

DELL

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A NEW
MIKE SHAYNE
MYSTERY



**MURDER
BY
PROXY**

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Murder by Proxy

1.

Ellen Harris stood in the center of an immaculate bedroom in an apartment in New York's East Seventies and turned about slowly to survey the large, pleasant room and assure herself for the last time that everything was in perfect order for her leave-taking.

She was a tall, beautifully proportioned woman of thirty with smooth, burnished blond hair that curled in slightly at the nape of her neck. She had a lovely, clear complexion with regular features, large blue eyes, set well apart and fringed with long, dark lashes, a generous mouth that smiled easily, and a firmly fleshed chin.

At the moment, Ellen Harris was stark naked.

An open suitcase lay on the foot of the neatly made double bed. It was carefully and lovingly packed with all the things she would need for two weeks in Florida, and ready to be closed. On the floor was a matching overnight bag, already closed and latched. The clothing she would wear on her trip was neatly laid out on a chair near the dressing alcove.

She completed her survey of the room with a small nod of satisfaction, then drew in her breath sharply and her smoothly fleshed body tensed as she heard the sound of a key being inserted in the front door beyond the hallway leading into the front room.

She took two instinctive steps in her bare feet across the rug toward an open closet where a flowered robe hung on the inside of the door, her gaze going quickly to an electric clock on her dressing table which showed the time to be eleven-thirty.

She paused with her arm outstretched and hand on the robe, turning her head to listen intently and hearing the outer door open quietly.

"Herbert?" she called hopefully in a modulated contralto voice, "Is that you?"

"Who the hell did you expect at this time of day?" an exuberant male voice called back from the outer room, and firm footsteps hurried down the hall toward the bedroom.

Ellen smiled with happy relief at the sound of her husband's voice. She snatched the robe off the hook and held it demurely in front of her as she turned to face him.

He stopped in the doorway to take in her loveliness, feeling a little catch in his throat at sight of her that a year of marriage to Ellen had done nothing to dissipate.

He was a tall, compact man in his mid-thirties, with friendly, brown eyes and smooth, handsome features. He was wearing a charcoal-gray, Brooks Brothers' suit, which clung superbly to wide shoulders and tapering waist, and he narrowed his eyes across the room at his wife, leaning indolently against the door-facing and thrusting both hands into the slash pockets of his jacket with elbows akimbo.

"I assume," he said conversationally, "that you wouldn't have been so quick to snatch that robe up if it had been someone else."

"Of course not," she agreed equably, with a teasing, luminous smile. "Every other man with a key to our front door just naturally expects me to be ready... and waiting... when he barges in."

He said in an awed voice, "My God, you're beautiful, Ellen." He straightened up and began to walk toward her slowly.

She said, "You look pretty good yourself, Mr. Harris. I didn't expect you for at least half an hour."

"I slipped away from the office early. I got to thinking... well, hell, you know what I got to thinking. It's going to be a long time without you."

He stopped directly in front of her and put his hands on her bare shoulders, looking down into her face hungrily and exhaling a slow, shuddering breath.

She relaxed her grip on the robe and it slithered to the floor between them. She stood straight and proud, and her blue eyes were wide and moist, staring directly into his. She said, "I love you, darling. I don't want to leave you. Let's cancel the trip..."

He drew her to him slowly and lowered his lips to hers, and she pressed the length of her naked body against his and her arms went about his waist fiercely and they swayed together for a long moment in a passionate embrace before turning inevitably to the waiting bed and sinking down upon it together...

Herbert Harris was in the neat, compact kitchen that connected with the living-room, through a dining alcove, when his wife called to him from the

bedroom, fifteen minutes later. He had his jacket off and his sleeves rolled up and was very carefully measuring a minute quantity of vermouth into a martini pitcher already containing ice cubes and gin. He called back, "Right away, sweetie," and walked through the living room, carrying the pitcher and stirring the contents with a glass rod.

This time his wife again stood in the center of the bedroom, but now she was wearing a brassiere and a white slip, and had her arms through the sleeves of a sheer white blouse that she planned to wear on the airplane under a suit of blue silk.

She turned her back to him as he entered the room, and smiled back at him over her shoulder. "These damn tiny buttons in the back, Herb. Will you do them for me, please?"

He set the martini pitcher down on the glass top of a chest of drawers and said, "With pleasure, my dear." He crossed to her and started fastening the blouse from the bottom, drawing it tight at her trim waist. "What I'm wondering," he muttered with his lips close to the curling strands of blond hair at the back of her neck, "is why you chose this blouse to wear on your trip. Who's going to unbutton it for you when you get there?"

"I can unbutton it, silly. I can even button it up if I have to, but it's an awful nuisance."

"And there'll always be someone around to do the job for you," he suggested lightly. "After all a man doesn't have to be a husband to do a job like this."

She flinched as though he had struck her. "Don't say things like that, Herb. Even if you are kidding. It just isn't funny. You *know* I'd rather stay here with you. You're the one who insists."

"There you are." He fastened the last button and gave her shoulder a husbandly pat. "You know that both of us swore one year ago yesterday when we got married that we weren't going to be like other couples and start taking each other for granted. And we promised each other a solemn promise that at least once each year we'd arrange to spend two weeks apart from each other. So hurry up and get the rest of your clothes on and join me for a final martini."

"Do we have time?"

"Plenty of time. We don't need to leave for the airport for at least twenty minutes."

He backed away from her and picked up the martini pitcher, strolled back into the living room and set it down on the coffee table, then got two cocktail glasses from a kitchen cabinet.

Ellen came in from the bedroom just as he finished pouring two tall-stemmed glasses full of liquid. She said composedly, "I'm all set if you'll close my suitcase." She sat down in an overstuffed chair beside the coffee table and lit a cigarette, then lifted one of the cocktail glasses and sipped from it appreciatively.

"You know, Herb," she said quietly, "I meant what I said a moment ago in the bedroom. Damn this whole idea of my trip to Miami. I'm going to hate every minute of it, if I think that you're back here in New York brooding over me. Making up all sorts of nasty things about me and other men while I'm away from you. I love you, Herb. If you don't know that... She frowned at him across her cocktail glass.

Herbert Harris said huskily, "I do know it, Ellen darling. I'm fully aware of it every moment of every day. I still think this trip is right and is necessary. I won't be sitting around brooding. Damn it, darling. If I didn't know you'd be faithful to me..."

"Then why do you *say* things like that?" Ellen wailed. "About other men buttoning my blouse? You can't... you just simply *can't*... She sank back in her chair, glaring down at her cocktail glass and then emptying it in an abrupt gesture of defiance.

Herbert got to his feet and refilled her glass from the pitcher. He poured the rest of the liquid into his own glass, and said urbanely, "The whole idea is that we are intelligent people, and that this is an intelligent thing to do. Have fun in Miami," he urged her. "Go out to Hialeah and bet on the horses; and have drinks at the Coca and take a fling at roulette at the Coral Casino. Don't worry about me here in New York. I'll be fine! I'll be on the town. Playboy Herb Harris. That's me."

Ellen drank from her glass and studied him under lowered eyelids. After a moment, she achieved a shaky smile. "I'm not going to worry about you, Herb. I expect you to have fun. Have the boys from the office over for poker. I don't want you to do a thing about the apartment while I'm gone. Don't wash a dish... or even a glass. Rose and I worked all yesterday afternoon polishing everything up so it's clean as a whistle. She won't come back until Monday, two weeks from today, and I told her to spend the whole

day before I get back cleaning the place up. So, you have fun, darling. Stack up all your dirty dishes and let Rose worry about them. Promise me?”

“Sure, I promise you,” he told her huskily. “You do the same. Have fun in Miami. Miss me a lot. When I see you next...”

Herbert Harris got to his feet, his face working queerly, and he held out his arms to his wife.

She looked up at him without moving out of her chair. “Everything is going to be fine, Herb.” She spoke with complete assurance. “I’ll call you at the office this afternoon as soon as I get settled in my hotel. You will be... careful... won’t you, darling?”

He said, “I’ll be... careful.”

Ellen finished her drink and stood up, carefully smoothing her skirt down over her thighs. She turned toward the bedroom saying, “If you’ll close my suitcase for me, darling?” and her husband followed her into the bedroom.

2.

The arrival of a beautiful, unescorted woman at any one of the dozens of luxury hotels on Miami Beach is no novelty and normally attracts only casual attention.

But a lot of heads turned to watch the tall blonde in the beautifully fitted, blue silk suit cross the lobby of the Beachhaven Hotel at four o'clock that afternoon. She was followed by a bellboy carrying a suitcase and a matching overnight bag. It was more than facial beauty, more than the lush promise of a beautifully sculptured female figure. Beautiful, well-stacked dames are a dime a dozen on Miami Beach. There was something special about the set of her head, the way she carried herself, the poised yet flowing grace of each separate step she took, an animal magnetism that managed to be demure yet was infinitely exciting to every male who saw her pass.

One felt she wanted and expected to attract masculine glances, yet secretly deplored the fact that this was so and was consciously determined to take no heed of them whatsoever.

The clerk on duty behind the desk was named Justus Lawford. He was tall, urbane and knowledgeable. He drew himself up a little straighter, glanced down quickly to check the amount of white cuff extending beyond his jacket sleeves, touched the neat, black bow-tie at his throat, and worked his features into the proper semblance of a tentative, welcoming smile as she approached the counter in front of him. It was not a subservient smile but it carefully erased every trace of the haughty superiority with which he was wont to greet newly arriving guests.

She carried a large, and obviously expensive handbag which she placed on the counter while she stripped off a pair of white string gloves and said, "I have a reservation. Mrs. Herbert Harris." Her voice was low and husky, and somehow managed to seem very intimate. Her wide, blue eyes met his briefly with self-assured candor, and then long, fringed lashes came down to cut off the voltage.

He said, "Of course, Mrs. Harris," and was dismayed by the treble note which unexpectedly crept into his voice. He turned to check a typed list of names, annoyed with himself and with the woman who had created this reaction within him. Consequently, he was very businesslike, almost curt,

when he turned back and laid a registration card in front of her and offered her a pen. He said, "That's for two weeks, Mrs. Harris? And you're alone?"

She nodded and signed the card carefully, bending her blond head forward over the card so a faint whiff of expensive perfume came up to him. With her head bent, her low voice told him, "My husband couldn't get away from his business at this time." She lifted her blue eyes to his and smiled faintly, and added with a bubbling note of merriment, "He also has the modern idea that married couples should spend their vacations separately. I'm not at all sure...." She broke off and frowned slightly. "Do you think it's such a good idea?" She asked the question with such innocent naïveté that Justus Lawford responded with an expansive smile.

"I'm a bachelor myself, Mrs. Harris. But if I were married to..." He caught himself and didn't say: "someone like you"; but the thought was implicit in the warmth of his voice. "I just don't know," he ended up lamely. "We've put you in three twenty-six, Mrs. Harris. A lovely room overlooking the ocean. I'm sure you'll be very comfortable."

"I just hope it won't be too dreadfully boring," she sighed, making a little, pouting moue. "All alone in a strange place."

"Your first visit to Miami?"

"Yes. I'm afraid I don't know a soul."

"Don't you worry about that," he said heartily. "We have a lovely hostess who'll see that you don't remain a stranger for long. And many social activities."

"Please," she murmured. "Deliver me from your hostesses and social activities. Oh, I'll want to rent a car for my stay. Can you arrange it? I think one of the rental companies is on my credit card."

She was opening her leather bag as she spoke and he saw the wide wedding ring on her left hand set with small diamonds that twinkled in the light.

She took out a credit card and laid it in front of him, and he said, "I'll call Avis at once. Will you wish to charge your hotel bill also, Mrs. Harris? In that case we can put the car rental on it."

"Why, yes. I suppose that's easiest. My husband is always after me to use the card more often. Could you have it delivered at once? A convertible, if they have one. I don't really care what make."

"It will be at the door in half an hour, Mrs. Harris." He had taken an impression of the card, and now returned it to her. "You'll just have the one

bill to sign when you leave.”

“You’ve been very kind.” She dropped the card in her bag and closed it. “Will you call my room when it arrives? Perhaps there’ll be time for a little drive before it gets dark.”

“I’m sure there will be.” He nodded to the bellboy who stood behind her with her bags. “Show Mrs. Harris to three-two-six.”

He stood with his hands flat on the desk watching her cross toward the bank of elevators, thoroughly enjoying the faint twitch of silk-sheathed buttocks which subtly emphasized the ladylike poise of her walk.

“A real dish,” he told himself appreciatively. “By God, if I was married to a piece like that...” He snapped to attention and turned with an expression of hauteur to the fat lady who said, “*May* I have my key, young man?”

The bellboy waited respectfully in the elevator with her bags until she got off at the third floor, then said, “To your left, Ma’am.”

She said, “You lead the way,” looking aside and up into his stolid face. He was very tall and broad-shouldered and young, with black hair in a flat-topped crewcut, and she followed him down the carpeted hallway, appraising the youthful, rangy body in its well-cut livery of dark maroon with yellow epaulets and gold stripes on the sleeves. He stopped in front of a door numbered 326 and unlocked it, then stepped back to let her enter. She passed closer to him than was necessary, just brushing a rounded hip and shoulder against him, entering a large pleasant room with two wide windows on the opposite side looking down on the limitless blue of the Atlantic Ocean.

She crossed swiftly to the windows and stood looking out while he entered the room behind her and crossed to place her suitcase on a luggage rack and set the smaller bag on the floor beside it.

He straightened up and found her turned away from the window, regarding him with a smile. “What’s your name?” Her voice was very husky, almost a sensuous purr.

“Bill Thompson, Ma’am. Here’s the air-conditioner here with a thermostat on the wall. And the T-V set here...”

Her smile widened provocatively. “You’re awfully young to be working in a hotel aren’t you, Bill? You look more like a college football player to me.”

He reddened slightly. “Well, I am a senior at the University. I just work here part time. I’ll check the towels...” He removed his youthful and slightly embarrassed gaze from her face and went into the bathroom.

When he emerged a minute later she was standing at the foot of the twin beds looking outraged. “Why on earth do you suppose they gave me a room with twin beds? *I* like to sleep in a double bed. Don’t you, Bill?”

“Well, I... I never thought much about it, I guess.”

She turned and smiled slowly. “You will, Bill. Before many more years, you’ll start thinking about it. Don’t you have a girl friend?”

“Not... not really.” He was blushing again, looking down at his hands. The way she was looking at him! There was at least ten feet of distance between them, but he felt as though he could feel the warmth of her body pressed close to his. He kept his gaze lowered, and muttered, “If there’s nothing else you want, Ma’am...” and turned toward the open door.

She had moved across to it in front of him. She closed it quietly and said, “Suppose I do want something else?”

“Well, I... I’m supposed to get you anything you want.”

She said, “Anything?”

“Sure. That is...”

She laughed softly. “You’re blushing. Don’t be afraid, Bill. I’m not going to seduce you. Not at five o’clock in the afternoon in broad daylight. Besides, you’re on duty. They’d probably suspect something if you stayed too long in a woman’s room.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” he said desperately. “They sure would.”

“One thing you can do for me,” she said gaily, “is to open that suitcase. The latch always sticks.”

He turned hastily to the suitcase and opened it, spreading it out on the rack.

She had moved closer to him and had her bag open and was taking out a bill. He saw it was a five-spot as he took it and she let her fingertips trail over his. He held it up for her to see and said awkwardly, “Didn’t you make a mistake? There’s no need for you to do that.”

She laughed happily at his embarrassment. “It’s just money, Bill. I’ve got lots of it to spend having fun the next two weeks. Do you think I *will* have fun, Bill?” she asked a little sadly. “Or do you think I’m just a foolish, old woman for even hoping?”

“You sure aren’t old,” he told her sincerely, swallowing back a lump in his throat as he spoke. “You’re... well...”

“What am I, Bill?” She moved very close to him and his heart pounded madly as he smelled the combination of woman smell and perfume that came from her body.

He looked down at the bill he was twisting around in his fingers and gulped in an awed, small voice, “You’re beautiful.”

She stepped back from him and said lightly, “Aw, shucks. I bet you tell that to all the women... just hoping they’ll give you big tips.”

She was laughing at him, damn it. He clenched his big hands together into fists and hated her for laughing at him. Without looking at her, he dropped the five-dollar-bill on the floor and muttered, “If that’s what you think, keep your money.”

He turned his back and stalked to the door, pulled it open viciously.

Her low, intimate voice stopped him. “Don’t go away mad, Bill. When... do you get off duty?”

“Tonight... at midnight.” He stood stiffly without looking back at her. He sensed her movement and knew she had moved up very close to him, but he remained adamantly half out of the door.

Her voice purred seductively and he felt the warmth of her breath on his ear, “I have a feeling I’m going to be terribly lonesome by midnight, Bill. If you feel like a nightcap, why don’t you knock on my door?”

“I’ll... uh... see.” He hurried out into the hallway, his face flaming, and pulled the door shut firmly behind him. He knew he ought to run like hell, but he also knew with a sick certainty inside him that he would knock on her door after he went off duty at midnight.

She smiled happily as the door closed behind him, and hummed a little tune as she looked at her wrist-watch. She had promised Herb she would call him from the Miami Beach hotel after she had checked in. There was still time to catch him at his office.

She sat down in front of the telephone and lifted it, told the hotel operator, “I would like to make a person to person call to my husband in New York.” She paused. “To Mr. Herbert Harris.” She gave the operator the office number and waited.

Presently, Herbert’s voice came over the wire. “Hello. Is that you, Ellen?”

“Herb?” She made her voice light and gladsome. “How *are* you, darling?”

“Swell. Fine. Everything okay down yonder in the Southland?”

“Everything’s wonderful, darling. The sun is shining, the ocean is blue, the hotel is lovely. It was a beautiful trip down. I miss you, Herb.”

“Not as much as I’m already missing you.”

“*You’ll* do all right,” she told him happily. “Let’s see now: I’m renting a car. It should be delivered to the hotel any minute, and I want to drive around a little before it gets too dark. I’m putting the hotel and car and everything on the Carte Blanche card, Herb. Is that all right?”

“Of course it’s all right.” His voice was reassuringly gruff. “What have we got credit cards for?” There was a pause. Then he said, “I love you.”

“Oh, Herb... darling. I love you, too.” She hesitated, then added perversely, “They’ve got the cutest bellboys in this hotel, darling. Collegiate football players, no less. You ought to see the one who brought me up. I don’t think I’m *really* going to be lonesome.”

“Look here, now!” His voice was peremptory and rough. Then he chuckled. “All right. Have fun. Call me again in a couple of days, huh?”

“I will, darling. And you have fun, too. Goodnight.” In New York, Herbert Harris echoed her “goodnight,” and the circuit was broken.

She replaced the instrument on its prongs and stood up, stretched her arms high above her head and sighed deeply, then went across to the windows on the East and stood looking down at the ocean for a long moment.

Finally, she shrugged and turned back into the room, peeling off her suit jacket and dropping it on the foot of one of the twin beds. She unbuttoned her skirt and stepped out of it, then crossed over to the open suitcase and selected a low-cut cocktail dress of brilliant, flame-colored silk.

The ringing of her telephone brought her out of the bathroom ten minutes later, holding a lipstick in her hand, and, when she answered it, the hotel doorman announced that her rented car was ready and waiting.

She thanked him and said she would be down immediately, and ten minutes later Justus Lawford stood appreciatively behind the desk and watched her emerge from the elevator and cross the lobby to the revolving front door. The cocktail dress, he decided, was a distinct improvement over the suit he had first seen her wearing. Then he let himself imagine her

wearing only a sheer white nylon nightgown, and blinked his eyes enviously as she disappeared out the front door.

The late afternoon tropical sunlight was brilliant on the sidewalk, and the brilliantly caparisoned doorman saluted with a smile when she approached him and said, "I'm Mrs. Harris in three twenty-six. Is my car here?"

"Yes, Mrs. Harris." He handed her a pair of keys on a ring and led her to a cream-colored convertible Pontiac with the top down. He opened the right-hand door for her to get in, and she slid under the wheel and asked him, "Does the hotel have a garage?"

"A free parking lot around on the other side, Madam." He pointed to a sticker affixed to the windshield that said, BEACHHAVEN HOTEL. "You can either leave it with me at the door to be parked for you and we'll have it brought around when you want it, or you can put it in the lot yourself and take it out when you want for no charge. But take the keys if you park it, Madam. There's no attendant at night."

She thanked him and found the key that fitted in the ignition. The motor purred smoothly and she pulled carefully away from the curb into traffic.

3.

There was only one bartender on duty in the cocktail lounge at the Beachhaven Hotel at seven o'clock that evening. The earlier rush had slackened and there were only half a dozen dawdlers at the bar, a couple of the booths were occupied and there were perhaps a dozen couples at the small tables more interested in having another drink than getting into the dining room.

The bartender was called Tiny. He was six feet tall and four feet around the middle. He wore a size twenty collar and weighed slightly more than three hundred pounds. He had been a professional wrestler for a period, but found tending bar less arduous and a lot more fun. Particularly in a cocktail lounge like the Beachhaven. Anything could happen any time. And most evenings something did.

Take like this stacked blonde, now, coming into the dimly lighted lounge through the door that opened directly into the hotel parking lot.

She was a new one, and, by God, she was a honey. That vivid red cocktail dress was something! Slashed all the way down in front to here, and filled out plenty good on each side of the spreading vee. But there was an elegance about her, too. The way she held herself... proud and sure. The way she took her time looking the joint over. Studying the empty booths and tables, then letting her wide-eyed gaze drift speculatively to the row of empty bar stools and finally to Tiny's face as he watched her. She smiled as though in recognition, although Tiny was positive she had never been in the lounge before. She moved along the bar with flawless grace and stopped behind the row of empty stools in front of Tiny.

"Is there any rule about an unescorted lady not sitting at the bar?"

"There sure isn't. Make yourself right to home."

She slid easily and competently onto the leather stool and rested both elbows on the bar, cupping her chin in her hands after removing a pair of white gloves. "I've always wondered just why it's considered proper at some places for a lady to sit alone at a table, but not at the bar."

"Nobody cares in Miami. All nice and informal down here. Your first trip?"

