunity to reach me when I was defenseless in a dark, lonely garage? Or had the person guessed the reason for our journey? Did he want those pieces of letter, which we had just found?

It was then that the most convincing and, perhaps, the most frightening explanation came to me. Suppose the murderer had guessed where Steve had put my galyak fur coat. Suppose he didn't know that the third, most vital letter was in the hands of the police. Suppose this was a desperate attempt to retrieve that letter addressed to me—the letter Grace had hidden in the lining of my coat and which Lieutenant Trant had said held the solution to the whole mystery.

If that were so, there could be only one destination for this moving presence. He would be coming here to the Saylers' car—right here where I was crouched in hiding.

I felt a crazy desire to call out to Jerry, to tell him to come back to me. But I knew at once that would be fatal.

Besides, there was no sound from the darkness to give me a clue as to where he was. The footsteps seemed to have stopped, too. I could not catch the slightest movement anywhere. The smell of oil, cars, leather—they all seemed a part of that long, brooding silence. Very carefully I pushed myself up in the seat so that I could peer through the windshield.

Nothing but darkness. Then, suddenly, without the slightest warning, a flashlight snapped on to my right—at the spot where that person must be standing motionless.

That bright beam shining down the broad aisle between the rows of cars brought with it the final touch of panic.

I slid down in the seat again, my heart beating wildly. The flashlight was only a dull radiance above me now—a radiance which, second by second, grew stronger.

And I knew it was moving down past the cars picking out each in turn and then traveling to the next—coming relentlessly toward me and Norma's maroon sedan.

Then, just as I was sure fingers were moving to open the door at my side, there was a sudden, sharp sound from the darkness to the left. The flashlight's beam jerked away from the car. There was silence, then that sound again and footsteps moving cautiously away from me.

Relief and anxiety warred with each other as I realized what had happened. Jerry had seen that figure coming to the car. He had deliberately revealed his presence in the darkness to attract the unknown danger away from me to him.

My pulses stabbing, I raised my head a fractional distance so that I could peer out of the windshield. I saw the beam of the flashlight playing tentatively over the wall, trying to pick out the source of the unexpected noise. It moved along the wall, revealing dark stains of oil and scars in the stone. It reached the open door of the little repair shop, showing what I had already seen that evening, the gleaming back of Dean Appel's sports coupe.

Then I saw something else. At the edge of that shaft of light, inside the repair shop, pressed against the wall, I could make out the vague figure of Jerry. He was crouched intently forward, the *Clarion* still gripped in his hand.

For what seemed like hours, the beam from the flashlight wavered to and fro, each time skirting Jerry's half-concealed figure.

Then, at last, it was shining directly on him.

It was ghastly seeing him hunted by that light when I was so completely unable to help him. Jerry had the fragments of the letters. I knew he would do everything to keep them safe. But what could he do? It was impossible for him to tell whether or not there was a revolver behind that blinding circle of light. It would be useless to make a dash forward, particularly with his broken ankle still weak.

I lay there in the car, desperately afraid for him, cursing myself. It was all my fault. I had brought Jerry into this. Against Trant's warning, I had got him to come with me to the garage.

The light was still fixed, vivid and unshifting, on Jerry. He hadn't moved either. Then, very slowly, he started backing away, deeper into the repair shop. And I saw he was doing the only thing possible. He was trying to lure that figure into the small, confined area, where they could meet on equal terms. Step by step he went backward, his right leg dragging slightly. And with each movement the flashlight followed him, nearer ... nearer.

Jerry was deeper in the shop now, between the wall and Dean Appel's car. But the moving light was catching up with him and now it revealed something I hadn't been able to see before.

I caught my breath. Right behind Jerry, where he couldn't possibly see it, a heavy iron jack was sprawled across the concrete floor. Each movement brought him nearer to it. With that awkward backing movement, with his bad ankle, he was certain to trip He ...

I stifled a warning cry.

But it had already happened. In one awful moment I saw Jerry's foot strike the jack; saw him stumble; saw the *Wentworth Clarionslip* from his hand as he clutched at Dean Appel's car for support. The unknown person with the flashlight moved swiftly forward into the repair shop.

The beam showed me Jerry falling heavily against the gray concrete of the floor. Then it snapped out and there was utter darkness.

The next few seconds are vague and chaotic in my memory. I heard a scuffling, a little cry of pain and then—silence.

And suddenly there was a new sound, a long grating sound which jarred through the stillness. Someone was pulling shut the heavy sliding door of the repair shop.

My mind was completely absorbed by the implications of that sound. Jerry had fallen and struck his head against the floor. There had been no fight. That could mean only one thing. Jerry must have been hurt; Jerry must still be lying there in the repair shop where this unknown person was shutting him in. My last link with Jerry and safety was gone.

And now ...

The next thing happened so quickly I was not ready for it. It came just at the crest of my panic, when my mind wasn't working logically any more. The door to my left was jerked roughly open. Someone was in the car with me; someone had slammed the door shut and was groping through the darkness, close to me, feeling for the ignition key.

I made a small, ineffectual grab, trying dazedly to snatch the key, to stop this person starting the car. My hand touched fingers. They were slender, with pointed nails—fingers, of course, which were not Jerry's. I snatched my hand back. I heard the drone of the car's engine, heard the gear click into place, the scraping of the hand brake. The car was moving forward, swinging right, away toward the ramp.

I could think only of one thing then. I was there in the car with this person who was not Jerry. The car was moving forward. Someone was deliberately driving me away from Jerry ... somewhere. The last shreds of my control warned me what to do. My left hand felt wildly for the door handle and found it. Still driving blindly, with no light, the car gathered momentum on its way toward the head of the ramp. I swung the door open. I felt a hand flung out toward me, grabbing my arm. But I shook it free and threw myself outward, away from the car.

I heard the car drone on, not pausing. For one second I seemed suspended in the darkness; then there was dull pain in my temple, pain pulsing and then slipping into the darkness and nothingness.

I don't know how long I lay there stunned by my fall. Gradually I began to think again, to feel the pain in my temple. I lifted a hand. There was cold metal behind my head—a car fender. I must have struck it when I fell.

I remembered that, remembered Norma's car plunging away toward the ramp. Then everything else slid out of my mind as I thought of Jerry.

Where was he? Was he still locked there in the repair shop?

And—as if in answer—I heard vaguely, far away, the steady throb of an automobile engine. At first I had the dim idea it was the unknown person in Norma's sedan still somewhere there in the garage. Then, slowly, it dawned on me that the throbbing came from behind—from the direction of the little repair shop.

Bringing sudden horror, the truth screamed itself at me.

Someone had started the engine of Dean Appel's car. Jerry must be lying there helpless in that small, airless room with a car engine running. Jerry was in there with the deadly carbon monoxide fumes from the exhaust—stifling him.

I pushed myself to my feet. Completely unconscious of the throbbing pain at my temple, I started to rush down the dark aisle. I reached the repair shop. I banged with both my fists against the heavy wood of the sliding door.

“Jerry ... Jerry...!”

But there was no answer from inside. Only the steady, relentless drone of the automobile engine.

I fumbled wildly along the door for a lock. I had no matches. I couldn't see. My fingers found a little square of metal at the extreme end of the door. I realized then that it was a spring lock—a lock that worked mechanically when the door was pushed to.

He was locked in, and I could not get to him. I went on beating futilely at the door, shouting hoarsely for help. I had seen the old attendant downstairs in the office. He would have a key. He must hear me—and come.



And then, after an age, the whole floor was suddenly ablaze with lights. I spun around. The man was there at the head of the ramp, his hand still on the electric switch, Staring sleepily through the rank of cars toward me.

“Quick!” I cried. “The key to this door. There’s a man inside, suffocating to death.”

He shuffled toward me. There was the clinking of keys. I saw his old, uncertain fingers selecting one. He was pushing it into the lock. The doors swung back.

“Watch out,” he called anxiously. “The gas from the exhaust!” But he might as well have told my heart to stop beating. I pushed him aside and dashed into that small, windowless room. Jerry was there. I saw him at once, sprawled on the floor just where he had fallen, not two feet away from the exhaust. I caught desperately at his wind-breaker. With all my strength I was dragging him away.

“Switch off the engine,” I shouted.

I heard the man hurry past me and then heard the throbbing of machinery fade. I had Jerry out of the shop now. The man came and together we half dragged, half carried him to a window.