"Yes." She sighed slightly and lifted her long lashes to widen her blue eyes at him in an intimately appealing way. "What do you recommend I

should drink?”

“Well, now. All depends on what you like.”

“I don’t drink very much at home. My husband doesn’t approve of it. But I feel tonight calls for it. I want to... sort of... cut loose. Not really, you know, but...” With a touch of defiance, “Well, why shouldn’t I?”

“No reason at all, Lady. You just name it.”

“A daiquiri?” She tilted her blond head charmingly. “Isn’t that the one you make with rum?”

“Right you are. One daiquiri coming up.” Tiny turned to lift down a bottle of Bacardi and put ice and lemon juice in a silver shaker. She opened her bag and took out a cigarette which she placed between her lips. She fumbled further in her bag and a pleasant masculine voice spoke from just behind her, “May I?”

A lighter snapped and flame moved toward the tip of her cigarette from her left. She glanced up into the mirror behind the bar and saw the reflection of a lean-jawed, smiling face beside hers in the glass. He was deeply-tanned and brown-haired, and had very white teeth. She turned her head slightly so the tip of her cigarette met the flame, and drew in deeply. Expelling smoke, she murmured a polite, “Thank you.”

He said, just as politely, “You’re quite welcome,” and he sat on the stool beside her, widening his smile at her reflection in the mirror.

She lowered her lashes composedly and snapped her bag shut. Tiny set a brimming, wide-topped, tall-stemmed glass in front of her on a paper napkin. The man sitting beside her said, “Bourbon and water, please, Tiny.”

“Coming up.” Tiny’s voice sounded grumpy.

She said delightedly, “Did you call him Tiny?” and turned her head to look at the man beside her.

He grinned in response. “Sure. On account of he ain’t.”

She said, “I see,” and took a sip of her cocktail sedately. “It’s delicious,” she told Tiny as he turned back to shove a highball glass in front of the man. “Just exactly what I needed.”

“For what?” the man asked with interest.

“For what ailed me. A... sort of lost feeling, I guess you might call it. A sort of wondering what-shall-I-do-next feeling.”

“Why not just have fun? That’s what Miami Beach is noted for.”

“I *want* to.” There was something almost plaintive in the way she emphasized it. “I’m not sure that I know how.” She took another and longer

drink from her glass. "But I do believe this is going to help."

"Perhaps I could help too," he suggested. "I don't want to seem forward, but... my name is Gene Blake."

"I don't think you're being forward at all. I'm Ellen Harris. Mrs. Herbert Harris," she added quickly.

He drank deeply from his glass and twirled it between his fingers on the bar. He didn't look at her as he asked, "Where is Herbert tonight?"

"Back in New York. He," she told Gene Blake with a faint note of rancor in her voice, "thinks that husbands and wives should get away from each other once in awhile."

"I agree with him," said Gene. "Especially if you're the wife. I think I approve of Herbert. Very definitely. Why not try the rest of your daiquiri... Ellen?"

She said softly, "I think I had better. Before I run like hell."

"Where would you run to?"

"Away from you."

"Back to Herbert?"

"Oh, no. I couldn't. Not for two whole weeks."

"Two weeks?" He turned his head to study her face as she emptied her glass. "Wasn't there a book once, called *Three Weeks*? Elinor Glynn, wasn't it?"

"I don't remember. Why?"

Gene tossed off the rest of his highball. He said to Tiny, "Two more, please."

And to her, he said, when Tiny had turned his back to mix the drinks, "It just came to me like a flash of inspiration that I'll bet if you and I put our minds to it we could cram as much into the next two weeks as her characters managed in three weeks in the novel."

"As much of what?" she asked, narrowing her eyes and sucking in her lower lip as though she wasn't at all sure she cared for the trend the conversation was taking.

"Fun," he told her. "Isn't that what you're down here for? Plain, unalloyed, pure, old get-away-from-it-all fun?"

Tiny set their drinks in front of them. Gene reached for his billfold and said, "One check, Tiny."

"Oh, no. You mustn't. I can pay for my own drinks, thank you. And yours, too."

“But I want to.”

“Give me the check, please.” She held her hand out imperiously to Tiny who handed it to her after a lifted eyebrow glance at Blake.

She said, “And a pencil, please,” and then explained to Gene. “This is *my* hotel. I’ll feel better if I sign it. I’m sure *Herbert* will feel better if I sign it.” She took the pencil from Tiny and carefully signed, “Mrs. Herbert Harris. # 326.” She took half her daiquiri down in one gulp. “I’d feel like some sort of a B-girl if I let you buy my drinks,” she explained. “You can see that, can’t you? *You* can see what I mean, can’t you, Tiny?” she appealed to the bartender.

“Well, sure, Ma’am... I guess.” Tiny held the signed barcheck between huge thumb and forefinger.

“Next time,” she said, “at *your* hotel... *you* can sign. Isn’t that fair enough?” She emptied her glass and set it down hard. “Where’s all the gambling and nightclubs and excitement?” she demanded. “I’d just as well be on Park Avenue as here.”

“You want to do some gambling?”

“I’d love to do some gambling. A lot of gambling. You know where to go?”

Gene Blake told her, “I know every place on the Beach.” He slid a half dollar tip on the table beside his empty glass. “Only trouble is, my car is laid up in the garage for repairs. We’ll have to get a taxi.”

He slid off the stool, avoiding Tiny’s half-admiring, half-accusing gaze, and put his hand firmly on the rounded smoothness of her left arm just above the elbow.

She finished her drink and smiled sweetly at the bartender. “Good night, Tiny. Or *au revoir*. Or something.”

And to Gene Blake, she said as she slid off the stool and stood very close beside him, “We don’t need a taxi. I’ve got a car. Cute little convertible. Rented it this afternoon for the whole two weeks.”

Tiny grunted sourly as he watched them move away together toward the rear exit onto the parking lot.

That Gene, he thought, angrily and enviously. He’s got it made, by God. And what a dish! Loaded with money and sex appeal... and a jerk of a husband back in New York paying the bills. Good enough for him, Tiny thought viciously. He’d heard her remark to Gene about her husband thinking couples should be separated now and then. Like as not, Tiny

thought, Mr. Herbert Harris had a private piece of his own that he was rolling in the hay tonight while his wife was vacationing in Miami.

So, what the hell? Why shouldn't she make out with Gene?

He wondered how soon he'd see Mrs. Harris around again.

4.

Martha Hays thoroughly enjoyed her job as a maid at the Beachhaven Hotel. She had been on the third floor for six months, and the work never did get monotonous. The population of the hotel was ceaselessly changing. Rich people from the North coming and going; mostly staying for a week or two, long enough to get to know the smiling and helpful colored maid who cleaned their rooms and was always eager to perform any small, extra task for the comfort or convenience of the guests. Mostly they were real nice when they departed and left fairly substantial gifts for the maid whom they'd got to know in a week or so; mostly a bill left on the dresser, often augmented by articles of clothing which refused to fit into the suitcases that were overstuffed with new purchases made on Lincoln Road during their stay.

It was always an adventure for Martha to unlock and enter the room of a guest who had just departed, and she was always eager for her first inspection of a room that was newly occupied.

In six months' practice, Martha had learned that, if you were smart about it, you could tell a whole lot about the occupants just by looking at their belongings, how they had arranged them, the way they left the bathroom and the room itself when they went out in the morning.

She liked to have single men best, but she didn't get many of those at the Beachhaven, and unmarried couples next. She did get quite a few of those. Many whom she could tell right off were unmarried, and others whom she came to suspect of an extra-marital relationship after cleaning up their room and observing them for a few days.

Best of all from Martha's viewpoint was the combination of a middle-aged, very wealthy man and a younger woman who had never known real wealth. They were the best tippers. The man because he was happy and guilty, and wanted to impress his younger companion, and the woman because it was all going to end in a few days or weeks and it did something for her ego to be prodigal with money that didn't belong to her.

The poorest bets of all were the single women who arrived at the Beachhaven in droves to spend one or two weeks of their vacations in the unaccustomed luxury of an expensive resort hotel. Most of them had saved up for a whole year to be able to afford the trip, and had come to Miami

Beach with roseate dreams of meeting some wealthy, attractive, unattached male and making a conquest which might or might not eventuate in marriage.

Disappointed in the end when they departed (because there just weren't that many wealthy, attractive and unattached males hanging around) they weren't inclined to waste any large portion of their remaining funds on a gratuity to the hotel maid.

Martha knew when she knocked on the door of 326 that morning that the new occupant of the room was a married lady named Mrs. Harris from New York who had reserved the room for two weeks. The maids were all furnished this information on new arrivals as a PR policy on the part of the management. It was a little after eleven o'clock when Martha got to 326, and her knock on the door was perfunctory while she inserted a key in the lock. It was her first morning in Miami Beach, and Mrs. Harris was extremely unlikely to be still loitering in her room at this hour.

She turned her key, when there was no response from inside the room, and opened the door. She was surprised, but not too surprised, to note that neither one of the twin beds had been slept in the night before. This sort of thing happened often enough in a resort hotel like the Beachhaven to occasion little surprise. It didn't displease Martha because it meant less work for her; and also, if Mrs. Harris was the sort to start sleeping out the very first night after she reached the Beach, it probably meant she wasn't a dissatisfied penny-pincher who would go back to New York two weeks hence feeling that she had spent more money than she could afford without getting much out of it.

Martha stood just inside the doorway and surveyed the empty room with a practiced eye. Neither one of the beds had been touched. Not even sat upon. An open suitcase lay spread out on a luggage rack in front of a closet, and Mrs. Harris hadn't even bothered to unpack. Some of the things were turned back in one side of the case, and Martha thought she had probably taken out a dress to change into for the evening because the jacket of a blue silk suit lay on the foot of a bed, and the skirt of the same suit had been discarded on the floor near the bathroom. An overnight bag stood unopened on the floor beside the suitcase, and the top of the dressing table was completely bare of any toilet articles. The windows were closed, and the air-conditioner was not turned on. Just to one side of the bathroom door a pair of beautiful blue spike-heeled pumps lay on their sides. From the

doorway there was no other visible evidence that Mrs. Harris had ever been in the hotel room.

Martha left her little cart of cleaning things and fresh linens standing in the doorway, and walked across to the bathroom door. She stooped and picked up the blue shoes and caressed them gently, admiring the soft leather and fine workmanship, and momentarily visualizing the small, high-arched feet that had kicked them off so carelessly.

She set the pumps carefully just inside the empty closet, went back to pick up the blue jacket and skirt and hang them neatly in the closet.

Inside the bathroom, a white silk blouse lay crumpled on the floor. Only the lavatory had been used by Mrs. Harris. There was a wet washcloth and a damp fluffy hand-towel, and a cake of soap had been removed from its hotel wrapper and was in the soap dish.

Martha wiped up the bathroom thoroughly, and picked up the blouse from the floor and hung it on a hook in the closet. She got a dusting rag from her cart and spent at least three minutes wiping off the telephone and the ashtray beside it which held cigarette ashes, and desultorily flicking the cloth around on other surfaces that were already immaculate.

She placed a fresh towel and washcloth in the bathroom, and closed the door of 326 behind her not more than ten minutes after she entered it. She wondered, greedily, where Mrs. Harris had spent the night, and hoped, unenviously, that it had been enjoyable.

Then she went into 328 which was occupied by a young couple from Baltimore on their honeymoon and found the same sort of mess they left for her every morning. But she didn't mind the work cleaning it up because they were a sweet young couple, obviously very much in love with each other and obviously thoroughly enjoying every moment of their honeymoon. It was a pleasure to make the room neat and comfortable for a nice young couple like that, and Martha didn't mind at all that she anticipated receiving a tip of not more than a dollar when they left after a two-week stay.

She thought no more about Mrs. Harris and the unused condition of 326 until she went off duty at two o'clock that afternoon and mentioned it in a brief report to the housekeeper which the hotel rules required her to do.

Robert Merrill, Chief Security Officer of the Beachhaven Hotel, read Martha Hays' report on the unused condition of Room Number 326 at five o'clock that afternoon. It consisted of a few typewritten lines near the end

of two typewritten pages of somewhat similar reports which Merrill received in his office each afternoon. Most of them were no more important and meant no more to the management of the hotel than Martha's report on 326. Yet, you never could be sure. It was Robert Merrill's job to read this daily report on the doings and activities of guests in the hotel, and carefully evaluate each item. He didn't really care, and the hotel management didn't care, who was sleeping with whom, or what sort of wild parties were being thrown in which suite, so long as the decorum for the hotel and the sensibilities of other guests were not endangered... *and* so long as the credit rating of a guest did not come under suspicion. This was the most important part of Merrill's job. He was hired to see, and it was his duty to see, that fraud was not successfully practiced on the Beachhaven by departing guests.

Thus, anything whatever out of the norm was noted by each employee of the hotel and eventually reached Merrill's desk. Very few hotel guests realize the type of surveillance they are subjected to every hour of the day. If they did realize it, most of them would protest honestly and vigorously against what they would consider an invasion of privacy, yet such protests would avail them nothing. If they managed to remain reasonably discreet during their stay and paid their bill in full on departure, they were rated as "Xlent" by the hotel and were welcomed as favored guests any time they wished to return.

Thus, when Robert Merrill noted that the maid on the third floor reported that Mrs. Herbert Harris from New York had not occupied her room the preceding night, he was only mildly interested. It was something that had to be checked, but nothing to get excited about. There could be dozens of legitimate reasons why Mrs. Harris had decided to spend the night elsewhere, and certainly she was under no obligation to inform the hotel of her intention or reason for doing so. The only important question was whether she could reasonably be expected to pay for the room she had not occupied.

Merrill had Ellen Harris' registration brought to him with her bill to date, and he glanced at the cryptic notations on the card before referring to her bill. Reservation had been made by letter from her husband in New York, ten days previously, European Plan. The daily rate for 326 was \$18.00 single. Husband's New York business address was a brokerage house which appeared legitimate. A notation from the desk clerk when he

checked her in indicated that her appearance and baggage were correct. Her bill was guaranteed by a Carte Blanche card in the name of Mrs. Herbert Harris. She had rented an Avis U-Drive-It car which had been delivered to her.

Nothing to worry about there. Merrill didn't care whether she spent fourteen nights or none in 326 so long as Hilton guaranteed payment. Save the hotel fresh linens if she did continue to sleep out.

He glanced casually at the first day's bill to see there was nothing out of the ordinary. A person-to-person call to her husband in New York soon after she checked in. A bar bill for four drinks from the cocktail lounge later in the evening. Nothing else.

Robert Merrill shrugged and put a small check mark against Martha's notation, and went on to the next item in the daily report which dealt with cumulative evidence that a homosexual was occupying one of their more expensive suites and was strongly suspected of luring youthful males into the rooms for purposes of blackmail in a variation of the badger game. This required Merrill's serious attention and careful plan of action. Mrs. Harris and her non-occupancy of 326 her first night in Miami Beach were forgotten.

5.

Daylight was just beginning to break over the Atlantic Ocean on Saturday morning when a dark blue, 1962 Buick with New York license plates stopped in front of the Beachhaven Hotel. Herbert Harris was alone in the driver's seat. He got out slowly and stretched and yawned before opening the back door to lift out a single bag.

His light gray suit was rumpled and showed traces of cigarette ashes down the front, his face had a dark stubble of beard, and his eyes were slightly red-rimmed. He had not been in bed since the preceding morning, and had been driving fast down the coast all through the night. But he squared his shoulders and dragged in fresh lungfuls of the cool Miami air, and walked purposefully around the back of the car and through the revolving door into the lobby that was empty except for the night clerk dozing behind the desk.

The clerk was elderly and bald. He watched Mr. Harris approach across the lobby with frowning disapproval. There were no planes or trains due to arrive at this ungodly hour, and a hotel like the Beachhaven didn't take many check-ins at dawn.

Harris set his suitcase down and rubbed the back of his hand across his rough chin, aware of the clerk's disapproval. Thus, his voice was more than usually brusque as he said, "You have a Mrs. Herbert Harris registered. What is her number?"

Mrs. Herbert Harris! The name struck an instant chord in the clerk's mind. There had been some memorandum about the lady. He couldn't recall just what it was. Nothing terribly important, he thought, but some sort of alert had been issued to the hotel employees.

He said, "Mrs. Harris?" questioningly, and just to be on the safe side, pressed a button beneath the desk to buzz the night detective on duty. He said thoughtfully, "I'll see," and turned his back to consult an alphabetical list of registrations. He ran his finger down the list slowly, stalling until he heard heavy footsteps coming around the corner of the desk, and then turned to admit, "Yes, we do have a Mrs. Herbert Harris registered." He spoke her name loudly and distinctly enough for the house detective to hear it as he came up.

Ed Johnson was the member of the Security Officer's staff on duty at dawn that Saturday morning. It had been quiet since midnight and he had managed to sleep most of the shift, and the clerk's buzzer wakened him. He was a heavy man, with a genial face and manner, not overly intelligent, but he knew his job and was fairly competent at it. He halted beside Harris, blinking the sleep from his eyes and considering the New Yorker carefully.

Harris paid no attention to him. "What's her room number?" he demanded impatiently.

The clerk shrugged slightly and looked at Johnson for his cue. Johnson said, "Just a moment, sir. Would you mind explaining why you want the lady's number?"

Harris jerked his head around angrily and narrowed his eyes at the stolid detective. "Who the hell are you?" he demanded insolently, "and what business is it of yours if I want my wife's room number?"

"Security Officer," Johnson told him equably. "You say you're Mr. Harris?"

"Yes. Damn it! I'm Mr. Harris. What's some flatfoot got to do with my wife?"

"No reason to get so belligerent about it, Mr. Harris," Johnson told him mildly. "It's my job to protect our guests' privacy. Is Mrs. Harris expecting you?"

"No, she isn't." Harris paused and sought to control his irritation. "Look. I've been driving all night. I'm tired and sleepy, and I need a bath and a shave and a drink. Now can I, for God's sake, have my wife's room number?"

Johnson's ruddy face remained expressionless. He said, "You don't happen to have some identification on you, do you?"

"I've got all the identification in the world," snarled Harris. "But why should I show it to you? What makes you think...?"

"If you are the lady's husband, you shouldn't mind showing it to me. Would you want us to just send any strange man up to your wife's room at daylight if he asked for her number? You can see we have to be careful."

"Well, I suppose... of course. I see the logic in that." Harris took out his billfold and pulled cards from it which he fanned out on the desk in front of the detective. Diner's Club and Carte Blanche credit cards, a Standard Oil credit card, a business card with the name Brinkerhoff & Harris, Brokers,

and a New York address. "Are those credentials sufficient?" Despite his resolve, he couldn't wholly keep a bite of sarcasm out of his voice.

Johnson said, "They look okay. No offense intended, Mr. Harris." He glanced at the clerk, "Is there a key, Richard?"

The clerk turned to numbered pigeonholes behind him while Harris replaced the cards in his wallet. "There's an extra one, Mr. Johnson. Three-twenty-six. Mrs. Harris hasn't been leaving her own key at the desk since registering." There was a confidential undertone to his voice. His mind had been at work during the by-play and he now remembered the contents of the memo on Mrs. Harris.

"Ellen never does leave a key at the hotel desk." Harris' voice was expansive, a trifle over-hearty. He reached for the key which the clerk laid between them, but Johnson's beefy hand closed over it before he could pick it up.

"I'll just go up with you, Mr. Harris. Make sure everything's okay. This your bag?" Johnson stooped genially to pick it up and turned toward the bank of elevators, shaking his head at a single uniformed bellboy who had materialized from the back.

"You don't need to bother." Harris followed him hastily. "I can carry my own bag."

"No bother at all." Johnson entered a waiting elevator and pressed the button for three. "We like to be of service at the Beachhaven."

The elevator stopped at the third floor and Johnson stepped out first with the bag and strode ahead of Harris down the corridor. He stopped in front of 326 and stood aside politely. "Maybe you'd like to knock." He held the room-key in his hand.

Harris stepped up to the door and knocked lightly. When there was no response, he knocked again, more loudly, and called, "Ellen. It's Herbert. Are you awake?"

"Why don't you unlock the door?" suggested Johnson. "No use disturbing other people." There was a note of pity in his voice as he held out the key.

Harris took it with a puzzled frown. "I don't understand. She's always been a light sleeper." He inserted the key in the lock and turned it.

Ed Johnson watched his face very carefully as he opened the door. He had a hunch what Harris was going to see inside the room, though he had

no way of being certain that Mrs. Harris hadn't returned to sleep in her own bed the preceding night.

Harris stood immobile in the doorway and his face went slack and frightened when he saw the unoccupied and unused twin beds. He took a step forward and said, "Ellen," disbelievingly, then turned a harried face to Johnson. "Where is she? Where's my wife? What's going on here?"

He stared at the detective a moment as though he had never seen him before, then whirled and sprinted to the bathroom door and jerked it open.

Johnson picked up his bag and followed him into the room, closing the door firmly behind him. At that moment he didn't like his job one damned little bit. Here was this seemingly nice guy... driving all the way down from New York to spend a surprise weekend with his wife... and where in hell was she?

He turned slowly away from the empty bathroom looking like a man who had been clubbed with a baseball bat. His eyes were vacant and staring, his jaw hung slack. "She's not... she's not here," he muttered feebly. His vacant gaze moved all about the room, disbelieving, unable to comprehend... searching for the woman who wasn't there. His gaze finally reached the open suitcase lying in the luggage rack, still packed exactly as it had been on Tuesday morning when Martha Hays first saw it. He took two wavering steps to stand over the suitcase, then turned to look distraughtly at Johnson who still stood in front of the closed door. "She's got her bag packed," he announced hoarsely. "As though she were ready to leave. But... she hasn't even been here a week. Where is she?" The last words were almost a sob.

Johnson shook his head compassionately. He said, "Sit down, Mr. Harris. Sit down and get hold of yourself. I got something to tell you, and you'll be better off sitting down when you hear it."

"Something's happened to Ellen! What is it, damn you? Don't just *stand* there. Tell me. I have a right to know what's happened to my wife."

"Yes," said Johnson uncomfortably. "I guess you got a right to know, Mr. Harris. It's just that... well, I don't rightly know myself." He paused to mop sweat from his ruddy forehead with his sleeve. "There's just this I do know. Mrs. Harris hasn't been seen in the hotel since shortly after she checked into this room last Monday afternoon. She hasn't slept in her bed a single night. That suitcase isn't packed for departure. It's the way she left it

Monday afternoon after she changed from her travelling outfit into a bright red cocktail dress. That much I do know.”

He stepped forward quickly, real concern on his face as Herbert Harris’ face turned a horrible deathly gray and he swayed on his feet as though about to faint.

Johnson caught hold of his arm and slid his own arm about Harris’ waist. He led him toward the bed, saying soothingly, “You just stretch out here and relax, Mr. Harris. I know how you feel. I know damn well how you must be feeling. I’m sorry as hell I had to tell you like that.” He gently lowered the man onto the nearest bed, stretched him out and got a pillow under his head.

Harris lay stiff and trembling for a moment, his eyes squeezed tightly shut. Then he sat up suddenly and opened his eyes wide and demanded, “You knew it all the time and you didn’t tell me? I wasn’t notified? All this week in New York, I didn’t *know*? What sort of hotel is this? What are you trying to cover up, anyhow?”

“We’re not covering up anything, Mr. Harris. Look, you want I should call the doctor? It’s been a bad shock.”

Harris continued to sit upright, and he drew in a long breath in a deep shuddering sob. “I don’t need a doctor. Goddamnit, I want the police. Hasn’t *anything* been done to find Ellen? You just stand there like a goddamned statue. Call yourself a detective? She’s been missing for five days. What have you *done*?”

“Look, Mr. Harris.” Johnson pulled a chair forward and seated himself in it. He spoke quietly and reasonably, striving to strike through the man’s panic. “There’s no reason to think anything’s *happened* to your wife. Get that through your head. Wait a minute.” He held up a big hand as Harris started to protest angrily. “I know how you feel. I know just how you feel. But stop and look at it for a minute. All we know is that she’s spent the last five days and nights away from this hotel. You admitted she didn’t know you were coming down to surprise her. If you had let her know, why, maybe...”

“Goddamn your soul to hell,” grated Harris viciously, swinging off the bed and surging to his feet with clenched fists. “What you’re saying is, in effect, that all this is *her* doing. *Her* choice. You’re just covering up for your goddamned hotel, for your own inefficiency. If I’d been informed last

Tuesday morning... He moved forward with blazing eyes and drew his right fist back to swing it on the stolid detective seated in the chair.

Johnson swung to his feet and easily warded off the infuriated blow. "Take it easy," he grunted. He pushed the man backward to the edge of the bed where he dropped down and lay whimpering like a child, both hands over his eyes.

Johnson stood beside the bed looking down at him commiseratingly and said, "All right. So you don't want a doctor. How about a drink? You need to relax and start thinking straight. I can call down on the phone and get a bottle..."

Herbert Harris writhed on the bed and moaned, keeping both hands clasped tightly over his eyes. "I could use a drink." He spoke wonderingly. "There's half a bottle of rye in my bag."

Johnson said, "I'll get some ice. You want soda, or some kind of mixer?"

"No. Just water will be fine."

The house detective went to the telephone and relayed a brief order over it. He turned to the chair drawn up close to the bed and reseated himself. "Start thinking straight, Mr. Harris," he urged. "We're not covering up for anything here. There's no real evidence that anything has happened to your wife. Maybe she ran into some friends last Monday evening. Maybe they were throwing a party, or going on a yacht cruise or something like that. She was on vacation. No reason she shouldn't go along."

Harris sat up on the edge of the bed again. He rubbed a tired hand over his eyes. "I could use a drink. You want to open my bag?"

Johnson got up ponderously and put the man's bag on the other bed and opened it. He found a fifth of rye about half full, and was turning toward the bathroom when there was a knock on the door. Turning back, he opened the door and took a pitcher of ice cubes from the bellboy standing there, growled his thanks, and got two clean glasses from the bathroom. He put two ice cubes in each glass, filled them near the top with whisky, and topped them off with tap water. He went back and put one into Harris' lax hand as he sat on the edge of the bed staring down at the floor, sat back in the chair again and said as cheerfully as he could, "Drink up, Mr. Harris. You been thinking over what I said a little while ago?"

"I've been thinking it over," agreed Harris hoarsely. "And every bit of it is pure horse-shit. Ellen doesn't have any friends down here. If she had met

someone unexpectedly and decided to go off on a jaunt, she would have notified me at once. Goddamnit, man, don't you understand that?" He glared at Johnson and then half-emptied his glass and coughed loudly.

Johnson took a hesitant sip from his glass. He marshaled his thoughts and spoke carefully:

"Get this clear in your mind, Mr. Harris. I don't pretend I know all about this. I'm just a hired hand here. All I really know about the whole situation is what I've told you. Mrs. Harris just hasn't been seen back here since Monday evening. Maybe there's a lot more to it that I don't know. My boss, Mr. Merrill, will be in his office at eight o'clock. He's Chief Security Officer here, and there isn't much goes on in the Beachhaven he doesn't know about. A lot of it he doesn't tell me. Now what I suggest is that you finish that drink and then take another one just like it. Take off some of your clothes and lie down and relax an hour or so. Leave a call for seven-thirty and get yourself a shave and a shower, and maybe things will begin to look a hell of a lot better. *I* don't know what further dope Mr. Merrill may have on Mrs. Harris." He shrugged his heavy shoulders ponderously.

"In the meantime," said Harris bitterly, "nothing's being done about finding my wife. God knows where she is... what's happened to her. The police should be notified."

"Now, look, Mr. Harris." Johnson tried to be understanding and sympathetic. "It's just good daylight. There's no one on duty at police headquarters except some punks like me. This isn't any sudden emergency. It's been four-five days already. Now, we got a hell of a detective chief here on Miami Beach. Peter Painter, his name is. He's the one you want to talk to. Mr. Merrill first, and then Chief Painter. Hell, like I say, Mr. Merrill may have all the answers right on his desk already. You just relax for a couple of hours, and when you wake up the sun will be shining and maybe everything will look a lot different."

Herbert Harris emptied his glass and dropped it onto the floor with a dull thud. He rested his head wretchedly on his hands with elbows propped on his knees. "I'm just... knocked out," he muttered as if to himself. "I can't believe it. Not Ellen. Goddamnit!" he exclaimed hoarsely, swinging his head up to glare at Johnson. "You don't know her. You wouldn't talk that way if... you knew her..."

"No," said Johnson. "Maybe I wouldn't, Mr. Harris." He got up and retrieved the New Yorker's empty glass from the floor, put ice cubes into it

from the pitcher and filled it to the brim from the whisky bottle. He carried it back to the distressed man sitting on the edge of the bed and said as cheerfully as he could, "Drink this down. Then let me help get some of your clothes off. I'll check with Mr. Merrill the moment he gets in his office, and the chances are we'll have Mrs. Harris back here before you ever wake up." Harris accepted the glass and slopped some of the drink down his chin as he drank from it. He held it out in front of him with the fingers of both hands laced tightly around it, and stared at it, and tears formed in his eyes and ran unabashedly down his cheeks.

He dropped the glass to the floor and sank back onto the bed, sobbing like a frightened child.

6.

Lucy Hamilton had not come in, and Shayne answered the phone when it rang on Saturday morning. A man's voice asked, "Will Mr. Shayne be in today?" When Shayne told him "until noon," the voice said, "I'll be right over," and a few minutes after eleven o'clock that morning, Herbert Harris strode into the waiting room of Michael Shayne's office on Flagler Street. He had shaved and changed to a clean shirt, and the hotel valet had pressed his gray suit. His eyes were still a little bleary from lack of sleep, but he looked self-contained and determined as he advanced toward Lucy Hamilton and demanded, "Is Mr. Shayne in?"

At her desk behind the low railing, Lucy appraised him as a young man with a lot on his mind. She got up from her chair and said pleasantly, "Yes. Whom shall I say?"

"Mr. Harris. From New York. It's extremely urgent that I see Mr. Shayne at once."

She unlatched the gate and went past him to a closed door marked PRIVATE. She entered and closed it behind her, and reappeared a moment later to hold it open invitingly. "Come right in, Mr. Harris."

Shayne was rising from a swivel chair behind a wide, bare desk when Harris strode in on hard heels. The detective was in his shirtsleeves and his collar and tie were loosened at the throat. He leaned forward over the desk to hold out his hand, and asked, "What can I do for you, Mr. Harris?"

"Find my wife." Harris shook hands negligently, and Shayne found his palm cold and lax. He sank into a chair and stared across the desk at the redhead and said coldly, almost arrogantly, "They tell me you're one of the best men in your field in the entire country." Shayne realized his visitor was under a tremendous strain, and probably suffering from shock. He reseated himself and said mildly, "It's nice to hear I have that sort of reputation. What about your wife?"

"She's disappeared. Vanished right into thin air. Five days ago and no one has *done* anything. They're not doing anything *now*. They seem to take it for granted that women disappear without leaving a trace in Miami."

"Who are 'they', Mr. Harris?"

"A man named Merrill at the Beachhaven Hotel. And that nincompoop of a detective chief... Painter, I think his name is. They don't *care*."

Shayne said, “Start at the beginning about your wife. Is she staying at the Beachhaven?”

“She checked in there last Monday afternoon. She telephoned me in New York about five o’clock to say she had had a pleasant flight down and that everything was fine. That’s the last communication I’ve had from her. According to the people at the hotel, she rented a car and had it brought around, and went out for a drive after changing into a dress from her travelling clothes. They have a record of her signing for four drinks in the lounge about seven o’clock. That’s all. No one has seen her since. Her bed hasn’t been slept in... her bag isn’t even unpacked. They’ve known this ever since Tuesday morning when the maid went in to do her room, and reported it... and they’ve done absolutely nothing about it. Didn’t notify me that my wife was missing... haven’t notified the police. They evidently just sat around on their dead butts, goddamnit, lecherously assuming that Ellen had rushed out as soon as she reached town to shack up with some man.” He pounded Shayne’s desk with a doubled fist, his voice savage and his face contorted with anger.

“And you don’t accept that explanation?” Shayne asked flatly.

“No, I don’t. And if that’s what you think, I’ll find someone else to help me.”

“I don’t think anything yet, Harris.” Shayne made his voice sharp to get through to the man. “I don’t know your wife, of course.”

“That’s just it. None of them do. They simply assume she must be a round-heeled floozie who could hardly wait to reach Miami before jumping into bed with some other man. That’s what they *want* to think. They aren’t even checking other possibilities.”

“I know Bob Merrill at the Beachhaven,” objected Shayne. “He’s a very competent and conscientious man.”

“I’m sure he’s competent for the job he holds,” Harris sneered. “Security Officer. All he’s interested in is the hotel’s security. He practically admitted to me that as soon as he discovered last Tuesday that my wife’s hotel bill was on her Carte Blanche card, and payment was thus guaranteed, he didn’t bother to investigate further. It wasn’t any of his concern what had happened to one of their guests.”

“Well,” said Shayne thoughtfully. “*Was* it, Mr. Harris? Let’s try to put this in its proper perspective. A hotel could get itself into a lot of trouble and lay itself open to libel suits if it jumped to the wrong conclusion in a

case like this. A guest has a right to a certain amount of privacy. There'd be hell to pay if hotels made a habit of reporting back to a husband or wife every time a guest spent the night out of his or her room."

"You're like all the rest of them," said Harris bitterly, shoving himself erect. "If that's what you think about Ellen..."

Shayne said harshly, "Sit down and try to stop acting like a juvenile if you want me to help you find your wife. I'm pointing out why Bob Merrill acted correctly in not reporting this situation to you or the police. Now that it's out in the open, you can be sure Merrill is doing everything in his power to find Mrs. Harris. And while I have no personal liking for Chief Painter on the Beach, he is a good policeman who has resources at his command that I don't have. I'm sure he's doing what he can."

"Oh, sure," said Harris bitterly, reseating himself with reluctance. "He's going through the motions... putting out a flyer on her rented car. Good God! that car may be any place in the United States by this time... five whole days..." He gritted his teeth and folded his arms together. "It's Painter's damnably insufferable attitude that frightens me. Practically patting me on the back and saying..." Here he savagely mimicked a soothing voice: "Now you just stop worrying, Mr. Harris. Leave her alone and she'll come home, dragging her tail behind her. *That's* what they think about Ellen, Shayne. And *that's* why they're not stirring themselves properly."

"And you know differently?" Shayne's voice wasn't sarcastic or exactly disbelieving, but he did put enough skepticism into it to bring livid anger to his visitor's face.

"Yes, damn you! I *do* know differently. We're *married*, Shayne. We've been married just a year. Ellen *loves* me. She didn't want to come on this trip. I had to urge her... actually insist on it... God help me. I had the foolish idea that it would be good for our marriage for us to be separated for a week or so once a year. Not that our marriage isn't complete and perfect, but just on principle... to *keep* it that way. She has never looked at another man since we were married... and I haven't looked at another woman. I know it's the fashion nowadays to play around with adultery, and you probably don't believe me, but it wasn't that way with Ellen or me."

He stopped abruptly and drew in a deep breath, then leaned forward and asked with shaking earnestness: "Have you ever been in love, Shayne? With

a woman whom you *knew* loved you... and whom you knew could not *possibly* be unfaithful?"

Shayne looked away from the man and his eyes were bleak. He said, "Yes, Harris, it happened to me once."

"Then you know what I'm talking about? Will you help me?"

A muscle twitched in the hollow of Shayne's right cheek. He said, "I'll do what I can. Do you have a picture of your wife?"

"Just a snapshot. But it's a very good likeness." He got out his billfold and eagerly removed a small picture of an extraordinarily beautiful young woman which he passed over to the detective. "I happened to have two pictures of Ellen with me. The other is a different pose... both taken a few months ago. Painter kept the other one... though he didn't seem much interested in having it reproduced in a newspaper as I suggested. He kept promising me in that reassuringly snide way of his that I needn't worry about the matter being given any publicity."

"And you don't mind publicity?" Shayne was studying the picture carefully, liking what he saw.

"Mr. Shayne." Harris' voice was low and intense. "I want to find my wife. That's all in the world that matters to me. Of course I don't mind publicity if it will help. I'm not afraid of the truth. Don't you understand? I *trust* Ellen. I know something terrible has happened to her. I... I'm afraid to let myself think what."

"All right," said Shayne briskly. "I think this picture will blow up fine and reproduce well in a newspaper. If we haven't something by this afternoon's deadline, I'll see that it's on the front page of tonight's *News*. Now, I need some facts about yourself and your wife. I'll have my secretary come in." He pressed a button on his desk, leaned back and lit a cigarette. "Could you do with a drink?"

"No, I... thank you, I think not. I had two drinks at the hotel earlier."

Lucy Hamilton came in with her notebook. Shayne said, "Take some notes, Lucy." And to Harris, "I want all the facts I can get." He waited until Lucy was settled with pencil poised above her open book, and then said, "Your full name and New York address?"

"Herbert Harris." He gave the residence address in the East Seventies, and slid a business card out of his wallet. "My business address."

Shayne glanced at it before sliding it across to Lucy. "You're a partner in this brokerage firm?"

“It’s a relatively small firm, but moderately successful. Most of our accounts are out-of-town clients whose business we handle on an annual basis.”

Shayne nodded. “You live in an apartment? Have a maid?”

“Part-time. She comes in twice a week. Her first name is Rose. I don’t know her last name, but she does work part-time for other tenants in the building. She hasn’t been in since my wife left. They gave the place a thorough cleaning on Sunday, and Ellen had arranged for her to come in next Saturday...” He broke off with a frown. “Is our maid important?”

“I don’t know what’s important at this point. Your wife’s maiden name?”

“Ellen Terry. She was a professional model and a very successful one when I met her about a year and a half ago.”

Shayne nodded. It was very easy to believe that the original of the snapshot had been a successful model. “What agency did she work for?”

“It was one of the big ones... located in Rockefeller Center.” Harris knitted his forehead in thought. “Noble,” he announced. “Noble and Elliot. But she stopped working when we were married.”

“That was just a year ago?” Shayne said. “Let’s have a physical description.”

“She’s thirty-one years old. Rather tall, five-eight, I believe, and weighed just under a hundred and forty. She wore a size fourteen dress, I believe, sometimes a twelve. Her hair is blond and she carries herself beautifully. Every movement she makes is grace personified. She... was a woman people looked at when she entered a room.”

Shayne nodded, glancing over at Lucy whose pencil was racing over her pad. He leaned back and tugged at his left earlobe, and said, “Fine. Now give us the names and addresses, if you can, of her closest friends... male and female.”

Harris looked at him sharply. “See here, Shayne. I’ve told you she had no men friends. And anyhow, I fail to see how her friends in New York have any bearing on what has happened here.”

Shayne said flatly, “If I came into your brokerage office, a complete novice about stocks and bonds, I don’t believe you would welcome my advice on how you should do your job. I have to do my job my way. Now, start giving Miss Hamilton a list of your wife’s closest friends. Going back to her modeling days, if you can.”

Harris said, "I think I could use that drink now, if you don't mind."

Shayne nodded and pushed back his chair to get up. Harris turned to Lucy and thoughtfully began giving her a list of names, mostly feminine, some married couples, with addresses or partial addresses as he recalled them.

On the other side of the room, Shayne busied himself getting a cognac bottle from the second drawer of the filing cabinet, fitting two pairs of paper cups into each other and filling each to the brim with liquor and carrying them to the desk, then getting cups of ice water from the cooler which he brought back and set beside the nested cups.

He pushed cognac and ice water toward Herbert Harris as the New Yorker concluded earnestly to Lucy, "That's all the names I can think of at the moment." He glanced at Shayne and explained, "I've told your secretary we didn't go out a great deal socially. Actually, we were both pretty well wrapped up in each other and we didn't need other people." He lifted the cognac and sipped it appreciatively.

Shayne said heartily, "I can understand that... during your first year of marriage. Let's see, now. Have you got the name of her hairdresser, Lucy?"

She shook her head as Harris broke in vehemently, "Now what in the living hell has her hairdresser in New York got to do with Ellen's disappearance in Miami? You may know your business, Mr. Shayne, but I certainly fail to understand..."

"All right, Lucy." Shayne's voice was grim. "Make a notation that Mr. Harris refuses to divulge the name of his wife's hairdresser."

"Wait a minute. I didn't refuse. Hell, I don't know her name," Harris said sulkily. "It's a shop on Park Avenue just around the corner from our place. Blanche, I think. Something like that."

Shayne nodded noncommittally. "Now, let's let Miss Hamilton get down the facts about your wife's arrival, and so forth." He settled back and took a long sip of cognac and narrowed his eyes. "You put her on a plane for Miami Monday afternoon. She phoned you from the hotel after her arrival, and you have heard nothing further from her. Didn't that disturb you, Harris?"

"No. Why should it? I didn't expect her to call or write me unless there was some particular reason."

"And you didn't bother to call her?"

“No.” Harris was on the defensive. “We’re mature people. I wanted her to have these two weeks away from me. I *wanted* her to meet new people and have fun without feeling that she had to report to me or that I was checking up on her.”

Shayne nodded, expressionless. “Now, this trip you suddenly decided to make. Did I understand you to say it was completely unexpected... not planned at all... that your wife hadn’t the faintest idea you might turn up in Miami today?”

“That’s right.” Harris became suddenly aggressive. “I didn’t know, myself, until late Thursday afternoon. A situation came up in the office that required me to be in Charleston, South Carolina on Friday. One of our elderly clients took a sudden notion to discuss his portfolio. I drove to Charleston that night, arriving Friday morning. I caught a few hours sleep in a motel and spent the afternoon with our client, and on a sudden impulse decided to drive on down here and spend Saturday and Sunday morning with my wife. By driving straight through, I planned to be back in New York Monday morning.”

“That’s a lot of cross-country driving,” Shayne suggested. “Most businessmen find a plane much easier these days.”

“I happen to like to drive,” Harris informed him coldly. “Especially by myself and at night. There’s something about driving across the country at night alone. You can really put the miles behind you... and stopping along the highway at the little all-night diners where the truckers congregate...” He paused, shaking his head as though a little ashamed of the enthusiasm with which he spoke. “I happen to like it,” he repeated. “And, when I left New York, I really had no idea at all of coming on. But when I realized it was Friday evening in Charleston and there was no reason at all for me to be back in New York before Monday morning... I suddenly thought how wonderful it would be to surprise Ellen... and I just came on.”

Shayne looked at him thoughtfully and a little wonderingly. You had to be pretty young, he thought, and very much in love with your wife, to decide it would be a good idea to pop up at her hotel at dawn in Miami when she was on vacation and had every reason to suppose you were safely in New York. How would Herbert Harris have liked it, he wondered, if Ellen had suddenly turned up unexpectedly at the New York apartment a week before she was expected home?

And yet? And yet!

Harris was pretty young... and apparently he was very much in love with his wife of one year. Aloud, Shayne said, "I guess that's about all for now, Mr. Harris. I'll get to work on it. Will you be available at the Beachhaven?"

"Yes, I... I suppose I may as well stay there as anywhere. Look here, Shayne." He leaned forward and his jaw jutted aggressively. "I didn't argue with you or withhold any information when you pointed out that you had your methods of working on a case just as I would have my reasons for buying certain stocks or bonds. But I'd still like to know why in hell you wanted this list of Ellen's friends in New York... including her hairdresser. How can any of those people possibly have any connection with what has happened to her here?"

Shayne said, "In the beginning, Harris, you complained that no one in Miami *knew* your wife, and therefore was not capable of conducting an intelligent investigation into her disappearance. I agree with you. I hope to conduct an intelligent investigation, and for that reason I want to know everything about your wife that I can. Does that answer your question?"

"In a way." Harris' manner was guarded. "Are you going to be in touch with those people whose names I gave you?"

"Have you any objections?" Shayne's voice was crisp and he met Harris' eyes levelly.

"Well... no. I just wondered."

"I'll be discreet," Shayne assured him. "But I won't take a case with any strings attached." He stood up and held his hand across the desk. "I won't tell you to go back to the hotel and stop worrying, but I do suggest that you go back feeling that everything is being done that can be done. I'll be in touch with you."