I dropped to my knees at his side, kicking the long skirt of my ball dress out of the way. I bent over him. His lips were bluish and there was a faint blue tinge to his cheeks. It was an agony to see him that way. Fighting back the dread inside me, I slipped my hand around his wrist. I felt his pulse throbbing, faint but steady, beneath my fingers. I could hear him breathing too.

A great wave of relief surged through me. I put my arm under his head, supporting him. “Jerry, Jerry darling. You’re going to be all right. It’s all going to be all right.”

Slowly his eyelids stirred, flickered open, showing his eyes, blue and flat, staring upward, not seeing. Then he shifted his head slightly. His tongue came out, moistening his lips. He was looking at me, knowing me.

And suddenly, before I realized, I was crying, crying like a baby.

## XXVI

I managed to pull myself together. It was bad enough for Jerry already without his having a weeping female on his hands. The attendant and I helped him into the nearest car which happened to be Steve's. I told the man, who was bewildered and rather frightened, to drive to the college infirmary, while I sat in the back seat with Jerry, supporting his head on my shoulder.

Dawn was breaking over Wentworth, gray and somber. As we sped through the empty streets, I felt as dejected as I have ever felt. I had made a criminal fool of myself. In disobeying Lieutenant Trant, I had achieved absolutely nothing except almost to cause Jerry's death. In the horror of our experience at the garage, I had forgotten the torn letters which we had gone out to find and which we had found. Where were they now, I wondered? Were they still lying there in the garage? Or had they been taken by the person who had done that diabolical thing to Jerry?

At the infirmary the nurse was marvelous. She asked no questions. She just took Jerry in hand, put him to bed in an empty ward and assured me there was nothing to worry about. I wanted to stay with Jerry but, weak as he was, he insisted on my getting some sleep, too.

So I left. I knew I should have gone to the police station, or at least I should have telephoned to report what had happened. But I didn't. I couldn't even bear the thought of ever having to see Lieutenant Trant again after what I'd done. I just walked over the cheerless gray campus to the Hudnutts' house and let myself in with the key Penelope had given me at the courthouse.

No one seemed to be awake. In the bathroom I found some lint and plaster. I made a rough dressing for the bruised cut on my temple.

I crept back to our room, slipped into my pajamas again and tumbled into bed. The early morning light seeped through the curtains showing Elaine's face against the pillow, a quiet expressionless mask of sleep.

Sleep! How could anyone have ever been to sleep?

But, almost instantly, I was asleep myself. It was a deep, dreamless sleep of utter exhaustion which might have gone on indefinitely if Penelope hadn't wakened me some time, much later, when the sunlight was bright and warm as it struck across my pillow.

The Dean of Women was standing at the foot of the bed, watching me from grave, steady eyes. Vaguely I realized that Elaine had gone, but all my sleepy attention was fixed on Penelope. She was as calm and handsome as ever, and yet I realized suddenly that she had changed. It was a very subtle, fundamental change, as if the heart-break of the last weeks had thawed some of her protective coating of ice. Her mouth was softer and there was a new sympathy in her eyes.

Somehow she had heard of our escapade at the garage, but she didn't scold me. She just sat quietly down on the bed.

"I hope that cut isn't bad, Lee?"

"Cut?" I remembered then, and my hand moved to the plaster. "It's nothing—nothing at all." I paused. "How's Jerry?"

"He's coming round nicely. Twisted his ankle, but not seriously. Lieutenant Trant is with him now in the infirmary. He wants to see you, but I'm having some breakfast sent up first." Her voice changed as she added: "You've had a terrible experience, my dear I only hope you have some courage left. I feel we're all going to need it."

"Why—what's happened?"

"I don't know, but I think Chief Jordan is swearing out a warrant." She sighed. "I suppose it'll mean an arrest."

I nodded wearily. "So Lieutenant Trant was right. He told me last night that he knew—had an idea who did it. In a way I'm glad. I used to feel the worst of all would be knowing. But—after what happened to Norma last night, and to Jerry ..."

“Yes, Lee, it’s far better for us to know the truth.” Penelope took both my hands in hers. “And I want to say something that’s very difficult to say. Marcia has told me all you did in trying to protect the college—my husband and myself. It’s rather beyond my province to say whether you were right or wrong. We’ve all been foolish, all made mistakes, but I want to thank you—to let you know I’m grateful.”

She bent forward and kissed me on the cheek. Then, very brusque and impersonal again, she rose to her feet.

“I’ll have breakfast sent up immediately. We mustn’t keep Lieutenant Trant waiting.”

Breakfast came. I managed some coffee and toast. With typical efficiency Penelope had seen that some of my clothes were sent over from Pigot. I dressed and went downstairs.

I went to the infirmary, taking a circuitous route around Broome. Once again, as on the day after Grace’s death, the campus was crowded with students reading newspapers and massed in excited groups. I couldn’t stand the idea of having to run the gauntlet of those curious eyes. The prospect of seeing Trant was bad enough.

And I met him, moving down the infirmary corridor away from the room where they had put Jerry. He looked pale, tired, and rather harassed.

“I was coming to find you.” He paused in front of me, gazing from gray eyes with no smile in them. “Although you were responsible for getting young Hough almost killed, I suppose you’re to be congratulated on saving his life.”

He couldn’t make me feel any more miserable than I was already. “I’m sorry. I know I was crazy. I never thought the murderer...”

“You have a very peculiar conception of murderers,” he cut in. “It’s about time someone got tough with you, and I’m glad about that bump on your head. I hope it hurts. It may help to remind you that people who take other people’s lives aren’t precisely the type one asks in to afternoon tea and croquet. You’ve been At Home to

murderers ever since this case began, and you've been a—:a damned nuisance.”

“What does it matter if I've been a nuisance or not?” I said, feeling angry and ashamed. “You've broken your case anyway, haven't you? You're smart enough to have broken it if there'd been fifty of me trying to stop you.”

I think I would have broken down and cried for the third time in twenty-four hours if his eyes hadn't relented and if that slow, sympathetic smile hadn't crinkled the corners of his mouth.

“Okay, Lee Lovering. I apologize. It's just that I get mad when I think what might have happened this morning if—” He glanced at the bandage on my temple—“if your head hadn't been quite so hard.”

His face was suddenly grave again. “You're right. I do know who killed Grace Hough and Norma Saylor. Chief Jordan agrees, but there's very little evidence at the moment. That's why I want you and Jerry to help me clear up certain points. You knew Grace and Norma better than anyone else here. Ready?”

“I'm ready,” I said shakily.

We went down the corridor together to the bare infirmary room where Jerry was lying on the bed. He was dressed again, but his ankle was bandaged and his face was very white. He managed a smile, I sat down next to him on the bed.

“Jerry knows what I'm going to do, Lee,” said Trant, sitting down on the only chair. “I'm going through the whole thing as it came to me—an outsider. I want to see if you come to the same conclusion. I shall have to say quite a few unpleasant things about Grace. That'll be tough for Jerry. But the whole thing has been tough for all of us—and it looks like staying tough.”

I didn't answer. I was thinking how probably no other detective in the world would set any store by my opinion at this stage.

“I got an idea quite early on. I got it from you, Lee. It took me around a long way, but it led right in the end. In most murder cases somebody tries to shield somebody else. And since most murders are pretty straightforward, nine times out of ten the person who is

being shielded turns out to be the guilty party. But this case wasn't ever straightforward. And the least straightforward thing about it was the quite obvious fact that one girl, Lee Lovering, was shielding at least five different people."

He paused, his eyes moving absently around the hygienic walls of the small room. "It was an intriguing situation, particularly when I found that four of those five people seemed to have been on the scene within half an hour of the crime and that each of them was trying desperately to keep back that information from the police. It was even more intriguing when it gradually came to light that all five of them, to a different degree, had perfectly good reasons to wish Grace Hough dead."

His glance turned, faintly apologetic, to Jerry. "In a homicide case the character of the deceased person often gives the vital clue. But your sister puzzled me. At first she seemed so very much like any of a hundred other college kids; her few problems seemed just the ordinary problems of any young girl—mild love affairs, mild jealousies, mild disappointments. It was only gradually that I realized the difference. Your sister went through life without armor. Things that the more usual girl takes in her stride wounded her badly. And once she'd been wounded she never forgave the person responsible. She had the passionate vindictiveness of an ultrasensitive person. That was the key, as I saw it. It was just that one little trait which made it possible for five people to want to murder her."

My hand found Jerry's. For a moment the little room was preternaturally still.