Harris shook his hand with more enthusiasm than he had shown the first time. "I feel better already. Uh... about your fee, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne said, "Give my secretary a check for a thousand as a retainer. With any luck at all, that should cover it. If I see it running into more, I'll let you know."

Harris said awkwardly, "Well... thanks," and followed Lucy out into the outer room.

Shayne sat down and rubbed his chin thoughtfully, and sipped his cognac with narrowed eyes while he considered the young New York stockbroker and his problem. Lucy interrupted his musings by entering a

few minutes later and asking, "Michael, do you want me to transcribe those notes right away?"

He jerked his attention back from a period in his past and said, "There's no hurry, angel. See if you can get me Jim Gifford in New York. If you can, stay on the extension with your notes, and read them off when I say so."

She started to say something, then compressed her lips and marched out. Shayne drank the last of his cognac and crumpled the paper cups in his hand and tossed them into the wastebasket. He was taking a swallow of ice water when his buzzer sounded. He lifted his telephone and Lucy said, "I have Mr. Gifford on the wire."

He said, "Jim?" and a hearty voice answered, "Is that you, Mike? How're things in the sunny land of sin and sex?"

Shayne said, "Sinful and sexful. Can you do a fast job for me?"

Gifford laughed and said, "For you... and for a price... I can do anything."

"Here it is, Jim. A Mrs. Ellen Harris from New York is missing from the Beachhaven Hotel in Miami Beach since last Monday. Husband is Herbert Harris, stockbroker. Lucy will give you the addresses from her notes in a moment. The way it looks, cold, Jim, is that the lady had a deal all set up before she left New York. She's an ex-model. I want you to dig into her background... before and after her marriage to Harris. Everything you can get... particularly on ex or current boyfriends. She's a real looker and should have plenty though hubby doesn't believe it. Put some men in it, Jim, and get everything you can by late this afternoon? Call my apartment or Lucy's home number if we're not here. I'm going to put her on the line to give you everything we've got. Go ahead, angel."

Shayne held the telephone to his ear until he heard Lucy start reading the important points from her shorthand notes to Jim Gifford in New York. Then he hung up.

He was standing in front of one of the wide windows looking down on Flagler Street when Lucy Hamilton come into the room behind him five minutes later. Her voice trembled with indignation. "Michael Shayne! What do you really expect Jim Gifford to find out in New York? If I ever saw a man truly in love and suffering because of it, it was Herbert Harris."

He turned around slowly, shaking his red head. "How much *he's* in love hasn't very much to do with it really. She's the one who has pulled the disappearing act. Get me Tim Rourke, huh?"

She stuck her tongue out at him and went back to her desk. Shayne turned away from the window, tugging at his earlobe and trying not to think about his dead wife, Phyllis.

Harris had really hit him below the belt with that one question he had asked. If it were Phyllis, now, who was missing... ?

His telephone buzzed and he picked it up and said, "Hi, Tim? Busy?"

He listened a moment to his old friend profanely telling him exactly how busy he was at the moment getting out world-shattering news to his millions of newspaper reading fans, glanced at his watch and then cut Rourke off by saying, "I've got a hell of a story cooking, Tim. Be by your office in about fifteen minutes. Then we'll grab lunch. Cut yourself loose for at least a couple of hours."

He hung up and went out to grab his hat and to tell Lucy she could leave the office whenever she was through, but to stick close to the apartment that afternoon in anticipation of a call from Gifford, and that he would check with her from time to time.

7.

In the crowded, noisy City Room of the *News*, Shayne went directly to Timothy Rourke's desk in a far corner and found the reporter pensively staring down at a blank sheet of paper in his typewriter while he assiduously practiced blowing smoke rings into the already smoke laden atmosphere.

Rourke was a lean, greyhound sort of man, with features so thin they were almost emaciated, and deep-set cynical eyes that were as bright as a ferret's. They became even brighter when Shayne laid the snapshot of Ellen Harris in front of him and asked, "Got room on your front page for a blowup of her?"

"We got practically nothing else for the front page today. What's she done? Cut up her sugar-daddy into little pieces and made him into a stew... I hope." Rourke studied the picture avidly.

Shayne said, "Right now... she's just a missing person. Take that back to your photo department, huh, and get some prints made? I'd like half a dozen... six by nine or like that. You can have it retouched and ready to hit the front page before your deadline *if* I give you the go-ahead. We'll grab some lunch and stop back for the prints."

Rourke had known Michael Shayne too long to ask any questions at this point. He shoved back his chair and got up and went around the corner to the newspaper's darkroom, and returned in a few minutes with a nod, "Prints will be ready by the time we've eaten." They went out together to a steak house half a block away and settled themselves with drinks and a luncheon order to come. Rourke cupped his thin chin in his hands and regarded his old friend shrewdly. "What's the story... and what's the 'if' about running the picture?"

Shayne told him, "The 'if' is whether we have any reason not to run the story by the time your first edition deadline hits. It's got to be confidential as hell until I give you the word, Tim."

"So?" Rourke sipped his bourbon and water and waited.

Shayne told it to him briefly the way Herbert Harris had given it to him. "Seemingly a hell of a nice guy. It's going to smash his whole world into little pieces if it does turn out his wife is just having herself a ball and turns up all in one piece."

“Which way would he rather have it,” grunted Rourke with a sour grin, “that she turn up in little pieces instead of having his dream world all smashed up?”

“I don’t know,” Shayne admitted angrily. “He’s so damned sure of her, Tim. I think it might be easier for him to live with it in the long run if she turns out dead.”

“Petey Painter and the Beachhaven Hotel aren’t going to like it if we spread that story over the front page,” Rourke warned him happily. “Either way the cat jumps, it’s going to be lousy publicity.”

“We’re not going to ask them whether they like it or not. Suppose you come along with me to the Beachhaven when I take that picture over and see what I find out. Merrill will let you sit in on it if I give him my word you’ll print only what I think needs to be printed.”

“Who’s Merrill?”

“Chief of Security. House dick, to you.” Shayne grinned, emptying his glass and picking up knife and fork as his plate was placed in front of him. “He’s in a real tough spot. Right now, he’s going to be damned if he does and damned if he doesn’t.” He sighed and then attacked his steak zestfully.

The prints were still damp when they got back to the newspaper office after a fast lunch, but the snapshot had blown up much better than Shayne had hoped it would. He took two of the damp prints with him and arranged to have a couple more delivered to his place after they were dry, then he and Rourke drove over to the Beachhaven in their own cars so they could separate later if they wished.

The reporter’s car was already at the curb when Shayne got there, and Rourke was at the desk talking to the clerk when he entered the lobby.

Lawford looked fussed and irritated as Shayne walked up, and Rourke turned to him with a wink and said, “This guy claims Mrs. Harris isn’t in, but he refuses to call her room and check.”

Shayne said, “I’ll ask the questions, Tim,” and to the clerk, “Merrill in his office?”

“Yes, sir. It’s right around...”

Shayne said, “I know where it is.” He took Rourke’s arm firmly and led him away from the desk. “These birds aren’t going to talk to reporters, damn it. Every person in the hotel has been clammed up.” They went around a corner to a suite of offices at the rear of the desk, and Shayne stopped at a closed, wooden door marked PRIVATE.

He knocked and turned the knob and walked in without waiting for an invitation. It was a small, neat office, lined with filing cases against the rear wall, with a bare desk in the center having only one telephone and a dictating machine. Robert Merrill was dictating into a microphone, leaning back at ease behind the desk and referring to an open cardboard folder in his lap. He pressed a thumb button on the microphone which shut off the machine when he saw Shayne in the doorway, and closed the folder and placed it on the desk in front of him.

With a hearty cordiality that did not appear to be feigned, he said, "Mike Shayne in the flesh. You don't get around these parts often."

He was a tall, middle-aged man, with iron-gray hair and coldly wary eyes. He was, as Shayne had assured Harris, competent and conscientious in his job—which was seeing to the security of the Beachhaven Hotel. It was a job that required a lot of intelligence and tact, the ability to unerringly detect a phony the moment he showed up in the hotel and to ruthlessly hound him away to another hostelry, and a sort of sixth sense acquired over the years which warned him in advance when trouble was brewing in any one of the more than thousand rooms overhead.

Shayne said, "The kind of people I deal with these days haven't got the sort of money to pay your rates, Bob." He held the door open for Rourke to come in, then closed it and asked, "Do you know Tim Rourke? Robert Merrill, Tim."

Merrill looked dispassionately at the slouching figure of the reporter in his baggy suit, and said, "The name is familiar. Byline on the *News*, isn't it? With a particular pipeline to Miami's most famous private detective. What can I do for you, gentlemen?" he made no motion to rise or offer his hand.

Shayne sat down in a chair at the end of the desk, and Rourke moved quietly and self-effacingly aside to sit in one against the wall. Shayne took one of the pictures of Ellen Harris from his pocket and placed it in front of Merrill. "Recognize her?"

Merrill stared at it and pursed his thin lips. "Is this blown up from a small snapshot I saw this morning?"

"That's right," Shayne told him equably. "The lady you seem to have misplaced last Monday."

Merrill permitted himself a tired smile. "I'd like to have this, Mike. Harris refused to leave the snapshot with me so I could show it around to the members of the staff who actually saw Mrs. Harris when she checked

in. He got up on his high-horse and stalked out of here, threatening to sue the hotel for criminal negligence and so forth, and I understood he was going direct to the police.”

Shayne said, “He did,” and grinned happily. “Petey Painter succeeded in rubbing him the wrong way just as you did, so he ended up in my office. My client,” he ended sternly, “feels that both you and Chief Painter are more concerned with covering up his wife’s disappearance than you are in finding her.”

“You know that isn’t so, Mike.” Some of the tension and strain inside Robert Merrill that had been building up since his interview with Herbert Harris early that morning showed through. “He’s her husband, damn it. And he’s nuts about her as far as I could tell. There were certain facts I didn’t wish to divulge...” He broke off, grinning ruefully at Shayne and suddenly becoming very warm and human. “Hell’s bells, Mike. I sound like a speaker at a Chamber of Commerce meeting, don’t I? Damn it all. That guy is due for a rude awakening. I’ve got a lot more dope now than I had when I talked to him this morning.” He dropped his gaze to the photograph in front of him, and said softly, “She’s pretty terrific, huh? If I were married to her, goddamnit...” He paused and wet his lips with the tip of his tongue. “Why’d you bring a reporter, Mike? I’d be glad to go over the evidence with you personally, but...”

Shayne said forcibly, “I brought a friend, first... a reporter, second. I promised Harris that I’d have this picture in the newspaper with a story about her disappearance this afternoon unless I was convinced it could not possibly be helpful. I don’t give one goddamn what you or Peter Painter or the Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce think about it, I’ve been hired by Harris to find his wife. Tim Rourke is here with me to decide whether we print her picture and story... and just what sort of story we print, if any. I’m the one who’s going to decide what’s best. Rourke will abide by my decision. You’re lucky to have it handled this way,” he insisted. “If another paper gets onto it...”

Robert Merrill smiled mirthlessly. “The whole thing is dynamite, Mike.” He hesitated, frowning down at the picture of Ellen Harris on his desk. “I think you’d better hear what we’ve got. Without this picture, we haven’t even got a definite identification.”

He leaned over his desk and spoke into a concealed intercom built into the surface of it: “Have Lawford relieved at the desk and come in. And I’ll

want that bellboy, Bill Thompson, after Lawford.” He leaned back in his chair and sighed deeply. “At a time like this I’m damned glad I’ve stayed a bachelor all my life.”

Michael Shayne didn’t reply to this. He knew that Timothy Rourke was watching him from the side, and he wondered if Tim was thinking about Phyllis. Merrill, of course, didn’t know about Phyllis. There was a knock on the door and Shayne was glad of a reason to stop thinking the way he was.

Merrill barked, “Come in,” and the door opened and Justus Lawford walked in. He glanced swiftly from Rourke to Shayne and then to Merrill, and if he recognized them as having stopped at the desk recently, he gave no sign of it.

He stopped in front of Merrill and asked, “What is it, Mr. Merrill?”

Merrill turned the picture around for him to look at. “Do you recognize her?”

Lawford said, “It’s the woman you were asking me about this morning, isn’t it? Mrs. Harris who registered last Monday?”

“Can you identify her positively?” demanded Merrill. Lawford hesitated and drew in a deep breath. “I wouldn’t want to take an oath on it. But... yes, Mr. Merrill. I remember her quite distinctly. So far as I can judge, that is Mrs. Harris.”

“All right,” grumbled Merrill. “Tell Mr. Shayne what you told me this morning. Why you remembered her particularly out of all the guests who registered that day.”

“It’s hard to put your finger on the exact reason,” Lawford began, fixing his gaze on the wall above Merrill’s head. “I’ve worked in lots of hotels... signed in hundreds of thousands of guests, I suppose. Mostly, it’s a mechanical process. But Mrs. Harris...!” He shook his head slowly. “You noticed her and you remembered her. I remember being surprised that she was checking in alone... for two weeks. And when I asked her... just to be sure... she vouchsafed the information that her husband had the modern idea that married couples should spend their vacations separately, and she asked me if I... approved.”

He stopped and gulped nervously and told Merrill, “I changed the subject at once, of course, sir. But she did mention her fear of being bored and lonely, and I assured her that we had a hostess and many social activities, and I recall that she didn’t seem interested. And... that’s about all, I think.”

“You did notice her go out later?” prompted Merrill.

“Yes. She had asked us to rent a car for her, and I advised the doorman to call her room when it was delivered. I saw her go by from the elevator to the door about half an hour later, and assumed she was going for her car. She had changed into a very noticeable red dress... cut quite low in front.”

“She didn’t leave her key as she went out?” prompted Merrill.

“No, sir. And I simply don’t recall seeing her again.” He dropped his gaze from the wall above Merrill’s head to the photograph on the desk, and shook his head slowly from side to side.

“All right, Lawford,” said Merrill briskly. “If the boy is waiting outside, send him in.”

As the clerk turned to go out, Merrill told Shayne, “Bill Thompson is the boy who took her bags up that first afternoon. I’m not absolutely sure...” He hesitated as the tall, rangy, good-looking young bellboy came in as Lawford went out. “I’ll let him tell it his own way,” he went on. “Nothing to be worried about, Thompson. Step up here and take a look at this picture.”

Bill Thompson threw a quick, frightened look at Rourke and at Shayne, then moved forward on stiff legs to the desk.

“Ever see this woman?” Merrill shoved the picture at him.

Bill Thompson stared down at it for at least thirty seconds. He put the palms of both hands flat on the desk to support his youthful weight, and his face began working queerly. There were actually tears in his eyes as he blubbered, “Honest to God, Mr. Merrill, I didn’t... do anything. Not after that first time at midnight. I swear I never did go back to her and I never did even see her after that first time.”

“Hold it, son. First tell me who she is.”

“It’s Mrs. Harris. In three twenty-six. You asked me about checking her in this morning, sir, and I told you how kind of funny she was... giving me a five dollar tip for nothing really, and how she was sore because there was twin beds in her room instead of a double... and how *she* liked to sleep in a double bed.”

He paused, swallowing hard in embarrassment, and Merrill said softly, “Yeh. You told me that, Bill. But you didn’t tell me anything about midnight. What about that?”

“Well, I didn’t think it was important, and I didn’t want to... but maybe it is important now she’s missing and all,” he stumbled on. “I was on my

way out the door when she came up close behind me and asked when I got off duty, and I told her at midnight that night. And then she kind of whispered in my ear that she was going to be lonesome and for me to stop up for a nightcap with her at midnight.”

“All right, Bill.” Merrill’s voice was cutting and hard. “What happened at midnight?”

“Nothing. I did go up and knock on her door. I know it’s against the rules and I’ll get fired for it, but I can’t help it. And I’d do it again, I guess, anyhow if it was someone like Mrs. Harris. But her room was dark and she didn’t answer, and... and that’s all there is to it.”

“You didn’t see her after that?”

“I swear I didn’t see her after that. I didn’t hear another thing about her until this morning when you asked me. Later, I heard around the hotel that she hadn’t been back in her room since that Monday evening.”

Merrill said, “All right, Thompson. Get back on the floor.”

When the lad had gone, he looked at Shayne and raised his shoulders. “Beginning to get the picture?”

“Too well,” growled Shayne. “Harris told me there was one other angle here. That she signed a bar bill about seven o’clock.”

“That’s the last thing we’ve got on her, Mike. It’s a chit for two daiquiris and two bourbon highballs.” He looked at his watch and got to his feet and picked up the picture. “The bartender who was on duty Monday evening has just come on in the lounge. I haven’t talked to him about her yet. Come along, you and your friend, and the house will buy you a drink and prove to you that the Beachhaven isn’t keeping anything up its sleeve.” He circled around his desk and led the way out of the room.

8.

The cocktail lounge was dimly lighted and cool and practically deserted. Tiny was polishing glasses with his back to the bar. He turned about as the three men climbed onto stools, flicked a glance at Merrill and nodded briefly, then his big face spread into a wide grin when he recognized the redhead. "Mike Shayne, by all that's holy! How are you, my lad?" He thrust out a hand as big as a ham and crushed Shayne's in a warm grip, then turned and searched along the top shelf for a very special bottle of Cordon Bleu which he uncorked and set in front of Shayne with a flourish. When he set a four-ounce wine glass beside it, Merrill said dryly, "Go easy on that stuff, Tiny. I promised Shayne a drink on the house."

"If it wasn't on the house, it'd be on me," Tiny assured him, filling the glass to the brim. He transferred his attention to Rourke and asked, "What'll it be for you?" then paused, staring at him. "Aren't you Tim Rourke, now? So it'll be bourbon and water. You can see I read all those books about you, Mike. But what's with this lousy T-V show on NBC Friday nights?" He scowled as he poured whisky for Rourke. "Where'd they dig up that bird that plays you, Mike? Why in hell aren't you out there playing the part your ownself? Drink, Mr. Merrill?" he added in an aside.

"A small beer, Tiny." Merrill had Ellen's photograph in his hands and he tapped it on the bar, but Tiny was giving his full attention to Shayne. "Take that show last night now. I turn it on every Friday night here just for laughs. My God, Mike! The way that actor got pushed around by everybody last night. How can you stand to watch it?"

Shayne said, "I don't." He sipped the fine cognac appreciatively. "I haven't tuned it in since the first two shows. Richard Denning is supposed to be a very fine actor."

"He the guy that plays you?" Tiny snorted his disgust. "Maybe he's a good actor, but the things they have him do..." He shook his head sadly. "And how do you like that young wise-cracker they got playing you, Mr. Rourke?"

Rourke said, "I'm like Mike. I just don't watch T-V."

"What's the matter with that friend of yours that writes the show?" Tiny demanded. "That Brett Halliday. Has he gone nuts or something? His books are swell, but God preserve me from those stories every Friday night."

“He doesn’t write those,” Shayne explained wryly. “The wise boys in Hollywood won’t let him. They think they’ve got writers out there who know better how to do it.”

“I’ll tell you one thing frankly, Mike. It’s a stinker and it’s not going to stay on the air very long. Like I say, I turn it on here because it’s supposed to be you and from Miami and all, and I hear what people say about it. We’re proud of you in Miami, damn it, and it makes people sore to watch it.”

“Ah, Tiny,” said Merrill with some asperity. “If you’ll wind up this session of the Mike Shayne fan club and take a look at a picture I have here, I’ll appreciate it. I have to get back to my office.”

“Sure, Mr. Merrill. Sorry I run off at the mouth so much.” Tiny wiped his hands on his white apron and took the picture. He turned slightly to get a better light on it, and nodded slowly.

“I’ve seen her. Sure. She was in here a few days ago. Wait a minute, now. It’s coming back to me. Last Monday, it was. I was off Saturday and Sunday, and came on late Monday with a hangover. Things were slack when she came in... about seven o’clock. I remember her, all right. She came in through that door from the parking lot and stood there for a minute looking around.”

“As though she expected to see someone she knew?” asked Shayne.

“I don’t think so. No. It wasn’t like that. More like she was casing the joint before deciding whether to have a drink or not. She was some hunk of woman. You couldn’t help but notice her.”

“Sexy?”

“Yeh, sexy. But don’t get me wrong. In one hell of a nice way. No tramp. You could see she was a lady right off. That’s why I remember her so well. She was... well it was kind of funny how she acted at the bar. Out of character, you might say. Different from what I expected.”

“How did she act, Tiny?”

“Well, she came up and hesitated and first asked if it was all right for her to sit alone at the bar, so I knew right off she was new in town. I told her sure. Then she asks what I think she ought to drink. Well, that’s a funny one, and I say what does she like. And she says she doesn’t drink very much at home, but tonight she feels like it, and isn’t a daiquiri that drink you make with rum? So I mix up a daiquiri for her.”

Tiny paused, shaking his head slowly. “When I turn around to pour it, she’s got a cigarette in her mouth and there’s this guy who has come up behind her and is offering her a light. So she takes it and thanks him, and, hell, *that’s* all right. Then he sits down beside her and orders a bourbon, and I kind of watch out of the corner of my eye waiting for her to do a chill job on him. But she doesn’t. She picks right up with him. And that *is* funny. Because I could of sworn she was a real lady.”

“Perhaps she knew him,” Merrill suggested.

“No. Not if it was her first trip like she told me. I’ve seen him around. Gene his first name is... I don’t know his last. He’s okay. Smooth and quiet. But I’ve heard it around that he’s a shill for some of the joints on the Beach. Hangs around bars like this looking for pickups.”

Merrill said sternly, “You know the policy of the Beachhaven, Tiny. We don’t allow...”

“Now look, Mr. Merrill. I know my job behind the bar. No rough stuff goes while I’m on duty. But if one customer wants to buy another customer a drink, and they’re quiet and nice about it, I wouldn’t hold my job very long if I started interfering.”

Merrill sighed. “You know your job, Tiny. I realize it’s difficult. So they got into conversation? You hear any of it?”

“You know how it is,” Tiny said blandly. “I had other customers to wait on. And they didn’t talk loud. Just quiet and pleasant. But I did catch a couple of little things. One was that her husband’s name was Herbert and he was in New York... and that he was the kind of guy who thinks husbands and wives should get away from each other now and then.

“That got me, sort of, when I heard her say that. Up to then I didn’t think much about it. Just that it was all right for her to have a friendly drink with him, and that’d be all. But for her to say that about her husband to a stranger... well, that sounded like a come-on. Then I heard her say something about she couldn’t go back for two weeks, and then they ordered another drink.

“There was something else.” Tiny screwed up his big face in deep thought. “Yeh. She insisted on signing for both drinks. He asked for the check, but she grabbed it and held out her hand for my pencil. And she told him she’d feel like a B-girl if she let him buy, and then asked me if I didn’t think she should. Then something was said about gambling and they went out back through that door into the parking lot.”

“You didn’t hear any place mentioned... where they were headed?” Shayne asked.

“No. I’m sure I didn’t. I watched them go out together and thought, what the hell? You just never can tell about a dame.” He paused to frown thoughtfully again, “Seems to me I’ve heard something about this Gene hanging out some at the Gray Gull Casino. You want I should ask around later on when some of the other fellows start dropping in?”

“You mean some of the other shills for gambling houses who come here to prey on our guests?” demanded Merrill.

“Well, now, that’s putting it pretty strong, Mr. Merrill. Behind the bar like this, you do hear things.”

“Can you describe Gene for us?” Shayne interposed quickly.

“He’s about thirty. Handsome, I guess you’d say. Lean face with a heavy tan. Brown hair. He wears good clothes and smiles easy, and the women like him.”

Shayne said, “I’ve known Tiny a long time, Bob. You’re lucky to have him on the job here. When did you see this woman next?” he asked Tiny.

“I didn’t. Only that one time. I sort of watched out for her, too. Knowing she was registered here, and wondering whether she’d take up with Gene or not. But she never showed again... not while I was on duty. What’s with her, Mike?” he asked earnestly. “Why are you interested?”

Shayne asked, “Want to tell him, Bob?”

“Everyone else around the hotel knows it... I don’t see why he shouldn’t. So far as we can find out, Tiny, you’re the last one who has seen Mrs. Herbert Harris.”

“Is that so? When did she check out?”

“She didn’t,” said Merrill bitterly. “That’s just the trouble. It looks as though she never went back to her room after you saw her walk out that door.”

“Is that a fact?” Tiny shook his head in amazement. “That Gene hasn’t been back either since then.”

“Ask around, Tiny,” Shayne urged, draining the last drop of cognac from his glass and smacking his lips with pleasure. “The police may be around, and her husband may even be in to ask you about her. Tell the police the truth... just as you told us, but take it a little easy on Harris, huh? He’s taking it pretty hard.”

“Yeh. I would be too, married to that doll. You want I should talk to the cops, Mr. Merrill?”

“If they come asking. We can’t afford to cover up anything at this point.” Merrill slid off the stool, leaving half his small beer undrunk. “Coming back to the office, Mike?”

“Just for a minute. We should settle what sort of story Rourke’s going to run with her picture this afternoon.”

Merrill didn’t reply to this until the three of them were in his office with the door closed. Then he asked, “Do you have to, Mike?”

“I took a job... accepted a retainer from Harris to find his wife. Yeh, we have to, Bob.”

“You can keep the name of the hotel out of it, can’t you?”

“You know we can’t,” Shayne told him bluntly. “But we’ll keep the personal bits about the desk clerk, the bellboy, and her pickup in the bar out of it. Right, Tim?”

“I can write in some curves around them,” he agreed. “Do you have the license number and description of the car she rented?” Shayne asked.

“It’s here... since we were putting it on her hotel bill.” Merrill went to a file behind his desk and took out a very slim cardboard folder. He opened it and extracted a typewritten notation which he put on the desk.

“Put that in, Tim.” Shayne lit a cigarette and sucked on it, tugging at his left earlobe while Rourke copied the information. “Right now, finding that car seems our best lead. Of course, the cops are looking for it already, but maybe you can prove the power of the press, Tim, by having one of your readers come up with it under the cops’ noses. Is Harris in the hotel, Bob?”

“Right now? I don’t know. We gave him another room... right across the hall from his wife’s... when it kind of gave him the jimmys to stay in her room. At no charge, of course,” he added hastily. “You want me to check?”

“I wish you would. If he’s in, I think you should talk to him, Tim. Sort of slant your story the way you feel it after sizing the guy up yourself.”

Merrill had lifted the phone on his desk, and he spoke into it. He listened a moment and then said, “Mr. Harris? Mr. Shayne would like a word with you.” He passed the instrument to the detective.

Shayne said, “Harris? I haven’t got anything definite yet, but I do have a couple of leads. In my office earlier, I mentioned getting a story in the *News* as a possible help. I have their top reporter downstairs with me right now

and I'd like to have you talk to him. Timothy Rourke. He's not only a fine reporter, but he also happens to be a hell of a decent guy and one of my closest friends. Don't be afraid to tell him anything... and trust him to write the kind of story you'd like to see printed."

"Of course, Shayne. I'll be happy to see him. Have you... do you... my God, Shayne! what have you found out?"

"Nothing definite." Michael Shayne grimaced as he made his voice sound cheerful and optimistic, neither of which he felt at the moment. "Just hold on tight and give us a few hours. In the meantime, Mr. Rourke will be right up."

He shook his head as he put the phone down and said, "Poor devil. What can you say in a case like this?"

"You can hang up the phone," said Rourke cynically. "I have to go up and face him... knowing what I do."

"You're a reporter," Shayne reminded him. "You make your living out of the tragedies in the lives of other people. Thanks for everything, Bob." He swung toward the door.

"Where are you off to?" demanded Rourke.

Shayne paused with his hand on the knob. "Nothing for your story, Tim. Willy Arentz is manager of the Gray Gull, and he owes me a couple of favors. He just might be in his office this time of the afternoon. Then I think I'd better drop in on Petey Painter and see if I can stir him up a little by letting him know he can't sit on this indefinitely. In the meantime, Bob. I don't want it now, but maybe later. Get me up a complete dossier on your desk clerk... Lawford, was it... and your athletic young Bill Thompson."

"Good God, Mike! You don't suspect either of them?"

Shayne said, "I don't suspect anyone. On the other hand, all we have at this point is their unsupported word about what happened last Monday. The more I look at Ellen Harris' picture and hear about the way she was tossing her sex around last Monday, the more I think I'd like to check both of them." He went out and closed the door quietly behind him.

9.

The Gray Gull was several miles northward on the beach, well beyond the concentration of luxury hotels. It did not open for business until the dinner hour, but there were six or eight cars in the parking lot when Shayne turned in, and the front doors stood open.

He went through them into a wide, empty hallway that separated the bar from the big dining room on the right where he could hear voices and the clatter of silverware. No one showed up to stop him as he climbed the wide stairway to the gaming room on the second floor and stopped in front of an unmarked door.

He heard voices inside the room, and turned the knob and the door swung open. The air conditioner was going, and two men in their shirtsleeves were bent over a desk littered with papers. The man seated behind the desk was Willy Arentz, slender and dapper, with a small, blond mustache and very cold, blue eyes. He had a reputation around town for being a square shooter—insofar as a man in his business can be and remain successful, and Shayne's previous dealings with him had given the detective no reason to think otherwise. Leaning over his shoulder and making penciled notations on a sheet of paper covered with figures was a young man wearing glasses and a green eyeshade.

Arentz looked up with an expression of annoyance when he heard the door open, which changed to one of pleasant though restrained welcome when he recognized the redhead. He said, "Mike Shayne," with practically no inflection. "Just a minute, huh, while I check this?"

Shayne said, "Sure," and wandered past the desk to stand in front of a window looking down on the ocean and light a cigarette.

There was the low murmur of voices behind him, and finally the creak of Arentz's chair, and his voice saying, "All right, Henry. We'll do it that way if you're sure it's okay." Shayne turned from the window to see the young man gather up some papers and go through a side door which he closed behind him. Arentz swung around and said affably, "Take the load off your feet, Mike." He gestured toward a chair at the end of the desk. "Trade that cigarette in for a cigar? Stand a drink?"

"Neither, thanks." Shayne settled his rangy body in the chair and crossed his long legs. "I'm looking for some information, Willy."

“If I’ve got it, it’s yours.”

“First off... have you ever seen this woman in your place?” Shayne took Ellen Harris’ picture from his pocket and put it in front of the gambler. Arentz studied it appreciatively, pursing his lips and touching the tip of his left forefinger to his mustache. “Can’t say that I have, right off. But she’ll be welcome any time she wants to come. A real looker.”

“One you’d be likely to remember if she had been in?” Shayne prompted him.

“You know how it is... there’s hundreds in and out every night. Not in her class, I’ll agree, but it’s hard to say. Actually, Mike, I have a feeling she does ring a bell. But that’s as far as I can go. Can you place her any better?”

“Maybe. Do you have a shill working here named Gene?”

“We don’t have any shills working here, Mike. I like to feel people come to my place because they want to gamble and know they’ll get a fair run for their money... not lambs being led to the slaughter like some other places I could name. On the other hand,” he went on, and a faint twinkle warmed his eyes, “we do have a sort of percentage arrangement with a few people who sometimes steer a customer here instead of some other joint where they’ll really get rooked. Would that be Gene Blake you’re asking about?”

“I don’t know his last name. About thirty, with brown hair and a lean, well-tanned face. Dresses quietly and well. Has a way with women.” Shayne frowned as he repeated Tiny’s description of the man last seen with Ellen Harris.

“That fits Blake to a T.” Arentz leaned back and made a tent of his fingers, his eyes hooded and speculative. “Has Gene stepped out of line?”

“I don’t know. What sort of character reference does he get from you?”

“I couldn’t say personally. Everything I’ve heard about him is okay... for a guy that makes his living that way. Let’s just say I don’t know anything bad about him, but you already know that, Mike. He wouldn’t be coming here if I did.”

Shayne tapped the picture in front of Arentz and told him, “Gene walked out of the Beachhaven bar with this woman last Monday evening after picking her up there, and the bartender heard some mention of gambling as they went out. She didn’t return to the hotel that night... hasn’t been seen since. Did he bring her here, Willy?”

The gambler lifted the picture again and studied it more carefully. He frowned, half-closing his eyes.

“Monday night? It wasn’t very fast... Mondays never are. I was out on the floor from about ten o’clock on. Gene Blake? H-m-m.” He touched his mustache reflectively. “Would she have been a plunger, Mike?”

“I don’t know how much cash she was carrying. Her husband is a New York stockbroker... fairly up in the chips I’d guess, though probably not really loaded.”

“Reason I ask... if she dropped a wad, Gene would have been around to collect his cut. I just can’t remember Mike. I’ve got a feeling Gene was in about then... a few nights ago, anyhow... I don’t remember seeing him around since. Later in the evening, I can show that picture around and maybe get a real make for you. If she was in, one of the boys will surely place her.”

“In the meantime, can you check and see if Gene did collect a percentage for someone Monday night?”

“Sure, I can do that.” He pressed a button on his desk. “It’s all kind of guesswork, you know. Anything under five hundred doesn’t count...”

He broke off as the door opened and the spectacled young man asked deferentially, “You want me, Chief?”

“Take a look and see if we paid out anything to Gene Blake this week.”

Henry nodded and disappeared into the inner office. Arentz studied Shayne shrewdly and asked, “You think this dame has been shackled up with Gene since Monday night?”

Shayne spread out his hands. “For her husband’s sake, I hope not. On the other hand... hell!” he ended explosively, “I don’t know what I think about it, or what I want to think.”

Henry reappeared in the doorway and said, “There is no record of any payment to Gene Blake for the past two weeks.”

Arentz nodded and dismissed him. “There you are,” he told Shayne. “That doesn’t mean he didn’t steer her here Monday night. It just means she didn’t drop as much as five hundred... or that Gene has been so busy since then that he hasn’t been around to collect.”

“You know where I could find him?”

“We wouldn’t have any record of that, Mike. Like I said, he isn’t on the payroll or like that. I can ask around tonight and probably get a line for you.”

Shayne said, "Thanks, Willy," and got up. He hesitated, and then said, "This is the only copy I've got at the moment," and pocketed Ellen's picture. "Let it ride, if you don't hear from me, Willy." He went to the door and opened it, then turned back, "The cops are liable to be around asking the same questions. Right now Painter is trying to pretend nothing has happened, but there's going to be a front-page story in tonight's *News* that will make him get off his ass and start asking questions."

"The Gray Gull won't be mentioned by name in that newspaper story?"

Shayne shook his red head. "Not in this one, Willy. The faster we clear it up the better chance we can keep you out of it."

Arentz said reproachfully, "You know if I had anything...?"

Shayne said, "Sure," and went out of the gambler's office.

Arentz sat very quietly and stared after him, then lifted a telephone and began dialling a number.

In the wide hallway downstairs a colored man was indolently moving a vacuum cleaner over the rug. Shayne headed for the open front door in long strides, then slowed suddenly and stopped beside a public telephone booth. There were Miami and Miami Beach telephone directories on a shelf beside the booth. He tried the Beach directory first, and found one Eugene Blake listed with an address on 12th Street. He left the book open at that page, and checked the Miami directory. There were a number of Blakes, but no Genes or Eugenes.

He went into the booth and closed the door tightly to shut out the whir of the vacuum cleaner, and dialled the number listed in the Beach book. He listened to the telephone ring four times, and then there was a click and a brisk feminine voice repeated the number he had dialled.

Shayne asked, "Is Mr. Blake in?"

"Not at the moment," she replied. "May I take a message for him?"

Shayne said awkwardly, "Well, I... this is an old friend of Gene's from out of town. I've been out of touch for a long time. Is this... *Mrs. Blake*?"

The faint suggestion of a chuckle came over the wire. "This is the Professional Answering Service. If you wish to leave a message for Mr. Blake, I will be glad to take it."

Shayne said, "Don't bother," and hung up. He sat there for a moment looking at the wall, and then went back to the telephone booth and verified Eugene Blake's street address. He went out and got into his car and headed south toward 12th Street.

Blake's street address brought him to a square, two-storied stucco apartment building in the cheaper section of the Beach. Shayne parked outside and went in to a foyer with sixteen mailboxes on each side of it. He found "Blake, E." on number twelve, and pushed open a door and went down the left-hand corridor where the apartments were numbered 9, 10, etc. He stopped in front of 12, and knocked.

He expected no answer, and received none. He took a well-filled key-ring from his pocket while he studied the lock, and the first key he tried went into the lock and turned it part way, but stopped there. He withdrew the key and studied it, selected another one which unlocked Blake's apartment smoothly.

Shayne stepped inside and drew the door shut behind him. He stood in a small entryway, with an open door on his left leading into a kitchen, and an archway in front of him. A faintly damp, unventilated smell came from the interior of the apartment.

Shayne went through the archway into a small and littered living room. The windows were tightly closed, and the smell of stale cigarette smoke lingered in the air. There was a shabby sofa along one wall, and beyond it a matching overstuffed chair with a newspaper lying on the floor beside it. On a coffee table, in front of the sofa, there were two glasses and a half bottle of cheap bourbon. One was an empty highball glass, and the other a cocktail glass with a tiny portion of faintly milky residue in the bottom. Shayne leaned over to sniff it, but he wasn't expert enough to determine whether it had contained a daiquiri or not. An ashtray beside the two glasses overflowed with cigarette butts, at least half of them carrying lipstick stains. Shayne studied them and wondered what shade of lipstick a blonde like Ellen Harris normally wore.

He moved on to the chair beyond the sofa, and checked the date of the paper lying on the floor beside it. It was dated the preceding Tuesday.

Shayne went on into the rear bedroom and found an unmade double bed with a bedside ashtray containing also an almost equal number of lipsticked and unlipsticked cigarette butts. There was the same smell of stale air in the bedroom that indicated it had been unused for several days.

Shayne turned back and glanced into the bathroom without seeing anything of interest, retraced his steps through the living room and paused in the door of the kitchen without entering it.

Two empty ashtrays stood on the drainboard beside the sink, and tiny gnats buzzed over the carcasses of two squeezed lemons in the sink.

He went out of the apartment and closed the door tightly behind him, went back to his car parked outside and drove to the first sign he saw indicating a public telephone.

There, he turned to the yellow pages and looked up the address of the Professional Answering Service, which proved to be less than four blocks away. He went back to his car and drove there, and went in.

10.

The office of the Professional Answering Service was located on the ground floor of a building on 14th Street. The anteroom was presided over by a pleasant-faced, elderly lady, and there were no switchboards or telephone operators in evidence so Shayne concluded that the actual work was done elsewhere.

When she turned from her desk to ask what she could do for him, Shayne put on his most disarming smile and told her, "It's probably against all your rules, but I'm a detective trying to locate a woman who has been missing for several days from one of the hotels here. I think one of your customers can give me information about her, and it's imperative that I contact him at once. The woman may be in great danger," he added gravely.

"Does his telephone number not answer?"

"Your service answered when I tried to call him a short time ago. I know that he hasn't been home for several days, and I assume you have been transferring calls to some other number."

"Not necessarily. Mostly, we simply take any messages that are left for a subscriber, and give them to him the next time he calls in."

"You mean you wouldn't know how to reach him in the interim?" Shayne showed his disappointment clearly.

"Normally not." She hesitated. "Of course, if he knew he was going to be away from his own telephone for several days, and could be reached at some other number, he might inform us in advance, so that calls could be transferred at once and he wouldn't have to be continually calling in to check. That's one of our regular services."

"In that case, would you give the caller his new number, or simply take the message and then call him?"

"Whichever way he preferred it handled."

"Would you have a record of it here if this subscriber had made such an arrangement?" Shayne persisted.

Her eyes twinkled faintly. She said, "Yes. But I could not possibly give the information out unless I were authorized to do so."

Shayne said ingratiatingly. "But you could check, couldn't you, and see if my hunch is right. This may very well be a matter of life and death," he

urged her. “Just knowing that he had arranged to be reached at another phone would be of great importance.”

She said, “I don’t see... that that would be a violation of privacy.”

“His name is Gene Blake,” Shayne told her quickly, and added the telephone number of Blake’s apartment.

She turned to a large alphabetical card-file on the left side of her desk and efficiently took out a card. Shayne moved slightly and unobtrusively so he could look over her shoulder at the card carrying the name: BLAKE, Gene. There were several notations on the card behind penciled dates on the left side, and Shayne concentrated on the last one. He couldn’t interpret the cryptic notation, but it ended with a local telephone number followed by #410.

He memorized the number and looked down guilelessly into her eyes as she replaced the card and turned to tell him, “Mr. Blake did ask us to transfer any calls to another telephone number last Tuesday until further notice. He asked that the new number not be given to anyone, and it would be a breach of confidence for me to give it to you.” She spoke with firm severity and Shayne didn’t know whether she realized he’d read the number over her shoulder or not. He rather suspected she did, and he thanked her gravely. “You’ve been a great help, and I certainly wouldn’t want to urge you to give away your client’s secrets.”

He hurried out to the nearest telephone before he forgot the hastily memorized number, and dialled it. A dulcet voice said, “Good afternoon. Seaspray Hotel. May I help you?”

Shayne said, “You have, honey,” and hung up.

The Seaspray was one of the huge, rambling hotels that had been built during the first boom of the Twenties. There was some sort of convention in progress, and the lobby was athrong with milling delegates and lines of guests who were checking in and out.

Shayne made his way through them to the elevator and squeezed in. It let him out on the 4th floor, and he found #410 and knocked on the door. It opened after about thirty seconds and Shayne faced a man wearing slippers and slacks and undershirt and holding a towel in his hands. His brown hair was damp and uncombed, muscular arms and shoulders were deeply tanned. He fitted Tiny’s description of Gene Blake perfectly.

He held the door half-open and frowned at the rangy redhead, and said aggressively, “I think you have the wrong room,” and started to close the

door.

Shayne stepped into it and shoved the door and the man back. “Right room... right guy,” he said, looking around the large sitting room of an expensive suite. The bathroom door stood open, and beyond it was a closed door leading into the bedroom. There was no one else in sight.

“What sort of deal is this? You can’t force yourself into a man’s room, and...”

Shayne growled, “I have, Blake. Who’s in the bedroom?”

“My wife, and I don’t propose.”... Blake dropped the towel on the floor and doubled up his fists, getting in front of Shayne and jutting his jaw belligerently.

Shayne said, “We both know you don’t have a wife, Blake. I’m taking a look.” He put the flat of a big hand on the man’s chest and shoved. Taken off balance, Blake staggered back two paces, and then unclenched his fists and got a half-shamed smile on his face.

“Can’t we handle this differently?” He fumbled for his wallet and made his voice placating.

Shayne said, “This isn’t a shakedown. I just want a look at the woman in your bedroom.” He moved forward purposefully, and Gene Blake got out of his way, still protesting weakly, but not as though he cared too greatly. When Shayne rapped on the door, he called out, “It’s okay, Peggy. Don’t be worried.”

Shayne opened the door and looked in the bedroom. On the other side of the room a woman sat in front of a dressing table with her back to him, calmly putting on lipstick with a tiny brush. Meeting her reflected gaze in the mirror, Shayne saw that she in no way resembled the photograph of Ellen Harris in his pocket.

He said gruffly, “I’m sorry, Ma’am,” and closed the bedroom door. Blake had backed away toward the center of the room and was lighting a cigarette with trembling hands. “What kind of Peeping Tom stunt is this?”

Shayne asked, “Where is Ellen Harris, Blake?”

“Ellen Harris? I don’t think I know anyone named that.”

“Maybe this will refresh your memory.” Shayne took the picture from his pocket and held it out. Blake studied it wordlessly, and then licked his lips. “I guess maybe that was her name. Ellen something. I met her at the Beachhaven bar last Monday. That the one?” He looked at Shayne curiously, but apparently without fear.

Shayne said, "That's the one. Where is she?"

"How in hell should I know? I haven't seen her since Monday night. She ditched me at the Gray Gull for another guy."

Shayne said, "Sit down and tell me all about it."

"Why should I? Who are you and what's all this about?"

Shayne said uncompromisingly, "Sit down and talk to me, or get a shirt on and we'll go to headquarters. My name is Shayne," he added impatiently. "I'm a private detective looking for Mrs. Harris."