"You see," continued Trant, "that was my first idea. I had the crazy notion that all of those five people must have conspired together to murder her or to shield the one of them who had done so. There seemed absolutely no other explanation for their all being so deeply involved in those last crucial moments of her life."

He was looking at me now. "I didn't think that way for long. It was too fantastic, but it gave me the lead to another, far more plausible

explanation. I was certain those five people were not tangled up in it purely through chance. The logical conclusion, of course, was that someone, either one of those five or someone else, knew just how much the others had become involved with Grace and had deliberately worked out a plan to implicate them as deeply as possible. And I had only one very elusive clue to work on.”

“The special delivery letters?” I queried.

“Exactly, or rather the few phrases from the last of those letters which I managed to pick up second hand through David Lockwood and Dr. Hudnutt.”

He was staring down at the plain linoleum of the floor as if he could trace there some pattern invisible to us. “The special delivery letters, of course, were the crux. The last of them came on the evening of Grace’s death and motivated everything she did. Having read it, she gave up Steve Carteris’ party and went to the Cambridge Theater to meet someone. You, Lee, saw her at the theater with David Lockwood. By all that was logical he could have been the writer of the special delivery letters. But he wasn’t.”

He glanced up. “And yet someone wrote them. Who? Grace was planning to meet someone at the theater; she was planning to meet someone later at the quarry. David Lockwood had glanced at the letter; he was ready to swear it was a passionate love letter from a man. What man? Everything fitted for Dr. Hudnutt, of course. He was at the theater. Grace telephoned him from the service station. I was certain at that stage he was guilty. I beat at him constantly, trying to make him confess in every way I could think of. And I did make him confess. I made him admit that he killed Grace Hough.”

He threw out his hands in a little rueful gesture. “And, as soon as I heard his story, I knew that I’d been wrong and that he’d been wrong, that in spite of what he thought, he hadn’t been responsible for Grace’s death. He hadn’t written those special delivery letters.”

He went on quickly: “My reason for that is obvious. The person who murdered Norma Saylor had certainly destroyed that letter by the time Hudnutt confessed. No one would ever have a chance to

read it. If Hudnutt had been guilty, he would never have been so foolish as to pass on to us what Norma told him about it, things which patently pointed suspicion at him. I knew then that he couldn't have written the letters. And from those facts and from the fact that Norma admitted the letter said things derogatory to her, I realized who must have written them."

His eyes, very gray and steady, were fixing my face. "I thought you would have guessed, Lee. Norma Sayler, to begin with, was convinced that Hudnutt had written the letters. She must have had a very good reason for thinking so before she accused him to his face. And there's only one reason she could have had. She thought he had written the letter because it was deliberately phrased so that anyone reading it should think it had been sent from Robert Hudnutt."

I tried rather fruitlessly to struggle with that point. "You mean it was a deliberate hoax—someone wrote all those letters to Grace to hoax her into believing they came from Dr. Hudnutt?"

"That is exactly what I mean. Almost—but not quite." Trant's voice was soft. "The letter spoke of a quarrel that day. Grace had quarreled with only one person—with Dr. Hudnutt at the quarry. The letter spoke of a date at the theater. Dr. Hudnutt had made some sort of vague remark about seeing Grace at the Cambridge. As a final, clinching proof it was signed *Robert*. That was the only solution. Someone had been writing to Grace under Robert's name and had fooled Grace into believing the letters were genuine."

Jerry leaned forward. "But that's crazy."

"It's crazy until you realize who actually wrote them. Then it's all quite simple. The two of you know the people involved. Who could have had a reason for wanting to write love letters to Grace as from Robert Hudnutt? Who could have had enough subtle insight into her character to realize the surest way to please her was to slam Norma? Who could have known about the scene in the quarry or have foreseen the meeting at the theater? Above all, who could possibly have written letters day after day, long, intimate letters,



making references to little private things in Grace's life, the kind of letters that kept her satisfied and never gave her the slightest cause to discount them as a hoax?"

He paused, looking down at his thumbnail with that quiet, intent gaze. "You've guessed now, of course."

Jerry's face was blank. But I had guessed. The truth came to me in a blinding flash.

"You mean...?"

"Yes," broke in Lieutenant Trant, "that's what made it so very difficult and what could have made it so very easy if I'd worked a little less hard and had thought a little harder."

His lips moved in a slight, crooked smile. "Those special delivery letters were written by Grace Hough herself."

## XXVII

That did not bring as much surprise with it as it might have done. For, as soon as Lieutenant Trant said it, I saw just how inevitable a solution it was.

Jerry's eyes were still blank. "Grace wrote letters to herself!" he echoed. "That can't be true. I know she was highstrung. She had a bad time after Dad's death. But she couldn't have done a thing like that. Why it's—it's mad."

"No, not mad, Jerry. A little unbalanced maybe but not more so than a thousand other girls who do the same thing—girls who are lonely and haven't any friends. Some of them, like Grace, write themselves love letters; some of them refuse dates with girl friends saying they're expecting important telephone calls which they know will never come. It's a kind of compensation for romance. If I'd been a psychologist instead of a policeman, I might have stumbled on it in your sister's case right away."

Trant was looking at Jerry again with that quiet, sympathetic gaze. "It's very easy to see now how your sister could have started doing that. Lee's told me how the shock of your father's death and your financial worries changed her. Overnight it left her with very little to cling to. The importance which wealth and position had given her were gone. Think of her here at Wentworth. She was rooming with Lee who had all the friends and fun she wanted; next door was Norma Saylor who had a dozen different admirers and never passed up a chance of reminding Grace that she wasn't popular with the boys. She saw excitement and romance all around her and she was left out of it.

"Grace made a rather unsuccessful bid for romance herself. She tried it with Steve Carteris but their little affair didn't get anywhere. Then she fell for Dr. Hudnutt. Of course, there wasn't a hope of that getting anywhere, either, especially after his marriage. But it's easy

to see how much Grace would have wanted it to get somewhere. Hudnutt was the most romantic figure on the campus. If only he had been in love with her, she would have far outshone the other girls, even Norma Saylor. It would have been so simple for her to start pretending, to write those first special delivery letters, signing them Robert.”

He was speaking slowly as if it were difficult for him to pick the right words. “Then the letters started to arrive at Pigot and the other girls began taking an interest. The rumor went around that Grace had a boy friend who wrote her letters every day. That made her intriguing, mysterious. Before she realized, probably, Grace found herself in the spotlight where she’d never been before. That sort of thing’s darn dangerous—like dope. The more attention she got, the more she’d want. Once she found she could fool the other girls, she had to go on writing more and more letters. And if you go on fooling other people long enough you’re liable to fool yourself.”

Jerry was still watching him, perplexed and anxious. “You don’t mean Grace reached a stage where she really believed the letters came from Hudnutt?”

“No, I don’t think that. That’s too extreme. But I can see how those letters coming every day would make the pretense seem more and more real. She was wishing so hard that Hudnutt was in love with her; in time it would have been easy for her to kid herself that perhaps he was. After all, he was a faculty member, a married and an honorable man. Even if he was interested in her, his position would make it impossible for him to show it. Maybe he smiled at her one day when he said good-morning; maybe he singled her out for praise in class. Once the idea was in Grace’s mind she could have interpreted those purely mechanical gestures of politeness as proof positive of an admiration which he didn’t dare admit to.”

He was watching his hand again. “That’s the way I see it. With absolutely no real justification, Grace kidded herself that Hudnutt was as much in love with her as she wanted him to be. And then, that afternoon, she followed him to the quarry. It’s not hard to read

between the lines of what Hudnutt told us. Probably they'd never been alone together outside the campus. Grace thought she was giving him the ideal opportunity to break down and admit his love. He was completely bewildered, of course. Disappointment made her angry. She lashed out, accusing him of discriminating against her work, anything that came into her head. Hudnutt was quite out of his depth. When he couldn't calm her down, he blurted out something about seeing her at the theater and left her."

He looked up. "I guess, if things hadn't gone so far in Grace's mind, she might have realized then that it had all been a pipe-dream. But by that time the dream had become the most important part of her life. She clutched desperately to save it, and Hudnutt had given her one straw. He'd said he would see her again at the theater. Because she wanted to so much, she could twist that one phrase around until she believed he had suggested they should meet there. Perhaps she convinced herself there had been reasons that afternoon why he hadn't been able to admit he loved her; perhaps it would be all right at the theater."