"Oh, Christ. You're Mike Shayne. Sure. I should have recognized you right off." Blake looked crestfallen. "What's happened to Mrs. Harris?"

"That's what I hope you can tell me." Shayne sat down and lit a cigarette. "I know you picked her up in the bar and she signed the chit for a couple of drinks, and you went out with her through the rear door to the hotel parking lot. You take it from there."

Gene Blake seated himself and drew thoughtfully on his cigarette. "There was something funny about her. In the beginning, it looked like a real hot deal. She was damned attractive and all out to have a good time... with no reservations as far as I could see. We used her car, rented, I think, and I suggested dinner first, but she didn't want food. Wanted to gamble. I remember particularly because I never did get dinner that night, and had a hell of a hangover the next day as a result.

"As I look back on it now, I got the impression she was sort of forcing herself. As though it was a completely new role for her. That she was trying to act wanton, maybe."

"Did she suggest the Gray Gull, or did you?"

"Damned if I remember. Probably I did, though there are a couple other places I'd just as soon steer a woman into. She just bought fifty dollars worth of chips to start with, and she settled down at a roulette table to make small bets. They gave me five hundred to go on... I suppose you know that sort of deal?" He mashed out his cigarette and looked at Shayne inquiringly.

He nodded and said, "I talked to Willy this afternoon."

"Yeh, well he'll bear me out that she wasn't much of a gambler. I stayed with roulette for awhile, and then began to get bored and drifted over to the crap table, but I kept going back to her... you know... and she stayed about even without doing any real betting at all. Then I saw her getting real friendly with another guy who'd sat down beside her, and I didn't mind because about that time I started talking to Peggy at the crap table." He

paused and arched his eyebrows at the closed door. "She was alone and out for a good time and we started hitting it off, and I'd already decided there wasn't too much percentage in Ellen, so I went back one last time and she practically cold-shouldered me... flirting with this other fellow."

"Do you think she knew him, Blake? That maybe she had got you to take her there so she could meet him?"

"I don't know. I didn't think anything like that at the time." Blake looked honestly puzzled. "Why would she have bothered? She had her own car and could have gone there alone."

Shayne said, "Maybe she didn't know that," recalling that Tiny had said she didn't know whether she would be allowed at the bar unescorted. "Maybe she felt she needed an entree."

"Maybe," Blake conceded. "Could be, I guess. That would explain why she cooled off so fast after we got there. Anyhow, I just thought to hell with it and went back to Peggy. We played a little more and then hit three or four more spots... and ended up at my place in the morning." He shrugged. "We moved in here the next afternoon, and it's been a ball ever since."

"Can you describe the man Ellen Harris was making up to?"

Blake narrowed his eyes and appeared to be thinking hard. "Sort of neutral, the way I remember him. Forty, maybe. Heavy-set, I think. One thing... I don't think he's a native. Not enough tan and he was wearing a dark suit." He paused and got to his feet as the bedroom door opened and Peggy came into the room. She was short and a trifle on the dumpy side, and her hair was almost certainly dyed that shade of red. She was completely self-possessed, as she sauntered in from the bedroom, and she looked at Shayne curiously as he remained seated. "Who is this man, hon?"

"He's a detective, sweet. Private," Blake added hastily, "and not interested in our love-life. He's trying to trace that dame I ditched for you at the Gray Gull last Monday night. Remember the one...?"

"Hold it," Shayne interposed. "I'd like to hear Peggy's story of that evening without any prompting from the sidelines. How do you remember it, Peggy?"

"Shall I tell him?" She settled herself in a chair and smoothed a short skirt down over thick thighs.

"Sure. Tell him just how it was. I got nothing to hide. He's got a reputation around town for being a square shooter."

“Well, I was at the crap table there at the Gray Gull and being bored. It was about nine o’clock, I guess.” She glanced at Gene and he nodded and said, “About that. Maybe a little after.”

“We got to talking, Gene and me, and... we hit it off right away.” She gazed at him fondly. “I knew right off he was a good sport, and... well, the chemicals were right, if you know what I mean.” She gazed boldly at Shayne and tittered slightly.

“And he told me he’d brought this other woman playing roulette, but he’d just as leave ditch her anyhow, and so why didn’t we go some place else.”

“Did he point her out to you?”

“Sure. That is, I watched him go over and speak to her. A sort of horsy blonde wearing a bright red dress cut all the way down to here.” She made an exaggerated slashing motion down to her navel. “So you didn’t have to do too much guessing about what was underneath the red dress, if you know what I mean. Some men go for that kind of thing, but Gene admitted he preferred to make his own discoveries.” Again, she gazed fondly at her room-mate. “Anyhow, she was already making up to some other guy, and so we slipped out.” She shrugged. “That’s all there was to it.”

“Did you notice the man you say she was already making up to?”

“I can’t say that I did. I wasn’t too interested in either one of them right about then.”

“Is this a picture of the woman at the Gray Gull?” Shayne showed her the picture of Ellen Harris.

She nodded disinterestedly. “I guess. She wasn’t really near that pretty, but I guess it’s her all right.”

“Are you prepared to testify that you haven’t seen the blonde since then, and that you and Gene spent the rest of that night together... and have been together ever since?”

“Hey! What’s this about testifying? You don’t have to drag Peggy into this.”

“She’s already dragged into it,” Shayne told him coldly. “So far as anybody knows right now, you two are the last people who have seen Mrs. Harris. You’ll have to come down to police headquarters and sign a statement.”

“Police headquarters?” It was an anguished cry from Gene’s outraged lips. “You’re private. What you got to do with the police? Look, I came

clean with you thinking we could keep the whole thing nice and quiet.”

“This woman has been missing for five days. Her husband is here from New York raising hell all over the place. This picture is going to be reproduced on the front page of tonight’s News with a headline asking for information about her. You can’t get away from it, Gene. If your story checks out, the chances are it won’t have to be made public. Let me take you in and give you to Peter Painter right now, and your chances for keeping it quiet will be just about doubled. He hates my guts enough that he’s going to be so damned sore I got to you first that he’ll do practically anything to prove your innocence. So, let’s go.

“Besides, you haven’t got any choice,” Shayne ended grimly, getting to his feet. “Either get dressed and come along with me like a good citizen, or I’ll call in and have them send the wagon around for both of you.”

11.

Peter Painter kept the three of them cooling their heels for at least fifteen minutes in a small anteroom just off his private office at Miami Beach headquarters. Shayne sat in a chair a little removed from the other two and placidly smoked two cigarettes while they talked together in whispers, interspersed now and then by a fluty giggle from Peggy.

Neither of them appeared really upset or frightened. They resented being brought down by Shayne, but that was perfectly natural under the circumstances. He would have resented it himself in the same situation.

Shayne went over Blake's story of Monday evening point by point while they waited, and he was inclined to believe it... or most of it at least. It shouldn't be too difficult to check what had happened at the Gray Gull on Monday night. The cashier would remember passing out the packet of free chips to Blake, and what sum he returned. One of the roulette dealers would almost certainly remember the striking blonde whom Gene Blake had brought in, and who deserted him during the course of the evening for another man. With more opportunity to observe them together at his table, he might well have formed an opinion as to whether they were strangers when they met.

At the moment, this was the most puzzling aspect of Blake's story. If this later meeting had been prearranged before her arrival in Miami... if it were, in fact, an assignation, why go to such a roundabout, cloak-and-dagger way of effecting it?

There was only one answer that made sense to Shayne. If she suspected she was being tailed, all that circumlocution about picking Gene up in the bar might have seemed necessary. Otherwise, for God's sake, she was ostensibly on her own in Miami for two weeks with no strings attached. All they had to do was to meet some place. Her reservation had been made in advance at the Beachhaven... her plane ticket purchased in advance and time of arrival known.

Yet both she and her husband had gone out of their way to make it clear that he had wanted her to make the trip, that he expected her to have fun, and had no intention of spying on her.

If not her husband, then whom had she suspected of keeping track of her movements in Miami so that she felt the need to cover up her tracks?

Of course, the simpler answer might be the correct one. It was entirely possible that she did just want to go out on the town and had tired of Gene Blake's company after an hour or two. It is simple enough to strike up an acquaintanceship with a fellow gambler at a roulette table, and as Peggy had phrased it in the hotel, maybe the chemicals were right with this new man. In that case it was going to be much more difficult to trace a casual bystander than if there had been a previous connection between the two.

A young officer opened a door into the waiting room and stuck his head in. "The chief is ready for you, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne got up and nodded to the couple, and preceded them into Painter's office.

The detective chief looked up irritably from a desk littered with papers. He was a small, dapper man, with a very black, pencil-thin mustache.

He snapped, "What is it, Shayne? I'm extremely busy."

Shayne said, "I've brought in a couple of people who want to make statements about Mrs. Herbert Harris."

"Harris?" sputtered Painter. "That New York woman who's been sleeping out a couple of nights? What's your interest in her?"

"The New York woman who's been missing since Monday night," the redhead corrected him. "I've been retained to find her."

"He came to *you*?" Painter's voice trembled with wrath. "After I assured him everything possible would be done to locate her without publicity or a scandal? Why?"

"Possibly," said Shayne modestly, "because I have a reputation for being one of the best men in my field in the entire country?"

"Who says so?"

"Mr. Harris," said Shayne. He shrugged and grinned innocently. "I thought maybe you told him Petey, because he came straight to my office from here."

"I told him nothing. Except that we have far superior facilities for that sort of work than any private detective, and that it would be a waste of money to hire one."

"What have your facilities turned up?"

"Nothing very definite... as yet. We have determined that she allowed herself to be picked up in the Beachhaven bar Monday evening by some smooth-talking gigolo, and went out with him evidently determined to make the rounds. We have a pick-up on her rented car, of course, and as soon as

we locate that I'm positive it will lead us to her and her paramour." Shayne shrugged and nodded toward the couple who stood close together, unhappily waiting to be noticed. "Here's your smooth-talking gigolo, Painter. And standing beside him is *his* paramour of the moment. Do you want statements from them, or don't you?" Peter Painter gulped back an oath and his black eyes glittered as he turned slowly to survey Gene and Peggy. "All right, Shayne," he said in a choked voice. "How'd you dig them up?"

"By using my own facilities. You want me to sit in while they tell you what they know about Mrs. Harris, or shall I leave them to you? By the way," he added, "I understand that Harris left a picture of his wife with you... a different pose from the one he brought me. It might be a good idea to let them identify it as well as the one I showed them."

"I'm perfectly capable of deciding how to obtain an identification, Shayne." He stabbed at a button on his desk, and when the young officer came in from a door on the opposite side of the room, he snapped, "Get your notebook to take down a couple of statements, Peters."

Shayne moved back unobtrusively to a corner of the room and seated himself. When the stenographer was ready, Painter said, "Now. You first." He stabbed a forefinger at Blake. "Step up here and tell me what you know about Mrs. Harris. Your full name, address and occupation first."

Blake gave his name and address, and after momentary hesitation stated that his occupation was, "Salesman... unemployed at present."

Painter then opened a drawer and drew out an 8x10 photograph and put it in front of him. "Do you recognize this woman?"

Blake studied it and nodded. "I met her in the Beachhaven cocktail lounge for the first time Monday evening, and she told me she was Mrs. Ellen Harris from New York."

Painter nodded and leaned back with narrowed eyes. "Go ahead and tell me what happened."

Shayne listened alertly while Blake retold his story of the evening in a straightforward and terse manner. The only thing he left out that Shayne could ascertain, was any mention of his arrangement with Willy Arentz to steer customers into the Gray Gull.

Painter heard him out without comment while the statement was taken down in shorthand. Then he questioned him closely about the man whom Blake claimed he had last seen with Ellen, without eliciting any more

detailed description than Shayne had gotten. Painter was withering in his demands for details about the subsequent sleeping arrangements between Blake and Peggy, and his contempt for the woman showed through clearly when he began questioning her.

She answered his biting questions with composure, making it very clear that she did not consider her personal life any of his damn business, stating for the record that her name was Margaret Gold, that she was a divorcee living on alimony payments from her ex-husband who was a businessman in Baltimore. She had been in Miami Beach at the Fontainebleau for three days, she said, before meeting Gene, and had checked out Tuesday afternoon to move into the Seaspray with him as Mr. and Mrs. Blake. Her version of the evening at the Gray Gull was the same as she had given Shayne. She hadn't really noticed the man who was with Ellen.

Painter gave a grunt of disgust when she finished, and told them both, "Remain in the outer room while we have these statements typed. Then you will be required to sign them under oath."

"Can we go then, Chief?" asked Blake hopefully.

"Back to your hotel bedroom for more fun and games?" snarled Painter. "I don't know. There's a law about that. I'll decide later. Go in there and wait until you're called."

When they had gone out and the stenographer had departed to transcribe his notes, Painter took notice of the detective again. "Any discrepancies in their stories?"

Shayne shook his head. "Just the way they told it to me."

Painter smoothed his mustache with a thumbnail and purred in a voice that dripped malice, "I can't see this helps us any. It simply makes it more apparent than ever that Mrs. Harris came down here with hot pants, ready to take on the first man she could pick up. This Blake didn't suit her taste, so she grabbed the next one."

Shayne said, "Maybe. Maybe not." He stood up and stretched. "You can't say I didn't cooperate this time, Painter. I hope you'll do the same if you get anything."

Before Painter could reply, there was a light rap on the outer door and a detective entered carrying a copy of the first edition of the *News*. "You seen this story, Chief?"

He hurried forward and spread the newspaper out in front of Painter. From where he stood Shayne could see a large picture of Ellen Harris

reproduced on the front page.

He edged toward the door and had his hand on the knob when Painter called to him in an infuriated voice, “Shayne! Now, by God to hell...”

Shayne kept on going and pulled the door tightly shut behind him. He went out a side exit and circled around to his parked car, got in it and drove away.

Before deciding what his next logical step should be, he stopped to telephone Lucy Hamilton and asked if Jim Gifford had called from New York.

“Not yet,” she told him excitedly. “But Tim Rourke just hung up the phone. The paper’s only been out half an hour and they’ve already found Mrs. Harris’ car. Parked right there in the Beachhaven parking lot. Tim’s on his way there now.”

Shayne said, “So am I, angel. Stand by for Gifford’s call, huh?” He hurried out to head for the Beachhaven.

12.

When Michael Shayne reached the Beachhaven parking lot, he found Robert Merrill at the entrance with a young man whom he told Shayne was the attendant on duty until six o'clock. "Ed called the *News* first and then told me," he explained. "I guess you know they offered a fifty-dollar reward for information about the car, and, as soon as Ed read the description, he realized there was a similar convertible that had been parked here several days, and he checked the license number. I called the police," Merrill added, "and the rental people to send up an extra set of keys. It's right over there... locked up tight. Hell of a thing, isn't it? Right here in our lot all the time."

"Been sitting here ever since Monday?" Shayne asked the lad.

"I don't know for sure. I just happened to notice it standing there, you know, without really noticing. I couldn't say when, or whether it's been there all the time or not. But I know I haven't seen it go in or out."

"There's no one on duty from six at night until eight in the morning," Merrill explained. "If a guest wants to use his car, a bellboy will bring it around or he can take it in or out himself."

Timothy Rourke's shabby sedan pulled up just then, and the reporter climbed out with a wide grin. "The power of the press, huh?" he greeted Shayne and Merrill. "And a fifty-buck reward." He had brought a photographer with him, and he added briskly, "I'd like a shot before Painter gets here. You the one called in the tip?" he asked the attendant.

"Yes sir. Ed Beagle's my name."

"I'm Rourke from the *News*." He shook the lad's hand heartily. "Which one is it? How about a picture of you standing behind it pointing to the license number for the paper?"

"Sure. That's it, right there." Ed pointed to the cream-colored Pontiac convertible across the lot with its top up now.

Rourke took him by the arm and led him across to pose him behind the car, and Shayne drifted away behind them as Painter's car came up fast, leaving Merrill to explain things to the detective chief.

Shayne peered through the windows for a look inside without seeing anything at all while Rourke secured a couple of pictures, and then he circled around the car and stopped suddenly, wrinkling his nose as a faint

breeze came to him from the direction of the car. He glanced over his shoulder and saw Painter and Merrill beginning to walk toward them, and he went quickly to Rourke and said in a low voice, "Have your photographer standing by to get a fast shot of the interior of the trunk when the keys get here. Painter won't like it, but *you* found the car."

"My God," said Rourke. "What makes you think..."

Shayne said, "Take a smell for yourself. Four or five days in the sun..." He broke off and strolled away as Painter came up and demanded of Ed Beagle, "You the one reported the car? Why didn't you call the police instead of the newspaper?"

"It was the paper that offered the reward," Beagle told him stoutly.

"Been here all the time, eh, and you didn't even notice it until a reward was offered? Or were you keeping it under your hat hoping there would be a reward?" The lad shuffled his feet nervously and looked to Merrill for support. "I'm not supposed to report cars in the lot if they've got a hotel sticker on them. It wasn't that I really noticed it. Not until I read the paper and got to thinking..."

Painter turned away with a snort of disgust as another police car rolled up and two uniformed technicians got out. "Try the door handles for fingerprints outside. You say they're bringing extra keys?" he added to Merrill.

"The Avis people. They should be here any minute."

"Has Harris been notified?" Shayne asked him.

"How'd you get here so fast, Shayne?" demanded Painter. "Is this some kind of put up job between you and Rourke? Why did you hurry out of my office as soon as you knew the *News* was out? Came straight here, didn't you?"

"After phoning my secretary and getting Tim's message," Shayne told him. "Has he, Merrill?"

"Harris? No. He should be, I guess. Ed, go ring the doorman and ask Mr. Harris to come out here."

While the boy trotted away to the telephone that connected him with the doorman, a U-Drive-It pickup truck drew up and a man in white coveralls got out. "You need some keys for a Pontiac here?"

"Right here, fellow," Painter said officiously. He went toward the convertible, warning, "Just unlock the doors without touching any surface. Do you have a mileage record on it?"

“Yeh. When it went out Monday.”

Shayne moved back to stand beside Timothy Rourke while the mechanic unlocked the right-hand door without touching the handle and then went around to the driver’s side.

Rourke stood at the rear of the car tensely beside his photographer. He muttered, “Damn if I don’t believe you’re right, Mike. Can you get them to unlock the trunk?”

Shayne went to the Beach fingerprint man who was standing beside Painter, waiting to get at the interior of the car, and asked him casually, “Did you check the handle of the trunk? It should be opened, too.”

“Yes,” Painter said instantly. “Check it if you haven’t.” And to the mechanic, he ordered, “Open up the back, too, while you’re about it.”

The fingerprint man dusted the trunk handle for fingerprints with negative results, and stepped back. The *News* photographer had his camera up and ready when the mechanic unlocked the trunk and lifted it, stepping back quickly with a startled oath as the odor of putrefied flesh rushed out of confinement and assailed his nostrils.

The alert photographer got his picture all right... of the body of a woman cramped up in the confines of the trunk on her back with knees drawn up to her breasts.

With the exception of the mechanic, every man there was more or less inured to the sight of violent death, but this was one of the most gruesome sights any of them had ever experienced.

They all stood well back from the car, grim-faced and staring, while the locked-in odor was absorbed and carried away by the fresh breeze.

The dead woman wore a red cocktail dress, the hem of which was up around her waist, displaying long and well-fleshed legs. She was also a blonde.

That’s about all any of them could tell about her at this point. Her face had been brutally smashed in so that she was totally unrecognizable. Before death, she might well have been as beautiful as the picture of Ellen Harris showed her to be... or she might have been so ugly that no man would look at her twice.

There simply was no way of telling at this point.

Shayne heard running footsteps behind him, and turned his head to see Herbert Harris trotting toward them across the parking lot. The *New Yorker’s* face was ashen and his tie was askew. Shayne breathed an oath

deep in his throat and moved to meet the man and slow him down, grasping his arm tightly.

“They found her car?” Harris panted. His frightened gaze was on the open trunk, the half dozen men standing in a semi-circle around it. “My God, Shayne...”

“I’m afraid we’ve found her, too, Mr. Harris.” Shayne’s fingers gripped his arm tightly and he hated his job at that moment. “Take it easy,” he cautioned, leading the man forward. “You can make an identification later. Right now...”

“Oh, my God,” moaned Harris as he saw what was inside the trunk of the convertible. He leaned against Shayne and a small whiff of the smell came to his nostrils, and he was unashamedly sick on the ground while Shayne supported his retching body with a big arm about him.

“Is that Ellen?” He kept his eyes tightly closed and leaned against Shayne. “Is that... my *wife*?” he went on shudderingly.

Shayne turned him aside, saying harshly, “We don’t know yet. Probably. Go ahead and be sick,” he went on in the same harsh voice. “Later on we’ll have to try and get a positive identification.”

“I’m all right,” Harris sobbed, retching again, but straightening himself and drawing away from Shayne.

Peter Painter marched up officiously and demanded, “Is that your wife, Harris? Do you recognize her?”

“Who could... recognize her?” Harris cried out in an anguished voice. “Could you recognize *your* wife if she looked like that?” He covered his face with his hands and his knees buckled beneath him.

Shayne lowered his shaking body gently to the ground and said wonderingly, “For God’s sake, Petey. Let the guy be for now. You can get your identification later.” He jerked his head at Merrill and said, “Help me get him back to his room and get a doctor for him.”

13.

An hour later Michael Shayne and Timothy Rourke sat side by side on the sofa in Lucy Hamilton's apartment, still waiting for a telephone call from Jim Gifford in New York. Lucy had efficiently served them drinks, and she was warming up some food in the oven in the kitchen, and now she sat across from the pair in a deep chair with her stockinged feet tucked up under her, and asked wonderingly, "Are you telling me, Michael, that they're still not sure the woman in the automobile trunk is Mrs. Harris?" Shayne clawed at his unruly, red hair, and said, "Sure is a pretty positive word, Lucy. How can they be? Nobody can possibly identify a faceless woman. Of course, everything points to the body being Mrs. Harris. But that's what bothers me. Whenever I see a corpse beaten up beyond recognition, discovered under circumstances where everything outwardly points to it being a particular person... I wonder if it was planned that way. To make us think it's Mrs. Harris when it isn't."