I said softly: "So she went back and wrote that last special delivery letter."

Trant nodded. "The few phrases from it which gave me the clue. By then the letters had become the main prop of her dream. She must have written that last one just the way she would have wanted Hudnutt to write it. She made him plead forgiveness for his behavior in the quarry, made him promise that everything would be different at the theater."

It was heart-rending now to see the pathetic, frustrated truth behind those last movements of my roommate which before had seemed so completely irrational.

"You know the rest," Trant was saying quietly, his eyes moving to Jerry, "Your sister gave up Steve's party at the Amber Club and went to the Cambridge Theater, as she thought, to meet Robert Hudnutt. She put on her best dress; for the first time she experimented with make-up; she borrowed Lee's fur coat. That night was to be the big

night. And then, almost as soon as she reached the theater, the first blow fell. Lee told her Mrs. Hudnutt was there. What did that do to her dream of a romantic tête-à-tête? You can imagine how she must have felt sitting through that first act alone, knowing Dr. Hudnutt was up in the balcony with his wife, Miss Parrish and Dean Appel. You can imagine her disappointment and, above all, her bitter resentment against Robert for what she thought was a betrayal. In the first intermission she went out into the lobby, determined to force the issue once and for all. She found Robert and cornered him.”

His gaze turned to me now. “I’ve been talking to Hudnutt this morning. He told me frankly just what did happen during that scene which you interrupted.” There was an infinitesimal trace of the old ironic smile in his eyes. “With your usual staunchness you kept the truth back from me because, you thought it was so damning to Hudnutt. It wasn’t. But it was the crux of the whole pitiful story. Grace accused him of deliberately trying to make her love him. He was horrified, of course. If he’d been a little more used to young girls and the way they felt, he might have eased the shock. But he didn’t. He came right out and said she’d made a terrible mistake. He shattered the dream.”

In my mind I was back again in the lobby of the Cambridge Theater; I was seeing Grace standing there with her hands clenched at her sides, her eyes staring right through me, not recognizing me. I felt a stab of pity. I had seen her face to face at the moment when she realized she had lost all the things she had never really had.

Trant was saying: “I think we all know Grace well enough to guess just how she would have reacted. Grace who never forgave anyone for hurting her had been more lethally wounded than she had ever been before. Of course, it wasn’t Hudnutt’s fault. But that only made it worse. She couldn’t have suffered any more even if the whole imaginary relationship had been real. While she was with the Wheelers in Baltimore she found out about Hudnutt’s California trouble. She threw it in his face, threatened to tell his wife,

threatened to ruin him. She wanted him to suffer as much as she was suffering.”

He glanced apologetically at Jerry. “I hate having to say these things about your sister. But since I’ve got to say them, I figured it was best to let you hear first.”

“Sure,” said Jerry in a low, stifled voice. “I understand.”

“I want you to think of Grace that way. But I want you to think of something else too. Hudnutt wasn’t the only person who had let her down that night. Except for Lee, you, Jerry, were the one other person at Wentworth whom she really cared for. That night you’d offered your fraternity pin to Norma Saylor, the girl she hated. You seemed to have gone over to the enemy too. Those first few moments of the second act of *Phèdre* were probably the blackest moments in Grace’s life. Everything that meant most to her seemed to have deserted her. I think it was then that she made her plan. It was an extraordinary plan but in a way it was very consistent with her character. And, once she’d decided upon it, she stuck to it with remarkable determination.”

His voice was suddenly crisp and official. “From then on we have all the facts. It’s just a question of interpreting them properly. Grace left the auditorium and went to the lounge to write letters, one to you, Jerry, one to Mrs. Hudnutt and a third which I found last night in the lining of Lee’s coat. She was one of those people who instinctively turned to letters for self-expression in emotional moments. Her plan was absolutely typical of her. She wanted to make all the people who had hurt her as unhappy as she was herself.”

He paused. “She wrote to you, Jerry, saying the nastiest things she could think of about Norma. That was to hurt Norma and partly, I believe, to hurt you. She wrote that second letter to Mrs. Hudnutt which, thanks to Miss Parrish and Lee, never reached her. In that letter she was carrying out her threat to Hudnutt to expose the California episode.”

“And the third letter?” I broke in hesitantly.

“That better wait for the moment.” Trant paused again, adding quickly: “By the time she’d finished writing those three letters, the second act was almost over. We know she intended to leave the theater then. David Lockwood saw her coming out. But there again Grace acted in character. She knew you girls would be arriving any moment from the Amber Club. Here was a chance to convince you once and for all that she did have a handsome boy friend. She kept up that little pretense to the last. She made Lockwood go through that act.”

He went on: “As it happened, David Lockwood fitted in perfectly with her plan. She wanted one thing very badly which Lockwood could give her. She also wanted somewhere to stay for several hours until she was ready for her next move. She got what she wanted from him. And she did stay with him, as you know. She took a drink at his apartment, too, something she had never done before. She took that drink because what she intended to do needed all the real and artificial courage she could muster.”

I think it was about then that I realized just what the inevitable end to this strange, moving story was bound to be.

“And then Grace had yet another use for David Lockwood,” the detective was saying. “He could chauffeur her to the place she wanted to go next. She had plenty of resourcefulness and, by threatening to make a scene, she compelled him to drive her to Wentworth against his will. I think she planned to have him take her all the way, but it so happened that she ran into Steve Carteris at the service station. That was the one coincidence in the whole affair and it made Grace’s scheme just that much more complete.

“Carteris was another person who had hurt her. He’d been tactless enough not to fall in love with her but to fall in love with someone else. Here was a chance to weave him also into the web she was spinning for the people whom she thought of now as her enemies. She dismissed Lockwood. She made Steve take the letters and the fur coat, give her the red slicker that was in his car and drive her to the quarry.”

His eyes moved very slowly from Jerry to me. “You’ve guessed of course what Grace’s plan was. She’d hit on the perfect way to solve her own problems and to pay back every debt of humiliation in full. She had telephoned Robert Hudnutt from the service station. She had persuaded him to come and fetch her. She had placed herself at the mouth of the quarry, there on the sharp bend in the road. She knew no other car was likely to pass that way so late at night. She waited until she heard an automobile heading toward the bend. At the crucial moment she flung herself forward.”

Jerry sat up very straight. “So you mean ...”

“Yes,” cut in Trant. “That’s why I told Robert Hudnutt he was not responsible for your sister’s death. He wasn’t. No one rounding that bend, however carefully, could have avoided doing what he did. That’s why I stressed the fact that Hudnutt was switching on his windshield wiper at that moment and couldn’t see just what happened. If he had seen, of course, he would have known that Grace deliberately threw herself under his car, that she deliberately killed herself.”

“So that’s the way it was,” whispered Jerry. “Grace committed suicide—just the way Dad did.”

I put out my hand, touching his arm. But he didn’t seem to be aware of my existence. He was staring at his clenched fist where the knuckles stood out white and hard.

Trant was saying: “Suicide, of course, seemed the one completely impossible solution. That was due partly to the fact that the body was moved and so many different threads tangled the real issue. But the main reason why all the evidence pointed to murder rested with Grace herself. Step by step she left behind her a perfectly built-up case against Robert Hudnutt. She even arranged for the actual method of death to re-create the California tragedy.”

Jerry said huskily: “I can’t believe it. Grace wouldn’t have done a thing like that.”

“I know, it’s hard to understand,” said Trant in a quiet, steady voice. “But you remember the old bromide—hell hath no fury like a



woman scorned. Grace had made her own hell for herself that night and she wanted to drag as many other people into it as she could. She was amazingly successful, too. These past days have shown just how much damage a vindictive person can do when she has nothing to lose. Grace made Carteris exchange the red slicker for the fur coat so that, when she was found dead, that slicker could be traced to a girl he'd been intimate with. She couldn't have chosen a more ingenious way of putting him on the spot. She'd left behind her almost as strong a case against Carteris as against Hudnutt."

He paused: "And then there was Norma Sayler. Norma, whom she hated almost as much as she hated Hudnutt, wasn't to be left out of it. She told Steve to put the fur coat in the baggage place of Norma's car. The reasons she gave him sounded perfectly innocent. She didn't want to have to lug the coat back to Pigot herself. It was too late for him to take it there. Why not leave it in Norma's car where it would be safe? What could be more reasonable—or more ingenious? Another damning clue had been planted on another enemy."

I was listening in shocked silence now. During the past days I had learned just how relentless Grace's spite had been, but I never dreamed she could have been as cruelly revengeful as all that.

Trant was saying incisively: "As it happened, Carteris didn't come forward about the coat, and the police, knowing Norma's car had not been out at the time of the crime, never thought of searching it. Grace's planned revenge on Norma Sayler didn't work. But revenge came last night—a more complete and horrible revenge than any Grace could have planned. In a sense Grace was responsible for Norma's death because, either through an oversight or for some purpose too devious for us to fathom, she left that last special delivery letter in the pocket of that fur coat. And Norma found it."

He went on: "We know why Norma reacted the way she did to that letter. She thought very naturally that Hudnutt had written it and decided to have a little malicious fun at Mrs. Hudnutt's expense to pay her back for having humiliated her publicly that day in

Commons. But later in the evening, after Hudnutt had denied writing the letter, Norma told Miss Parrish she had another idea that would explain the special deliveries. It's only too obvious now what that idea was. Having believed Hudnutt, Norma stumbled on the truth—that the letters must have been written by Grace herself. It wasn't a far cry from realizing that to suspecting suicide. That gives us the real motive for her murder. Norma Sayler was killed because she had seen through Grace's plan and had it in her power to expose the suicide."

His eyes, still on mine, seemed half rueful, half amused. "From the beginning of this business, Lee, you've been working overtime protecting your friends because you couldn't believe that any of them were murderers. You were justified, of course. There was no murderer at Wentworth—until last night. There wasn't any real crime for the police to investigate either." He paused. "But Grace's suicide had automatically made one person here a potential murderer."

Jerry said suddenly: "You mean someone who stood to benefit by keeping dark the fact that Grace had killed herself."

"Exactly." Trant's slow gaze moved to him. "Last night when I first realized that, there seemed to be only one person who could benefit. You, as Grace's brother, were in the running for \$150,000 insurance money provided the truth didn't come out."

I drew in my breath and he turned to me with a slight smile. "Yes, last night Jerry seemed the only reasonable suspect."

"And then, later, I found that third letter which Grace had concealed in the lining of your coat in the hopes that you and no one but you would find it. That letter shed a great deal of new light and gave me at least two other suspects."

He was looking at Jerry again. "As I've already said, Jerry, on the night of your sister's suicide, you had gone over to the enemy. You'd as good as given your fraternity pin to Norma. I'm sure Grace was very fond of you, but her hatred for Norma turned out to be stronger than her sisterly love. Grace was shrewd enough to realize that, if her scheme worked, the insurance company would have to pay on

the policy. There at the theater, it must have struck her that if you came into the money, Norma might possibly benefit. That thought, of course, was intolerable. And to make certain Norma could never get a cent of the money, she did something which rather gave away her intention to commit suicide.”

He turned to me. “Remember how I said Grace wanted something from David Lockwood? Remember how surprised you were when he told us that Grace had asked for his autograph and Roulane’s too? Well, that was what she wanted from him. She needed those autographs to use as witnesses to her signature on a document. You see, that letter addressed to you was more than a letter; it was a will.”

Both Jerry and I stared blankly. “A will?”

“Yes. She wrote a will making Dean Appel’s father her executor and leaving the money away from Jerry—to someone else.”

While I struggled with the implications of that extraordinary fact, Trant went on: “Whether or not that will can be proved valid doesn’t really matter now. There won’t be any money to leave anyway. But so long as Grace’s suicide was kept dark that will gave someone a fighting chance for \$150,000.”

Jerry, his lips very white, muttered: “Then you think the person who hoped to benefit by that will might have—have killed Norma?”

“I do think that,” said Trant evenly. “I think that someone knew all along that Grace had committed suicide and also knew everything about the will. There was only one thing he didn’t know and that was where the will actually was.” He was looking at me quizzically. “That’s why I tried unsuccessfully to make you realize your danger last night, Lee. I guessed that person wasn’t going to stop at anything to get that will. What happened this morning at the garage proved my point rather forcibly.”

Once again Jerry cut in, a perplexed furrow on his forehead. “Then you think, when he followed us to the garage today, he was after the will?”

“I think at first he hoped Lee was taking you to the place where the will was hidden. Of course, he was mistaken. All you got and all he got was an old copy of the *Wentworth Clarion* containing the pieces of those letters to you which Norma had torn up.”

Jerry said: “Then he did get them?”

“He got them all right. But we have managed to get them away from him. They are being pieced together now down at police headquarters.”

I was completely out of my depth then. But there was one thing I simply had to know. I said: “You’ve got to tell me why he tried to kill Jerry in that ghastly way.”

Lieutenant Trant’s face was grave, inscrutable. “I think the attempt on Jerry’s life was the last act of a very desperate person. As soon as he knew it was not the will you were after but those torn pieces of letter, he realized there was no more hope of his ever getting the money. He probably realized too that between you you had it in your power to prove his guilt. Rather than take that risk—well, he was ready to do anything.”

Jerry’s face was very haggard now. “Then you think he would have killed Lee too if he’d had the chance?”

“I wouldn’t have been surprised if he had,” replied Trant grimly. For a moment we all sat around in silence. Although I was still utterly confused myself, I had the feeling that we were almost at the end. I also had the feeling that Jerry had guessed something which was still beyond my reach.

He said in a low, steady voice. “So you thought he’d try to kill Lee too? That doesn’t make him a particularly pleasant person, does it?” His blue eyes met Trant’s. “Well, you’ve got the will. You’ve got the letters that were in the *Clarion*. You know the person who murdered Norma. Aren’t you going to arrest him?”

Trant said: “It isn’t quite as simple as that. I have the evidence. And I’ve convinced Jordan. But he feels he can’t swear out a warrant yet, because there’s one thing still barring our way. The person in question has an alibi for the time of Norma’s death—a very well-

established alibi. In fact, you and Lee and I are the star witnesses....” He paused, adding quietly: “There are only two things for us to do right now. We’ve got to go all out for a confession or we’ve got somehow to break that alibi.”

Jerry was still looking at him. Once again I had the sensation that he had stumbled to the solution and that both he and Trant were deliberately skirting around the real issue.

Jerry said at last: “I’ve given that alibi quite a bit of thought. And I think I can break it for you. You see, I’ve realized who you’ve been talking about.”

“I thought you had.” Trant nodded. “But do you really have an idea on breaking that alibi?”

“I think I have more than an idea. You see—” Jerry broke off, his eyes studiously not meeting mine. “It’d probably be better if we talked it out together. I mean—well, there’s no point in bringing Lee into it yet, is there?”

Trant looked at me with that unobtrusive, intent gaze of his. “I guess you’re right. How about leaving us alone for a while, Lee?”

I knew Jerry didn’t want me there and I knew he must have a good reason for it. So I asked no questions. I just slipped out of the room, waiting anxiously in the white, hygienic corridor. In a short time Lieutenant Trant came out and moved down the passage toward the telephone. After a moment’s hesitation I went back into the room. Jerry was there, standing by the window.

I went up to him. “Jerry, do you really know who did it?”

“Yes. I know.”

“And—and aren’t you going to tell me?”

He took both my hands in his. “I don’t want you to know just yet, darling. Not till this alibi business has been settled. I’ve asked Trant to let me reconstruct a particular moment at the dance last night. We’ll be going over to the gym right away. If my notion satisfies Jordan—well, I guess you’ll have to know then. It’s not going to be pleasant for any of us, you know.”

“I know that,” I said wearily. “From the beginning I’ve always, known it would be hard. But harder for you than for me.”

The morning sunlight from the window made his blond hair gold and his eyes a deep, dark blue. But it hurt me to see him so pale and drawn. All the life seemed to have gone out of his face, and there was a set, bitter curve to his lips.

“You’ve been swell, Lee,” he said huskily. “I guess it’s taken all these ghastly things to make me realize just how utterly unworthy of you I am.”

“Jerry, you mustn’t say things like that, please. Soon it’ll be over. Maybe we’ll be able to forget it all—sometime.”

“Sure. It’ll be over. No more damn doubts and suspicions. It’s going to be better that way, isn’t it?”

“Far better,” I said. Then impulsively, I added: “But I don’t think I’ll ever be able to forgive Grace. It’s her fault really. Whoever killed Norma, it was because Grace did that terrible thing and left so much temptation behind her. If only she hadn’t dragged everyone into it! If only this second senseless thing hadn’t happened!”