"You're jumping to conclusions, Mike," Rourke warned him. "The rented car had been driven only forty-two miles. We know Mrs. Harris went for a drive before she came back to the Beachhaven at seven to pick up Gene Blake. The car must have been sitting in that lot since late Monday night. You know, the M.E. said she had been placed in the trunk of the car within a few hours after her death... before real rigor mortis had set in. And he placed the time as Monday or Tuesday night at the latest... judging by the amount of decomposition. She's been missing since then. Who else could it be?"

Shayne growled. "I know all that. But why was her face and head so senselessly beaten into a pulp? I still don't like it," he said flatly.

"Can't they tell by her fingerprints?" Lucy asked brightly.

"Painter will do that," conceded Shayne. "He's thorough when it comes to routine police procedure... and he doesn't jump to conclusions no matter what else you say about him. He questioned Harris about any official record of her prints before we took the poor devil back to the hotel and got him a doctor and a sedative, and when Harris insisted his wife's prints weren't on record, he was quick enough to get the address of their New York apartment. If I know Petey as well as I think I do, he'll have a set of the dead woman's prints in New York tomorrow morning to be checked against

those in the Harris apartment. Then we'll be sure. But, until then, I'm still going to wonder why she was beaten so as to be unidentifiable." He emptied his glass of cognac and Lucy jumped up to refill it.

"Somehow," she said thoughtfully, "thinking about poor Mr. Harris in the office this morning, I think maybe this is easier on him than the other would have been. You know what I mean, Michael... if Painter had been right and it was just a matter of her sleeping out for a few nights."

Shayne nodded and agreed. "You never know which is worse for the survivor in a case like that. At the same time, now that she's dead, the whole tawdry story is going to come out. Everything I found out about her today indicates that she was just about the opposite of what her husband believed her to be. Instead of an ever-loving wife, the picture we get of her here in Miami is a sexy floozie who was ready to take up with the first man that looked at her. Herbert Harris is going to have to live with that knowledge for the rest of his life."

Lucy Hamilton's telephone rang as he finished. She padded across to answer it, and said, "Mr. Shayne is right here waiting for your call, Mr. Gifford." She held the instrument out to her employer.

Shayne took it and said, "Hi, Jim."

"Mike. I'm sorry to call so late, but I've been getting around. It's a Saturday, you know, and people are hard to catch up with."

"What have you got?"

"Just about negative, Mike. Nothing that I assume you hoped I'd get on Ellen Harris. All the dope I can gather here points her up as a plenty beautiful doll, but strictly on the up and up. I contacted a couple of models she knew before she married Harris, and they swear she never played around. Seems like she fell for him hard, and he was her one and only. Same dope from those who knew her after she was married. Strictly a one-man gal, and happy and contented with what she had. Seems they weren't too social, but in a small circle of friends they were regarded as a veddy, veddy happily married couple. I've got a hunch that isn't what you wanted, but that's all yours truly turned up with a lot of leg-work today. Is the lady still among the missing?"

Shayne said, "No. We found her about an hour ago, Jim. Dead."

Jim Gifford said, "Oh?" very thoughtfully.

"So here's some more leg-work, Jim. I don't know how much you can accomplish on a Sunday, but this time concentrate on Herbert Harris. His

wife reached here by plane Monday afternoon and was probably killed late that night. Find out where *he* was Monday night. Check *his* personal life.”

“Like that, huh?”

Shayne said sharply, “It’s always like that when a married woman gets bumped off. The guy that did this job, by the way, wasn’t satisfied with just killing her. He frenziedly beat her beautiful face into a pulp just for the hell of it. That puts it close to home in my book.”

Gifford said, “Yeh. I’ll dig what I can, Mike.”

“You’ve got my apartment number... and Lucy’s,” Shayne told him. “One of us will be home tomorrow.”

“Yeh. Give Lucy my dearest love.” Gifford chuckled. “What’s she cooking up for dinner tonight?”

Shayne frowned at the telephone. “Whatever gives you that idea?”

Jim Gifford chuckled again. “I can smell it all the way up here over the telephone. Poor Boy Steak, huh? Remember that time she cooked it for us? Must have been five years ago, but I can still taste that garlic sauce. Tell her so, Mike. ’Bye.” And he hung up.

Shayne turned away from the telephone shaking his head. “You did say you were warming something in the oven for dinner, Lucy? What is it?”

“Some left-over porkchops, Michael. I’m going to make a garlic sauce to go with them... whatever *are* you laughing about?” she ended indignantly.

Shayne didn’t tell her. Instead, he relayed to Rourke, “You’ll have to write your story straight, Tim. Gifford didn’t turn up a single thing on Ellen’s past or present love life.”

“And now,” said Lucy indignantly, “you’ve got him digging into Mr. Harris’ personal life. Sometimes, Michael, I wonder how I ever manage to put up with you.”

He chuckled and returned to the sofa and his drink. “Judging from the smells coming from the oven, you’d better get your garlic sauce started. Check with me in the morning, Tim?” he added as the reporter finished his drink and got up to go.

Rourke promised he would and thanked Lucy for the drink.

14.

Michael Shayne didn't bother to go back to the Beach that night. With a dead woman on his hands, he knew that Painter would have detectives swarming all over the Gray Gull to check every detail of Blake's story and try to get a line on the man Blake claimed he had last seen her with.

He stayed late at Lucy's apartment and slept late on Sunday morning before getting up to make coffee and get the morning paper from in front of his door.

It contained a brief account of the discovery of the body in the parked convertible, with a few details that Shayne didn't already know. No purse had been found with the body, and the entire car was completely clean of fingerprints. Mr. Harris was quoted as saying that a wide wedding ring set with diamonds was missing from the dead woman's hand, and that she had left New York with about three hundred dollars in cash and her credit card. The lack of positive identification was mentioned, but not stressed.

Painter was quoted as stating that he believed robbery to have been the motive without mentioning why he thought a robber would have beaten her face up beyond possible recognition. It was guardedly stated that she was known to have left her hotel the preceding Monday evening in the company of a strange man, but Gene Blake's name was not mentioned, nor was the Gray Gull. At the end of the story it was stated that Michael Shayne, well-known private detective from Miami, had been retained by the bereaved husband to help solve the case, and that he was working in close conjunction with the Miami Beach police.

Shayne put the newspaper aside thoughtfully and went into the kitchen to pour himself another cup of coffee. He added a dollop of cognac to this one, and settled himself comfortably back in the living room.

His telephone rang. He answered it and a nervous voice asked if he was Michael Shayne. He said he was and there was a pause at the other end of the wire, and then the voice went on hurriedly:

"In the morning paper it says you're working on the Harris murder case. Is that right?"

Shayne said, "Yes."

"Then I have to see you at once. It's very important. I... have to tell you something. May I come to your place?"

Shayne gave him his address and apartment number. He hung up more thoughtful than before, and drank his coffee royal, then showered and shaved and was just finished dressing when there was a knock on his door.

Shayne opened it to admit a very worried and frightened man. He was in his forties with a fairly bulky body and a clean-shaven, nondescript sort of face. He was neatly dressed in a dark suit with a white shirt and maroon tie.

He said, "Mr. Shayne. I'm sorry to bother you at home like this, but... I have to talk to you. I need your advice desperately." He carried a brown fedora in his hands which he twisted nervously.

Shayne said, "Come in. Sit down. Care for a cup of coffee?"

"No, I... I had coffee. My name is John J. Benjamin from Detroit. I'm on vacation at the Beach... with my wife. I..." He slumped into a chair and gulped nervously, then raised harried brown eyes to Shayne and confessed, "I have information about Mrs. Harris which I think the police should have. Ever since yesterday afternoon when I saw her picture in the paper, I knew I'd have to come forward. But I kept hoping..."

He paused and shook his head. "But when I read about her being murdered this morning, probably last Monday night, I knew I couldn't keep quiet any longer. I'll pay you well, Mr. Shayne, extremely well, if you can arrange to relay my information to the police without my becoming involved."

"I can't promise anything until I know what it is."

"Of course not. I didn't expect... I saw her Monday night, Mr. Shayne. At the Gray Gull. That's a gambling casino at the Beach. I'm not really a gambler, but... on vacation like this... and my wife was ill that night. I'm not really one for picking up strange women either," he added with a self-conscious smile. "But I was alone there and she was extremely attractive. We were playing roulette at the same table... for small stakes... and it was she who actually spoke first. In another type of woman, I might have thought her forward, but she seemed very ladylike, and in the informal atmosphere of a gambling house..." He broke off and looked anxiously at the detective for man-to-man understanding.

Shayne said with a slight smile, "I know how it is. Tell me what happened."

"Well, we just got to talking and she told me she was Mrs. Harris from New York... I noticed her wedding ring set with diamonds just the way it

was described in the paper... and she mentioned, kind of sadly, I thought, but spunky about it, that it was her husband's idea for her to come down alone and have fun... and, by golly, she was determined to do just that.

"Well, I couldn't help but remark that if I were married to a looker like her I'd keep her locked up at home... not that Mrs. Benjamin isn't a fine-looking woman," he broke in to explain, "but a different type, you might say.

"Anyhow, she confided in me that she had met this man in the cocktail lounge at her hotel that evening and he seemed like a gentleman and she'd come to the Gray Gull with him, but she guessed it was a mistake because he seemed to think that... well, you know... that it was all right for him to be forward with her because she had let him pick her up in a bar. And she asked me real nicely if I'd help her get rid of him and I told her I'd be delighted to help, so the next time he came to the roulette table to speak to her she hardly looked at him, but pretended to snuggle up to me and talked in a low voice that sounded intimate, I guess, and he got the idea and, after a little, we saw him leaving with another woman. And she giggled and said, well, that had taken care of him, all right, and that she was tired of playing roulette and why didn't we go on somewhere else?"

"What did the man look like?" Shayne asked when Benjamin paused in his recital.

"Like just the sort of self-assured young man who would try to take advantage of a lady. You could spot him for a gigolo right away. That's an old-fashioned word, I guess, but I'll bet he makes a living preying on lonely women, who just want to have a little innocent fun. He was tall and tanned, and had brown hair, I think."

Shayne nodded. "Did you and Mrs. Harris leave then?"

"Very soon afterward. We cashed in our chips... she had about forty dollars left out of the fifty she said she'd started with, which was a little better than I had done, because I dropped thirty-two dollars. Not that I was worried about that," he added hastily. "I could afford it all right. Well, she said she had her own car and I don't have a car with me down here, so we went downstairs and they brought it around... a cream-colored Pontiac convertible with the top down. She asked the attendant to put the top up because it was getting a little cool, and she drove.

"Since she didn't know the Beach, I suggested a little hotel near mine for dinner where they have a small, quiet dining room and serve really

excellent food until midnight. The Mirabel.”

He paused nervously and Shayne nodded. “I’ve eaten there. The Pompano Amandine is terrific.”

“Yes... well... I don’t wish to attempt to completely exculpate myself, Mr. Shayne. I want to be thoroughly honest, and, perhaps, what did happen was partially my fault. But she had been so friendly up to then, and appeared to like me very much, and I had had several drinks with a very early and very light dinner... and I sat close to her while she drove and put my arm about her shoulders, and she laughed quite charmingly and encouraged me, turning to smile in my face and pat my cheek once, when she stopped for a traffic light. And she said, very sweetly, that I wasn’t like the other man and she felt perfectly safe with me. Which I assure you she *was*, Mr. Shayne,” he added earnestly.

“I really had no thought of anything more than a pleasant late dinner with a charming companion. But she... perhaps she misinterpreted things. I still don’t really understand. It came as a complete surprise and shock.” He stopped, shaking his head in puzzlement.

“What did?” Shayne asked.

“When we reached the canopy in front of the Mirabel. There was a doorman there, and a parking attendant to take the car. I got out and the attendant was on her side and started to open the door for her. He just had his hand on the handle when she whooshed away leaving me standing there dumfounded. There’s a turn-around that the taxis use, and she just sailed around it and disappeared. I felt an awful fool, of course, with the doorman and attendant standing there looking at me and you could tell they were feeling sorry for me.

“Well, I passed it off as best I could. I summoned up a rueful laugh and said, ‘Women!’ And the doorman was sympathetic and asked me if I was going in or wanted a cab, and I told him I guessed I’d just walk on to my own hotel... which is only three blocks... and I did.”

“And that was the end of it?” Shayne demanded. “The last you saw of Mrs. Harris?”

“That was the end of it,” the man from Detroit declared firmly. “She just vanished out of my sight into the night. Naturally I told my wife nothing about what had occurred. But since yesterday afternoon, when I saw her picture in the paper and learned she was missing, I knew I should eventually have to go to the authorities with my story.”

Shayne nodded slowly, "Yes, they'll have to be told." He sat for a time, pondering what Benjamin had told him. Here again was the same inexplicable pattern of behavior repeating itself. What hidden impulse had driven Ellen Harris to act as she did last Monday? She had apparently invited passes from every man whom she encountered, and then backed out of the situation as soon as it began to develop. It was almost as though she had been asking to have her pretty face beaten to a pulp by some sexually frustrated male.

He shook his head and turned his attention to the problem presented by Mr. Benjamin and his wife. At the moment he felt thoroughly sorry for the man. If his story was true... and Shayne believed it was... he was a perfectly innocent guy who had taken one very small step aside from the straight and narrow path and was likely to be pilloried for it.

"Do I have to go in and tell them, Mr. Shayne?" he asked unhappily. "It will be quite an ordeal. I've never had any experience with the police."

Shayne said, "It would be better for you to go in than wait for them to pick you up. You see, they got your description at the Gray Gull last night, and right now you're probably the most hunted man in Miami."

"Oh, God." His face went ashen. "You mean I'll be arrested and held in jail?"

"At least until your story is thoroughly checked." Shayne hesitated, tugging at his earlobe and thinking out loud, "If I were positive in my own mind that you're telling the truth, I can't see that it would help the murder investigation any for them to know your name. If we could place her at the Mirabel that night, and if the police were convinced she had ditched her escort from the Gray Gull at that point, they'd lose interest in you."

"Could you manage that? I can't begin to tell you how everlastingly grateful I'd be."

"Do you think the Mirabel doorman would remember the incident?"

"I feel certain he would, Mr. Shayne. And the parking attendant, too. It was so very obvious that she was getting rid of me and that I was taken completely by surprise. They were too polite to laugh at me openly, but I'm sure they snickered about it after I left."

Shayne nodded and muttered, "I think that's Mandel." He looked up the number of the Mirabel Hotel and called it, and asked for Pete Mandel.

In a moment a voice said, "Mandel speaking."

"Mike Shayne, Pete. How're things with you?"

“Quiet, Mike. No luscious blondes getting themselves murdered in our parking lot.” He sounded very smug about it.

“Yeh? I congratulate you. Can you quick get me the names of the man on the door and the parking lot attendant who were on last Monday evening... and how to get hold of them if possible?”

“Couple of minutes. Will you hold on?”

Shayne said, “Sure,” and lit a cigarette while he waited.

Mandel’s voice sounded worried when he came back on the wire. “Tom Thurston was parking cars. He’s on right now. Ned Brown was on the door. I can get you his home address... listen, Mike. *Monday* evening? This hasn’t anything to do with a dead blonde, has it?”

Shayne grinned and said cheerfully, “I’m very much afraid it has, Pete.” Then he relented and reassured him, “Nothing to tie the Mirabel into it, I think. I’m coming over to see Thurston. If it’s anything you should know, I’ll tell you before the police.”

“Thanks, Mike.”

Shayne hung up and told Benjamin briskly, “I’ll drive you over to the Beach, if you like, but drop you at your hotel first. At the moment, I don’t want you seen at the Mirabel. If this checks out, I see no reason why anyone ever has to know you were involved.”

“That would be wonderful. If you could know how I’ve felt ever since I saw her picture in the paper yesterday. Like a condemned man, Mr. Shayne. And now you’ve given me a reprieve.”

“Don’t be too sure,” Shayne warned him, leading the way out of the apartment. “If I don’t get a positive check at the Mirabel, you’ll have to go in and face the music.”

“I understand.” Mr. Benjamin had acquired a new sort of dignity in the past few minutes. “I deserve whatever happens to me.”

When Shayne dropped him in front of his hotel half an hour later, he said, “Sit tight and try not to worry. I’ll call you either way as soon as I know what the score is.” He wheeled away and drove the few blocks to the Mirabel where there was a canopy leading from the door to the *portecochere*.

As Benjamin had described it, there was a drive leading straight on into the parking lot, and a curving drive for taxis or cars which merely discharged passengers.

The parking attendant was a small, wiry man with a pleasant smile. He stepped up smartly and opened the door on Shayne's side, and the redhead got out. "Your name Tom Thurston?"

"That it is, sir." The man waited inquiringly.

Shayne said, "I've got a couple of questions. First off, do you recall ever seeing this woman?" He took Ellen's photograph from his pocket and showed it to him.

Thurston studied it carefully and drew in a deep breath and then said, "Well, now, that's a question that's been bothering me since yesterday afternoon. I just wasn't sure in my own mind and I was waiting for a talk with Ned Brown first. He was on the door that night."

"Which night?"

"Monday was when it happened. I know because that's the last night Ned and I worked the same shift."

"What happened?"

"Well, it was a funny one, sir. There was this big cream-colored convertible drove up about ten o'clock... I disremember whether it was a Pontiac or not. There was a lady driving and a man in with her. Ned was right there to open his door, and he stepped out just as I was reaching out to open her door. And whoosh! Damned if she didn't step on the gas and go around the circle on two wheels, leaving that poor devil standing there staring after her with the funniest expression on his face you ever did see." Thurston chuckled broadly at the memory. "Ned and I kept our faces as straight as we could, and he asked the man if he wanted a cab, but he said no, it was just a few blocks to his hotel."

"And this woman was driving?"

"I can't swear for sure. I just got a glimpse of her behind the wheel before she took off like a bat out of hell, practically jerking my hand off me. But I've had this funny feeling ever since that picture was in the paper yesterday. I do believe it was her. Maybe Ned got a better look."

"Can you describe the man?"

"Sort of. There wasn't anything special about him." Thurston hesitated, thinking back, and then gave a vague description that fitted Benjamin as well as hundreds of other men.

Shayne thanked him, and said, "This may be important. The police will be around to talk to you about this. And they'll want to check with Brown. Don't try to embroider it any. Just tell it straight as you've told it to me."

“Sure. Say, aren’t you Mike Shayne, the famous detective?”

“I’m a detective and my name is Shayne.”

“Gee, my kid’ll be nuts when I tell him. He watches your T-V show every Friday night, but that actor doesn’t look like you much.”

Shayne grinned and got back in his car as a taxi drew up behind him.

He drove direct to police headquarters and went in.

15.

With a hot murder case on his hands, Chief Painter was in his office this Sunday morning, and Shayne wasn't kept waiting this time, although Painter welcomed him coldly: "What is it now, Shayne?"

He shrugged and said, "I've got some information on the Harris case that I want to give you. And I wondered what progress you were making... whether you have an autopsy report yet."

Painter sat very erect behind his desk and folded his arms across his chest. He was the only man Shayne had ever known who could successfully strut sitting down.

"The Harris case has become a homicide case, Shayne. Homicides are my business in Miami Beach. As long as Mrs. Harris was a missing person, her husband had a perfect right to hire any jack-leg detective he wanted to go out looking for her. But I've warned you before, Shayne. Keep your nose out of murder cases on the Beach. If you want information, try reading the paper for a change. I've issued orders to my entire department that they are not to discuss the case with you."

Shayne said, "I thought you might be interested in getting a line on the man Mrs. Harris met at the Gray Gull Monday night."

"I have a line on him, thank you, and I'm convinced he's our killer. I expect an arrest any moment now."

Shayne said mildly, "Yesterday you were equally convinced that as soon as you located her rented car you would have her and her paramour... your word, I believe. Well, Tim Rourke and I found the car for you... and no paramour." He spread out his hands and grinned.

"I have work to do, Shayne. If you have nothing more to say..."

"But I have. I told you I've got information which I'm going to give you, whether you want it or not."

"What sort of information?" Painter's tone was withering. "We have a full description of the killer and several witnesses who can identify him."

Shayne shook his head slowly. "You haven't got anything, Petey. Except the kind of crap you're always handing out to the papers."

"Now, by God to hell, Shayne..."

The redhead put his hands flat on Painter's desk and leaned forward to glare at him. "If I weren't a conscientious citizen and didn't feel sorry for

you, goddamn it, I'd walk out of here and leave you to continue running around in circles looking for a man who had nothing to do with her death whatsoever."

"Now, you listen to me, Shayne..."

"No, damn it, you listen to me. Send a couple of men over to the Mirabel Hotel to ask Tom Thurston, the parking lot attendant and Ned Brown, a doorman, what happened there Monday evening. I'm giving this to you for free because I hate murderers and particularly the sadistic kind who smash up anything as beautiful as Ellen Harris was. Now I'm walking out of your damned office, and, the next time I come back, it'll be to bring your killer along and throw him in your face."

He wheeled about and strode out, his cheeks trenched with anger.

He had begun to laugh at himself by the time he reached his car and climbed in. When would he ever learn to control himself and not let Painter upset him? This feud between the two of them had been going on for years and it always ended the same way.

He stopped at the first public telephone he saw, and called Benjamin at his hotel. When the Detroitier answered, he said, "Mike Shayne, Benjamin. Relax. Everything is under control. I'd stay away from the locality of the Mirabel, if I were you, but otherwise I don't think you have anything to worry about."

"I... see. I... ah..."

In the background Shayne could hear a strident female voice asking who was calling.

Shayne went on quickly, "How long are you staying in town?"

"We'd planned another week here."

"Good. Don't leave without letting me know and giving me your home address. I think the chances are a hundred to one against anything else coming up, but I've got to be covered."

"Of course, I understand. About the price..."

Shayne said, "Forget that. It was worth it to me to see the look on the face of a certain chief of detectives when I tossed it in his lap."

He hung up feeling good. Mr. Benjamin would return to Detroit with a lesson well learned, and remain a faithful husband for many years to come.

16.