“If only it hadn’t happened!” There was a little catch in his voice as he put out his strong hands and drew me toward him. “But it’s done. And it’s no use worrying about might have beens. You must try not to feel too badly toward me, Lee, because I’ve got to be the person to show who did it.”

“Of course you’ve got to,” I said.

And I wasn’t worrying any more because I felt him close to me, felt his lips warm and tender against mine.

## XXVIII

Jerry and Trant went off to the gym together. I was told to go back to Pigot and wait until Chief Jordan came to pick me up. During those few interminable minutes of waiting, I deliberately kept myself from thinking. I knew from the way Jerry had spoken that the truth was going to be an unpleasant shock and I had enough sense to realize what a strain it had been listening to Trant's terrible story of Grace Hough. I was conserving what little emotional stamina I had left.

And then Chief Jordan arrived and drove me over to the gym. It was eerie going into that large building which had been so gay and thronged last night and which now was desolate and empty except for Jerry, Trant and two plainclothes men. The heavy curtains had been drawn over the windows, shutting out all daylight. The main floor was illuminated as it had been for the ball with soft maroon and blue chains of light. But the gallery was dark—looming above us in a vague, shadowy rim.

Trant glanced at Jerry who nodded shortly. Then the detective turned to Jordan.

"Mr. Hough has a very ingenious idea, Jordan. He wants to make a test with Miss Lovering as the principal subject. If it works, I think you won't have to worry about that alibi any longer. You'll be justified in swearing out a warrant for the murderer of Norma Sayler."

He glanced back at Jerry who was staring straight in front of him, his hands thrust in his pants pockets. "Okay, Jerry."

Jerry glanced at Jordan and began jerkily: "Last night when Trant arrived at the dance, a lot of us saw Norma standing up in the gallery by the refreshment tables. She wasn't seen again. From that, I guess, you've been figuring she was murdered some time later when Trant was having that talk with Steve Carteris. I want to give you another idea."

He came to me, laying his hand lightly on my arm. He was drawing me back under the gallery toward the naked rows of chairs which still stood as they had been last night.

He said: "I want to run through that moment when Trant arrived at the ball. Lee and I were standing here. Steve Carteris came up to us. He said something. I forget what. Then Trant and Mrs. Hudnutt came toward us from the direction of the door."

Very quietly Trant moved across the bare boards of the floor to our side. The three of us stood there together facing across the gym, instinctively staring up at the high gallery which was still shrouded in darkness.

Jerry went on: "Trant asked if anyone had seen Norma. Lee and I said we hadn't. Then Steve said he'd seen her a few minutes ago up in the gallery with a lot of stags. He turned to the gallery and said: 'Yes, she's still there.'"

I remembered that moment so well, remembered that last glimpse any of us had seen of Norma Saylor alive, a slim figure in a gleaming gold dress up there in the gallery surrounded by a circle of admirers. Still confused and anxious, I waited uneasily for what was going to happen next.

Jerry's fingers were back on my arm again. I saw his tongue come out to moisten his lips. Then, suddenly, he called up into the darkness of the gallery: "All right, Nick. Let it go."

So Nick Dodd was up there somewhere, I thought vaguely. Then I didn't think any more for the gallery had been flooded with light, the warm amber light which Nick and Jerry had used for the ball.

For that first instant everything seemed impossible. I saw—yet I couldn't believe what I saw. Just at the corner of the gallery, her back to us, stood what seemed to be the figure of Norma Saylor. There was the same blonde hair, the same low cut back, the same unmistakable gown of glittering golden lamé. It was a weird, fantastic sensation as if, somehow, Norma had been brought back from the dead.



Dimly I heard Jerry's voice: "Wouldn't you have been prepared to swear that was Norma, Lee?"

"Yes," I said almost inaudibly. "It is—it does seem to be Norma. It's certainly her dress."

Jerry called something to Nick again and the lights in the gallery snapped out, taking that brief hallucination with them.

Jerry and Trant were both looking at Jordan. Trant said: "Perhaps you can see how we were all fooled. Miss Lovering knew Norma Saylor as well as anyone did. Even now she was almost convinced."

"But what—?" I faltered. "Tell me, what's the explanation?"

As I spoke I heard the grating sound of heavy curtains being drawn up in the gallery. Daylight was pouring in now—pouring in on that girl still standing by the balustrade above the orchestra platform.

And I understood then.

The girl had turned slowly to face us. The dress which had gleamed gold in the small amber spot was not gold any longer. It shone a pale, shimmering silver in the sunlight. I saw the blonde bang, the very familiar face which was not the face of Norma Saylor.

Elaine, of course. Elaine in her ball gown of *silver* lamé!

Elaine stood there for a second in the gallery, staring down at us, her face very white and drawn. Then, suddenly, she turned and slipped away out of sight into the darkness where the curtains still covered the windows.

Trant was saying: "That's Mr. Hough's idea, Chief Jordan. He suggested that the murderer very cleverly took advantage of the lighting effects to make us believe Norma was here at the ball alive when in fact, even at that very moment, she was lying murdered in the fountain pool. He did that so that he could give himself a perfect alibi. Everyone knew, of course, that Norma's was the only golden dress in the room. It never occurred to us that a silver dress in an amber spot looks gold."

Jerry had moved to my side again as Trant continued: "And it isn't only conjecture. Mr. Hough tells me the students were having some fool bet about Elaine's back being the prettiest in the room. It would

have been easy to persuade her to stand in any given spotlight without arousing her suspicions.” He looked at Jerry. “Thanks, Mr. Hough. I’m sure Chief Jordan will realize that Norma could have been murdered before I arrived last night and that alibis after that time cease to be valid.”

Nick Dodd came down from the gallery and Jerry moved to join him. Trant and I were left with Chief Jordan who was looking very grim.

At last he said: “Well, I guess that covers everything. I’ll get that warrant sworn out right away.”

I think it was then that I first began to realize for whom that warrant was to be sworn out. For a while I had been unable to think of anything but those moments at the dance last night when Elaine had grabbed me around the waist, had chattered about her back and a bet. But gradually and relentlessly this other idea reared up in my mind like some horrible weed, stifling everything else that was there.

Already Trant had told me everything about the murderer except his name. Now I saw how there was only one solution. The person who could have known about Grace’s suicide and the will from the very beginning; the person to whom that false glimpse of Norma gave so perfect an alibi, the person who had actually pointed Elaine out in the gallery saying: “There’s Norma....”

I turned desperately to Lieutenant Trant. “But you can’t mean him. It’s not possible. And Grace—Grace couldn’t have left her money to him. She didn’t like him. She ...”

Trant laid his hand on my arm as if he knew just how much I needed something to steady me. “I never said that Grace left the money to him. I only said that he hoped to benefit by the new will. That makes quite a difference. You see, he hoped to benefit indirectly *through* the person who stood to inherit the money.” He paused, his gray eyes fixed intently on his thumb. “Of course, there won’t be any money now. But Grace made her new will, Lee, in favor of—you.”

Trant's voice went on, soft and even, but I wasn't really listening. I was struggling fruitlessly to keep myself from admitting what I knew now to be the truth.

"You, as Grace's only friend, were the logical person for her to leave the money to. She couldn't have realized what would happen. That someone, who wanted that money badly, would try to make you fall in love with him and..."

"Don't tell her that, Trent." Suddenly I felt the detective pushed aside and Jerry's rough hands were on my arms. "They mustn't make you believe that, Lee. Maybe he did want the money. It was a hell of a temptation, strong enough to make him murder Norma. But he wasn't kidding you about loving you. I'm sure of that."

Jerry was there, gazing at me intently, his young face soft, as gentle as I had ever seen it. And I remembered how those two had once been close friends.

After a long moment Jerry drew away, his eyes moving to Trent. He said very quietly: "We might as well get it over with. I promised I'd try to get a confession for you. I guess I can if you—you leave the two of us alone together."

"Okay." Trant nodded and came over to me. "We all better get out of here and let Jerry take care of the rest, Lee. You go over to Pigot and wait in your room. I'll be there—soon." He turned to Jordan. "You've made all arrangements?"

Jordan said: "Yes. One of my men is bringing Carteris over here right away."

They had said Steve's name now. It wasn't just in my mind any more. There wasn't any doubt any longer.

Somehow I stumbled out of that gaunt, dark building, out into the campus.

Mechanically I started down the drive toward Pigot. I didn't really notice anything until I became conscious of two men bearing down upon me. One was square and inconspicuous, obviously a plainclothes man; the other, very tall and lithe in a light gray suit was—Steven Carteris.

I didn't know what to do. They were almost up to me; I couldn't possibly avoid them. And yet—what could I say to Steve now?

I made myself walk on, not looking, but I was terribly conscious of his nearness. Then, suddenly, I felt my arm gripped.

“Lee!”

I did look at him then. He was standing there, next to the detective, his hand on my arm, his dark eyes, steady but very desperate, fixing mine.

“Lee, there's something I want you to know before it's all over. This morning, in the garage, I didn't mean to hurt you. I never knew you'd open the door and jump out. I ...”

“It's all right, Steve,” I whispered. “I guess it's all right.”

I couldn't say anything more. I drew my arm away from his fingers and hurried toward Pigot. Vaguely I was conscious of a car parked outside. Steve's car. That was just one thing more to remind me.

Then I was up in my room alone—in that small, bare room which had used to be just a room in Pigot Dormitory but which now was a storehouse for so many memories I would have given my soul to forget. I sat down in my old work chair with my back to the window, staring pointlessly at the wall, waiting for Lieutenant Trant.

I shall never know how long I sat there. Now that I had made up my mind to face it, I could see the whole thing with hurting vividness. Steve had driven Grace from the service station that night. How easy it would have been for him to guess she was planning suicide. Perhaps she had even hinted it to him, told him about that crazy will she had written making me the beneficiary of that nonexistent \$150,000. Then she had left him with the fur coat and all the letters in his possession. Steve was the one person who had had a chance right from the beginning of reading those letters—and knowing.

And last night he had appeared out of the bushes while I was watching Norma and Marcia in the formal garden. He could have heard Norma saying then that she had the real explanation. He could have realized then that she had to be killed. And later—how easy it would have been for him as Nick Dodd's roommate to know about

the lights, to persuade Elaine to stand there and build up that false image of Norma which gave him so very perfect an alibi. Steve, who had been alone with Lieutenant Trant all through that time when Norma was supposed to have been killed.

All that seemed pitifully clear. But it had no reality. Steve had always stood for something so definite in my life. Steve had been gay and gentle and considerate and absolutely straight. He'd been my very best friend and it was only now that I saw just how much I had always needed him. During all those years when Jerry had just been an exciting dream, there had been Steve. Almost without my realizing, he had become an integral part of me. And then last night he had told me he loved me.

And he'd done that just because he thought I was going to be rich. Steve had done that!

I was still sitting there, feeling that all the life had drained out of me, when the door opened softly and Lieutenant Trant was there. He came into the room. I got up. And we stood looking at each other.

His level gray eyes which during the past days had held so much menace for me were very soft and sympathetic now.

I said: "Then it's over?"

"It's over. He's made a full confession. It's much easier that way. Chief Jordan's taking him to the station. They'll be here any minute to pick me up. So I guess it's time for me to walk out of your life. I'm sorry it had to be this way, darn sorry. You won't hold it against me, will you?"

I shook my head. "You had to do what you had to do. It's just that I can't believe it yet because it's too much coming so suddenly ..."

He broke in quietly: "You were fond of him, weren't you?"

"Of course I was fond of him, terribly fond."

"I thought so. Once I had the idea you were a bit in love with Steve Carteris."

It was strange and cruel that I should only have realized it then. "Yes," I said. "I think I was a little in love with him—if you can be in love with two people at once."

He took my hand. “You can do anything when you’re young, kid,” he said suddenly. “You can be madly in love with fifteen people at once. You can think you’re in love when you’re only really clinging to memories. You can fall out of love overnight.” He paused, that queer slight smile on his lips. “You can do most anything—if you’re young and you try hard enough.”

His fingers tightened their pressure on mine; then he drew his hand away. “Okay, Lee Lovering. We’ll be meeting again one day and this will all be just something that hit and hit hard—but didn’t have enough punch in it for a knockout.”

And he was gone, closing the door behind him.

I moved aimlessly to the window. The sun had slid behind a cloud now. It seemed to be banking up for rain and the campus was gray and somber. Steve’s car was still there parked on the gravel drive, half hidden behind the young spring foliage of the maple trees.

But a second car was there too, parked near to it. Vaguely could see men inside. I couldn’t bear to look more closely, to catch a glimpse of Steve there in the police car—under arrest.

I saw Lieutenant Trant hurry down the steps of Pigot to the police car and lean in the window. Then Chief Jordan emerged and he and Trant moved across the campus, disappearing into the Administration Building.

At that moment there was a soft tap on my door and Elaine slipped into the room. She was dressed in ordinary clothes again and her face was very white and dispirited. She came up to me, putting her hand impulsively on my shoulder.

“Darling, I had to tell them. He was the person who suggested I should go up in the gallery and stand in the spotlight so everyone could see my back better. I thought it was all just part of the gag.”

“Of course you had to tell,” I broke in miserably.

I glanced out of the window again. Lieutenant Trant and Jordan had come out of the Administration Building and were moving back toward the police car.

“Lee, darling,” Elaine was saying awkwardly, “I just met Lieutenant Trant. He gave me something for you—a letter. He told me to bring it to you.”

She took an envelope out of her bag and handed it to me. I stared at it without much interest.

My fingers moved to slit it but suddenly Elaine gave a little stifled scream.

Her hand was clutching my arm. She was staring out of the window, her face blank with surprise and fright.

“Look, Lee. There’s a fight or something—down there.”

It was hard to see clearly, for the maples half screened us from that thing which was happening out on the campus. But I saw the confusion around the police car, saw a door swinging open, a plainclothes man staggering backward and sprawling onto the drive. There were harsh cries, the sharp crack of a pistol shot. Another policeman was dashing away from the car.

And, for one lightning second, through the screen of maples, I caught a glimpse of a third figure running in the direction of Steve’s parked car. I heard a door open and slam shut. Once again there were warning shouts, then the roar of a car engine suddenly bursting into life.

“Lee!” Elaine cried hoarsely. “He’s making a get-away.”

I saw Steve’s car then, swerving away from the running policemen. It was heading straight at Chief Jordan and Trant, gathering speed every second. Jordan sprang forward, making a futile attempt to check its wild career, but Trant gripped his arm, jerking him back to safety as the automobile hurtled past them.

There was something frightful about that swift, crazy flight. The car seemed to be heading at random. It hadn’t turned toward the college gates; it was roaring insanely toward, the gym.

Then suddenly I saw it swing off the drive. I saw it tearing headlong over the lawns. I saw a tree looming ahead, straight in its path, a huge old oak tree. I stood there at the window, every nerve in my body numb.

There was a crash, a grinding, wrenching crash of metal as the car careened into the tree, sprang up like a live thing and lurched over onto its side.

I stumbled away from the window. I didn't see any more.

But I had seen enough to realize that no one could have been in that car—and lived.

I sat down on the edge of the bed, too dazed really to think or feel much. Elaine was at my side. For a long moment we just sat gazing at each other, seeing the remembrance of that horrible thing in each other's eyes. At last, her voice very small, Elaine said:

"I suppose it's better that way, Lee. You've got to see it's better. No trial, no beastly drawn-out trial with newspaper stories and everything."

I managed to say: "I guess it is best. But if—if you don't mind, I think I'd rather be alone."

"Of course, darling." She bent and kissed my cheek. Then she slipped out of the room.

After I was alone again I sat there on the bed, not moving. There were vague sounds from outside. Once I heard a car start and drive away. But I didn't go to the window.

Gradually, as my mind started working again, I realized that I was still holding in my hand the envelope Elaine had brought me from Lieutenant Trant. Listlessly I opened it. There were two folded pieces of paper inside. I unfolded one. I saw Trant's neat, careful writing.

"DEAR LEE:

Maybe I should have broken the news myself but I thought it might be easier this way—easier for you. You've read or heard the contents of every document in the case except one. I'm enclosing a copy of that one. The pieces have just been fitted together at the station. I think it speaks for itself. Chin up.

T."



Feeling a cold constriction around my heart, I unfolded the other piece of paper. It was the typed copy of a letter.

I read:

*Copy of letter written by Grace Hough to her brother on the night of her suicide.*

JERRY DARLING:

Before anything I want you to promise me to destroy this letter as soon as you've read it. If there's no way for you to destroy it yourself at the infirmary, you must get Lee or someone to do it for you. You've got to do that. I shouldn't be writing this, I know. But I couldn't do what I'm going to do—not without saying good-by.

Jerry, you musn't—mustn't be sorry when you hear this. Tonight I've found out something that just makes it impossible to go on any longer. Jerry, please say you understand, that you forgive me. I'm going to kill myself. It sounds terrible, I know. But it's the only way. What is there for me anyway? It's stupid to kid myself I'll ever get what I want out of life. No one ever likes me. In fact, I think people hate me, people have always been so cruel, they've hurt me so much, they've made it all unbearable. You're the only one I love—you and Lee. But you wouldn't want me always as a burden.

No one will know I've committed suicide, darling. I've arranged for that. Don't think there'll be a scandal, all the awful things that happened with Dad. But I've done one thing you may hate me for. Please believe I'm doing what I think best. I know you gave Norma your fraternity pin this afternoon. And I can't bear the thought of you being engaged to her. I know what a temptation she must seem at the moment. And I thought if you were to get my money,

you'd never get out of her clutches. That's why I made a new will, leaving everything to Lee. She loves you; she's worth five thousand of Norma. It would make me so happy if I thought one day you could marry her. You need someone strong and decent—just the way I do. We've got so much to fight against; we've got such a rotten heritage. I think I knew this would happen to me, knew it that night when we heard about Dad—a sort of presentiment.

Good-by, darling,

GRACE.

I never knew before just now how it could feel to have everything—absolutely everything—swept away from under your feet. For one moment it was as if I were turned to ice. The blood in my veins was ice; my fingers holding the letter were stiff icicles. Only my mind went on working, presenting one thought after another in a cold, deadly sequence of logic.

Grace had written this letter to Jerry on the night of her death. Jerry had shown me another one, the earlier one she had written about Norma. Jerry had deliberately shown me the wrong letter so that I should be a witness to the fact that it gave no indication of suicide. Then he had persuaded Norma to tear both the letters up. He had known from the beginning just what Grace was planning to do; he had known she was making a will in my favor. If that will was proved valid, I would get the money and he would get me. If it was proved invalid, he would get the money anyhow—provided the suicide was kept dark. Of course, his motive was far stronger than anyone's. He had to kill Norma because she was endangering his chance of getting the money. Jerry had killed her and had gone out with me to the fountain for an alibi. He had used me for an alibi, made love to me, knowing what was there in the pool. Jerry had done that. He had done all those things I had been attributing in my mind to Steve.

And the car, the car that had hurtled across the campus and had been shattered into twisted wreckage. It hadn't been Steve in that car. I had been wrong; I had been fooled—so hopelessly, abysmally fooled.

There wasn't anything that could matter any more because Jerry had done that to me. And Jerry was dead.

I never heard Steve come in. I never knew he was in the room until he was there, standing in front of me, watching me from those dark steady eyes which said so much more than he or anyone could possibly have said in words.

He took the letter from my numb fingers. Very deliberately, he tore it up, scattering the fragments on the floor.

"Don't think what you're thinking, Lee," he said softly. "Whatever you're thinking, it's only half true. You've got to believe it isn't quite as ugly as the words say it is. Jerry told me everything; he wanted to tell me, not the police. He knew Trant had guessed this morning. That's why he offered to break his own alibi and confess."

I looked at him, but I wasn't really seeing him. "He's dead, isn't he, Steve? Jerry's dead."

He nodded, his eyes careful and solicitous, never leaving my face. "I guessed he might do something like that. But I—I didn't tell Trant. I thought it was better to let him do it his own way. You see, this morning at the garage—that's what happened. He knew that when you found the pieces of Grace's last letter—the real one—there in the *Wentworth Clarion*, he knew then that it was all up. He couldn't go on lying to you any more and he—he tried to finish it there in the repair shop. It was he who locked himself in and turned on the engine because he was through then."

I found I could still speak, still think, just as if my heart wasn't breaking. "And it was you who followed us?"

"Yes. Trant knew it all last night. He was scared something might happen to you so he asked me to hang around to see you didn't run into any danger. He told me about that letter, too, and how Jerry would be desperate to get the pieces if he found out where they

were. And then you telephoned in the middle of the night. I hated to snoop on you, but I had to follow. I got the *Wentworth Clarion* from Jerry there in the repair shop. I knew it was his death warrant; that's why I couldn't bring myself to speak to you when I got back to the car. I was planning to drive you back to college and try to give you some sort of explanation. But you jumped before I could stop you. It was then I realized that you thought I was the murderer." His voice broke, then he went on hoarsely. "But that wasn't so bad as having to tell you that Jerry was. So I didn't go back for you, Lee. I shirked it. I sent the garage man up and told him to drive you home in my car. I didn't think you were badly hurt, and I never dreamed Jerry would try to kill himself."

I said dully: "But now he's dead. Jerry's dead, and he made me think he cared about me, and all the time ..."

"No, that's not true." Steve's hands had taken mine and were holding them gently. "Try to understand, Lee. Jerry told me everything. One reason he confessed to me instead of to the police was because he wanted me to tell you some of these things. Grace left him a terrible temptation. He wasn't strong enough to resist it. But he did love you. It was just that he only found out when it was too late, when he'd gone too far down the other way."

"But he fooled me," I insisted brokenly.

"Not in the big thing, Lee. He fooled you by switching Grace's letters that day in the infirmary. There was a weak, rotten part of him that saw how the insurance money could mean all the difference between everything and nothing. And then, when he had gone so far off the rails, there was nothing for it but—murder. You see, Norma confronted him with the special delivery letter at the Ball. She was mad at him anyhow and quite prepared to be nasty. She had figured it out that Grace had written the letter herself and that she'd probably committed suicide. She had figured out about the insurance money too. She accused Jerry of deliberately switching the letters on her and making her tear up the suicide note. She had it all straight in her mind. Then she dropped a bombshell. She said she hadn't destroyed

the pieces of those letters; she wouldn't tell him where they were but she said she was going to take them to the police. That was fatal. He killed her then. She was the only person, so he thought, who could prove anything against him."

For a while neither of us spoke. We just sat there together listening to the dreary patter of rain in the leaves outside.

"That's what Jerry told me." Steve's voice came at last through the stillness. "He wanted you to know and he wanted me to say that it was better for you without him. He said you weren't ever really in love with him, with the real Jerry. You were in love with the memories of the way he used to be when you were kids, before everything happened and he changed. He said he wanted you to forget him. That's what he told me, Lee."

"But I won't forget him. I can't forget how life can do this to you."

Steve's face was very white. I knew then that it was hurting him almost as terribly as it was hurting me.

"Ever is a long time, Lee," he said huskily. "I guess it seems like the end of everything now. But one day, maybe, it won't be so tough. And if—if ever you want anyone, perhaps you'll remember what I said last night. I'm here. I'll always be here."

He drew me a little closer. His hands on mine were warm and comforting.

And, strangely, something Lieutenant Trant had said to me just a little while ago trailed back into my thoughts.

You can think you're in love when you're really clinging to memories. You can fall out of love overnight. You can do most anything—if you're young and you try hard enough.

And I wondered ...

THE END

## About the Author

Patrick Quentin, Q. Patrick, and Jonathan Stagge were pen names under which Hugh Callingham Wheeler (1912–1987), Richard Wilson Webb (1901–1966), Martha Mott Kelley (1906–2005), and Mary Louise White Aswell (1902–1984) wrote detective fiction. Most of the stories were written together by Webb and Wheeler, or by Wheeler alone. Their best-known creation is amateur sleuth Peter Duluth. In 1963, the story collection *The Ordeal of Mrs. Snow* was given a Special Edgar Award by the Mystery Writers of America.

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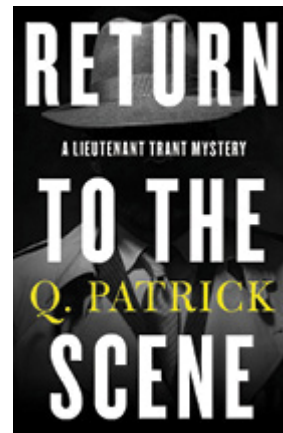
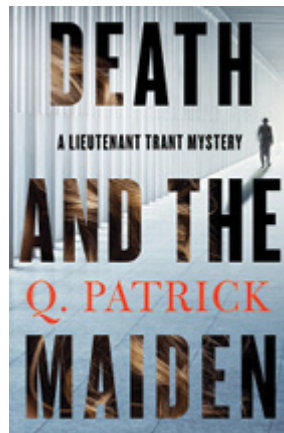
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