Michael Shayne was alone in his apartment late that afternoon when Timothy Rourke breezed in carrying a thick wad of copy paper. The reporter tossed it on the table in front of Shayne and exclaimed dramatically, “Read all about it. Latest developments in the Harris murder case. Quote, Michael Shayne, the private detective who had been retained by Mr. Harris to search for his missing wife, retired from the case abruptly after Mrs. Harris’ corpse was found in the trunk of her rented car. We quote Chief Painter in an exclusive interview with this reporter: ‘Homicide is the exclusive business of the duly constituted law-enforcement officers. During the past twenty years of my tenure as Chief of Detectives of Miami Beach, no single murder case has been solved with outside assistance. Our own facilities are more than adequate to cope with any problems arising from a homicide committed within our jurisdiction, and any citizen who spends his money on highly-publicized “outside help” is warned that he might as well pour it down a sewer.’

“How do you like that, Mike?” He crossed with easy familiarity to the liquor cabinet on the wall and lifted down a bottle of bourbon.

Shayne grinned at him and said, “I was privileged to hear the same stuff from Petey’s own mouth this morning. Anything else in your story, Tim?”

“Plenty.” Rourke reentered the living room carrying the whisky bottle by the neck and a tall glass with ice cubes in it in the other hand. “Did you know, for instance, that Petey has established the fact that Mrs. Ellen Harris ditched her second admirer of the evening in front of the Mirabel about ten o’clock? The trail ends mysteriously after that point.”

“How did he establish that pertinent fact?” asked Shayne curiously.

“You know Petey. Routine police work, he insists. Aren’t you interested in the story told by the doorman and the parking attendant of the Mirabel?”

Shayne grinned irritatingly at his old friend. “Not particularly. I heard it before Petey did.” Shayne looked down at the paper and grimaced. “Don’t make me read your scribbling. First off: has he definitely established the identity of the dead woman?”

Rourke nodded. “He was just as suspicious as you were when he saw she was battered beyond recognition. He shot her fingerprints to New York,

and they went to the Harris apartment and established beyond a doubt that the dead woman is Mrs. Harris.”

Shayne frowned and clawed at his red hair at this information. “Did he release the autopsy report to you?”

“To the Press. It’s all there.” Rourke gestured to the paper on the table. “Salient facts are these. Death was from a bullet wound in her heart. Thirty-two caliber pistol. Bullet entered her body without piercing the gown she wore, but it was cut rather low and could easily have been pulled aside to admit entry of the bullet. But, get this, Mike. All those facial wounds were committed *after* she was shot. She was killed first, and then beaten up. Let’s see, now. What else?” Rourke stretched his long body out in a chair with a highball glass in his hand and owlshly contemplated the ceiling.

“The M.E. can’t be positive about time of death. He places it at either Monday or Tuesday. There was no blood at all in the trunk of the convertible under her body, indicating that it was at least an hour... probably two... after her death before she was squeezed in there. He guesses it at not less than two and not more than four hours after death when she was placed inside the trunk. One thing more that I think of. She had eaten a shrimp salad about two hours before death... and had a fair amount of alcohol inside her preceding that last meal.”

Rourke smiled happily at the redhead and demanded, “How do you like your pipeline into headquarters?”

Shayne said with a frown, “Are you certain about two things, Tim? They seem contradictory to me. If her face was definitely smashed up after death from a bullet wound, it looks like a positive attempt to establish false identification. Is the fingerprint evidence positive that she is Ellen Harris?”

“If you can trust the New York police department. Their report leaves no room for doubt. There’s all the other contributing proof of identity also. I don’t see how you can question it, Mike.”

“I guess I can’t. But it still sticks in my craw that her face was battered up *after* she was shot. That means something, Tim.”

“Sure. In my book it means some gink... or gal... who hated her because she was so beautiful.”

“Right. Which probably brings it a lot closer to home than some stranger she picked up Monday night.” He looked at his watch and muttered, “I’m hoping Jim Gifford will call from New York.”

“You going to keep on paying for long distance calls?” asked Rourke innocently. “Painter says you’re off the case.”

“You know damn well I’m not off it, Tim. Let’s see, you gave me the autopsy. I suppose Painter checked the husband’s story about driving down when he says he did.”

“Naturally. When a wife is killed, check the husband. Standard police procedure. He checked as far as possible on a Sunday, Mike. Harris stopped at the motel in Charleston Friday morning, and contacted a business client there. He checked out of the motel late afternoon, and mentioned that he intended driving through to Miami that night.”

Shayne nodded and said sourly, “He would have been a fool to try and fake that. And Mr. Herbert Harris may be lots of things, but I don’t believe he’s a fool.”

“You still make him for the job?”

“I don’t know, Tim.” Shayne got up and began to pace the floor, clawing at his unruly, red hair. “Depends a whole lot on what Jim Gifford digs up.”

As if in response, his telephone rang. He picked it up and said, “Shayne.” Then, “Fine, Jim. I’ve been waiting for it.”

He settled back to listen and make notes.

Gifford said, “I’ve been a busy boy. You’ll find it all on the expense account I send in. To begin with, if your job was done in Miami last Monday or Tuesday, as you said, then hubbie is in the clear. I’ve definitely established that Harris could not possibly have been in Miami either Monday or Tuesday night.”

Shayne scowled and said, “Go on.”

“Which is a little bit too bad because I did dig up a little more pay dirt on him than on his wife. She remains perfectly clean, so far as I can establish. But here are a few juicy items. When they were married, they took out a joint insurance policy on their lives, payable to each other. A hundred grand. I get strong hints that they live it up just about to the extent of his income. It’s Sunday and this is all personal stuff, but the consensus among their friends is that they haven’t any financial cushion to fall back on. I can check his credit rating and dig around at his office tomorrow, if you want more on that angle.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes, there is something else. Again, it’s rumors and hints, but there may be another woman involved. His personal secretary, named Ruth Collins. The word I get is that she’s another blonde like his wife, not quite so well-stacked, maybe, but a knockout for all that. I tried to contact her, but she’s on vacation. Left last Monday for two weeks at a resort hotel in the Catskills. Again, I can probably get more on the office romance tomorrow, if you want me to keep on.”

“I do, Jim. Definitely. Spend another day on it at least, and call my office tomorrow when ready. Follow through on the secretary particularly, Jim. Take a run out to the Catskills to look her over and see what gives.”

“Sure. I could do that this evening. You getting no forwarder down there, Mike?”

“There’s only this at the moment. She was shot first and *then* had her face beaten in viciously... either to delay identification, or because somebody just didn’t like her looks.”

Gifford said, “I see. I’ll work on it tomorrow and call you. Will you be home late tonight, if I do run into something hot in the Catskills?”

Shayne said, “I’ll be home,” and hung up. He scowled thoughtfully as he renewed his drink.

“Getting somewhere?” Rourke asked with interest.

“Dead ends, I’m afraid.” Shayne told him about the hundred-thousand-dollar insurance policy, payable to either husband or wife in the event of the other’s death, and the possibility that the Harris’ were sailing pretty close to the wind financially.

“And he may have a thing with his secretary at the office,” Shayne added, in a disgruntled voice. “Damn it, you never can trust a guy. I would have sworn he was sincere when he talked about his wife in my office. He had the guts to ask me if *I’d* ever been in love... and married.”

Rourke shrugged cynically. “All this begins to look like the usual answer.”

“Except,” gritted Shayne, “that the bastard appears to be in the clear. Jim Gifford says positively it was impossible for Harris to have been in Miami either Monday or Tuesday nights. You did say the M.E. places her death as no later than Tuesday?”

“Positively no later than Tuesday night... and he much prefers Monday. Maybe Gifford slipped up on that,” Rourke added hopefully. “If Harris did

have something like this planned when she left New York, he would have taken great pains to establish an alibi in advance.”

Shayne admitted, “Everybody can make a mistake. Even Jim Gifford. But he’s a hell of a careful operator, and he alibis Harris for those two nights so flatly that I’ll take his word for it until something else comes along.”

“Of course,” said Rourke, “it wouldn’t be the first time a husband hired someone to get rid of his wife... in order to collect an insurance policy and get into bed with another doll.”

“There’s always that.” Shayne sighed. “And those are the toughest ones to crack. One thing we’ll have in our favor. With a big policy like that up for grabs, we’ll have insurance investigators digging on it, too. They’ve got the money and facilities to go over Harris in New York with a fine-tooth comb. Have you talked to him, by the way?”

Rourke nodded. “Just after lunch today at the Beachhaven. He had just gotten the autopsy report, and he’s been getting some hints about the way she conducted herself around town Monday evening. Like you, Mike, I’d swear the guy had been pathetically in love with his wife, truly adored her, and is knocked for a loop by any suggestion that she would as much as look at another man. Yet it looks like he was carrying on with his secretary all the time.”

“We don’t know for sure. Jim didn’t have too much to go on in that direction.”

His telephone rang. He said, “Shayne,” and then, “*Jim?*” in a surprised voice.

“Yeh,” Gifford said, “I thought I’d better get right back to you, Mike. It begins to look like we may really have something by the tail.”

“What?”

“The Ruth Collins I mentioned. I called the hotel in the Catskills to see whether I could see her this evening. And... hold onto your hat, Mike. She isn’t there.”

“Where is she?”

“God knows. They don’t. They say she did have a reservation... made a month ago... starting Monday afternoon for two weeks. But she called up from New York the preceding Friday and said her plans had changed and she cancelled the reservation. That’s all they know.”

Shayne said, "I'll be damned. But you'd already checked that she left all right on her vacation Monday?"

"I talked to her room-mate on the telephone this afternoon, Mike. They share an apartment on the West Side. That's when she told me that Ruth left on Monday for the Catskills. I tried to call her back just now, but she's out."

Shayne said grimly, "Stay with it, Jim. Find her. And find out why she cancelled her reservation without telling her room-mate."

"I'll put a lot more on the expense account tomorrow," Gifford promised him blithely, and hung up.

Timothy Rourke's deep-set eyes glinted with real excitement when Shayne told him this latest development. "How much of this can I print in my story tomorrow?"

"Not a damned word about it until you check with me just before press time. I may have something else from Jim by then."

"It begins to shape up," said Rourke happily.

"Not in any shape I can see yet. It's like one of those ink blobs that psychologists use in their tests. Rohrschach, isn't it?"

"Something like that. What we both need is another drink... then maybe it'll begin to make sense to us." Rourke reached happily for the bourbon bottle.

17.

When Michael Shayne returned to his office from lunch the next afternoon, Lucy Hamilton sat demurely typing at her desk and did not glance up as he entered.

He went past her into his private office, and stopped in surprise at sight of a large, square cardboard box sitting in the center of his desk.

Lucy stopped typing and got up and silently followed him into his office. She found him leaning over the desk staring in perplexity at the label on the box which was addressed to him.

Standing in the doorway, she said, "I couldn't hear any ticking inside so I thought it was all right. But if you're going to start ordering cases of liquor delivered here to the office, Mr. Shayne, I think you'd do better to close this place up and move back into your hotel."

"I didn't order a case of liquor, Lucy. How did this get here?"

"Delivered by messenger," she told him sweetly. "It's several months until Christmas, but they do keep moving the season up, don't they?"

"I don't know anything about it," he declared, crossly. He moved around his desk, stopped with a frown and leaned over to remove a small, square envelope affixed to the side of the box with scotch tape. He opened it and took out a card and read aloud in a wondering voice: "With the compliments of Mr. and Mrs. John J. Benjamin." He chuckled and added, "The 'and Mrs.' is in parentheses, and I'll bet this would be a surprise to her if she saw it."

"Who is John J. Benjamin?"

"He is an upright gentleman from Detroit who, one time in an otherwise blameless life, had the temerity to look into the melting eyes of a female whom he found more beautiful than his lawfully wedded spouse... that's who John J. Benjamin is," Shayne told her blithely. "Let's open this here gift offering... and what'll you bet it's not domestic sherry?"

He took hold of a corner of the stapled cardboard top in strong fingers and ripped it back to display neat rows of bottles, each one carefully encased in white tissue paper. He lifted one out and stripped the paper off, and his bantering tone changed to one of pure incredulity and pleasure.

"Cordon Bleu, Lucy. A whole damn dozen of them. Why, the sweet, little guy. I'll be double-damned. How did he know that I'd positively drool

over such a gift?”

“He can probably read,” she suggested. “Brett Halliday has mentioned your taste in cognacs in several of his books.”

“Yeh, but I never thought Benjamin was the kind of guy... you never can tell... hell! let’s sample it.” He began opening the bottle he held in his hand.

“Michael! You just came back from lunch, where I’ll bet you had half a dozen drinks.”

“Sure, but not Cordon Bleu,” he agreed blandly. “You know what? We’re going to have to invest in some glasses to keep in the office for this. It’s sacrilege to drink it out of paper cups.”

“I certainly hope you won’t commit sacrilege, Michael,” she said sweetly. “I’ll go shopping for some glasses tomorrow morning...”

“It’s not all *that* sacrilegious.” He grinned at her infectiously as he set the open bottle down on the desk and turned to the water cooler to nest two paper cups together.

Filling the inner one reverently from the bottle, he held it aloft and murmured, “I thank you, Mrs. Benjamin.” He sank into the swivel chair behind his desk and said, severely, “So, to work. Get me Bob Merrill at the Beachhaven, Lucy.”

She said, “Yes, Mr. Shayne,” and left the room. Shayne peered after her dolefully. *Was* he drinking too much these days? He didn’t think so. In fact, he very probably was drinking too little. He hadn’t felt up to par for weeks. He kept having these recurrent periods... The buzzer sounded on his desk and he lifted his telephone and Lucy’s voice said, “I have Mr. Merrill, Michael.”

He said, “Bob?”

The chief security officer of the Beachhaven Hotel said cautiously, “Yeh, Mike?”

“Remember I asked you to run a close check on that desk clerk and bellboy of yours? What results?”

“I thought you were off this Harris case, Mike?”

Shayne chuckled and sampled some more Cordon Bleu. “Petey Painter thinks so, too. I’m not, Bob. Did anything show up?”

“Nothing.” Robert Merrill’s voice was coldly superior. “They’re both clean as a whistle. We haven’t turned up anything to indicate that Mrs. Harris came back here alive that night.”

Shayne said, “All right, Bob. Lower your hackles. This is Mike Shayne, remember?” He broke the connection and happily drank the rest of the Cordon Bleu from the inner paper cup.

Timothy Rourke breezed in to his office while he sat there, gazing at the empty cup. He came to a halt and thrust both hands deep into the patch pockets of his shabby jacket and whistled shrilly. “Lucy said you were hanging one on. She didn’t mention the fact that you were working your way through a case.”

Shayne waved his hand grandly toward the cardboard box on his desk. “Little token of esteem from a client. Guy’s got a hell of a taste in liquor, it seems. Try a bottle.”

“I’m on the edge of a deadline,” Rourke told him severely. “Last night, you told me to check before we went to press today, to see if I could print any of that stuff from Gifford in New York. So, I’m checking.”

Shayne very carefully poured more cognac into the nested cups. “The answer is no.” He peered at Rourke owlishly. “Gifford hasn’t called back. Situation remains unchanged. Ultimate evaluations are becoming momentarily clearer. Have a drink, Tim.”

Rourke said, “Later,” sitting down and looking at his old friend happily. “I remember a couple of times in the past when ultimate evaluations became clearer, Mike. Are you onto something this time?”

Michael Shayne made a sweeping gesture with his right hand. “We’re on the edge of a breakthrough, Timothy.” He drank more cognac.

His desk buzzer sounded. He lifted his phone and Lucy said, “Mr. Gifford on the wire from New York.”

He said, “Hello, Jim,” and Jim Gifford said, “I thought I might as well check in, Mike. I’ve been working.”

“So?”

“I talked with Ruth Collins’ room-mate for one thing. I don’t think she’s as surprised as she pretends to be that Ruth didn’t turn up at the Catskill hotel. I think she had a hunch she planned some other gambit for her vacation, but nothing definite. She didn’t *know* about an affair between Ruth and her boss, but I’m pretty sure she sensed it. In other words, take this for what it’s worth, Mike, I’d say that Ruth Collins and Harris had planned to spend most of these two weeks together while his wife was on vacation in Florida.”

“All right.” Shayne sounded and acted completely sober. “I’ve got that. You’ve been snooping around the office, Jim?”

“I have that. And there is plenty of low-down here on the Harris-Collins affair. Nothing overt, but... it was pretty generally accepted. What’s more important, everything I can find out about Herbert Harris puts him on the pretty fine edge financially. Nothing desperate, but... he’s a few weeks late paying his bills. He has two thousand a month drawing account from the business, and stays drawn in advance most of the time. Nothing really serious, but... I gather a hundred thousand insurance from his wife’s death wouldn’t be amiss.”

“Despite all that,” grated Shayne, “do you maintain that he could not possibly have done the job on her in Florida last Monday or Tuesday?”

“When I began to get this other stuff, I rechecked, Mike. He just couldn’t have. I can place him here... I’ll put it all in my report,” Gifford broke off. “No use running up a long distance bill. Take it from me, Harris was not in Miami murdering his wife last Monday or Tuesday.”

Shayne said, “All right, Jim. Send me a detailed report and a bill, and drop it.” He started to hang up, but was interrupted by Gifford.

“There’s one more very small thing. It’s so tenuous that I normally wouldn’t include it in a report... but you can have it for what it’s worth, Mike. There’s a faint suggestion, somehow, that his secretary, Ruth Collins, might have been holding something over his head. It comes mostly, I think, from those who knew his wife and couldn’t understand how he could even look at another gal. In order to justify it, I think, they suspect Ruth has some hold on him... though nobody is sure what it is. Now, I will hang up.” And he did.

Shayne dropped his phone onto its prongs and cheerfully emptied his paper cup. “We’re getting closer to the breaking point all the time. It’s already later, pal. Have a drink of this stuff and we’ll ratiocinate together.”

“I will if there’s nothing to add to my story as written.”

“Nothing to add at this time, Tim. The plot is thickening in New York... that’s all. Lucy!” he called out commandingly through the open door into the outer office.

She came to the doorway and stopped, shaking her head in mock despair when she saw Timothy Rourke filling a paper cup from the bottle in front of Shayne.

“Come on in and join the party,” Shayne ordered her. “We’re solving a murder case and I need the feminine point of view. And not an entirely sober point of view either.” He pointed a finger at her sternly. “Sobriety doesn’t solve murder cases. Not tough ones like this. We need inspiration. Got twelve whole bottles of the stuff, so drink some of it.”

She said, “You’re already tight as a tick,” but she smiled and got herself a paper cup and held it while he poured it half full.

He paid no attention to her remark, but said, “Now then. Let’s get our basic facts straight in our minds. Let’s go back to the Harris’ in New York. He’s a partner in a small brokerage firm drawing two grand a month and spending it. He’s married to a luscious blonde with a hundred-thousand-dollar insurance policy on her life, and he’s playing around on the side with his secretary, who’s also a blonde, but maybe not quite so luscious. But a hundred grand might make up for that difference.

“All right. So he insists his wife come to Florida alone for two weeks coincident with his secretary’s vacation from the office. Question number one: Did his wife know about secretary’s vacation? Did she care?”

He paused and Lucy promptly said, “No, to the first question. Sure, she would have cared. Any wife would.”

Shayne said, “Ah,” and filled his nested cups again. “At this point the meeting should consider the strange conduct of Mrs. Harris the moment she arrives in Miami. As soon as she reaches the hotel, she makes a point of telling every man she contacts that she is alone in town and more-or-less available. Let’s see, there were...” He ticked them off on his fingers, “The desk clerk, bellboy, bartender, Gene Blake, Benjamin. That last name is strictly off the record, Tim. Five of them altogether in the course of her first evening in town. What does that add up to, Lucy?” He took Ellen’s picture from his pocket and laid it on his desk. “Look at her,” he urged. “And you saw and talked to Harris here on Saturday morning. Here’s where we need an inspiration. Let’s all have a drink.”

He and Tim drank while Lucy knit her brows over the picture.

“Keep in mind, too, Lucy,” Shayne sounded completely sober suddenly, “that everything Gifford found out in New York paints the same picture of Ellen Harris that we got from her husband. A loving and loyal wife. Even back in her modeling days, before her marriage, she had a reputation for chastity. This is what has been bothering me from the beginning. How can a woman change so suddenly and blatantly?”

“She can’t,” he told them flatly. “It just isn’t in the books. So, what is the answer? I give you two possibilities. Either it *wasn’t* Mrs. Harris who flew to Miami Monday afternoon... or she drew attention to herself intentionally and with malice aforethought... for reasons which are at present unknown to us.”

He calmly sipped cognac and beamed at Rourke as the reporter objected. “But we know it *was* Mrs. Harris, Mike. A dozen people identified that picture. And the fingerprint report was positive.”

Shayne nodded agreeably. “We all know that fingerprints don’t lie and the New York police are infallible. All right, we’ll have to accept the fact that the dead woman is Mrs. Harris. We’ll come back to that later. If she was going around drawing attention to herself, giving men the impression that she could be had easily, *why?* What possible reason could she have had?” Neither of them answered him. He took a sip of cognac and declared, “That’s the crux of the problem. Let’s crack the crux. Come on, Tim. You need more inspiration. Hell’s bells, man, you and I have cracked more difficult crux’s than this in the past.” He leaned forward and poured fine old cognac into Rourke’s cup. “You, too, angel?”

Lucy put her hand over her cup and shook her head absently. “One answer is that she was deliberately creating this image of herself, knowing that she was going to be away from her hotel room for several days and fixing it so too much fuss wouldn’t be made about it. I’m not saying it very well, I’m afraid. But she would know the hotel would check around, if her room remained vacant, and, if they got reports from the hotel clerk and bellboy and bartender indicating that she was the sort of woman who probably *would*, be sleeping around, then they’d be inclined to sit back and let matters take their course.”

“Which is exactly what happened,” Shayne pointed out, happily. “Go to the head of the class, Lucy. Bob Merrill did get those reports about her, and since her room was on a credit card and her luggage still there, he did nothing about reporting her. So now we have a logical reason for the way she acted. And that brings us to another crux. *Why* did she plan to be away from her hotel for several days? Disregarding the obvious reason which doesn’t seem in character... what *other* reason could she have?”

Again, he received no answer. He sighed deeply and took another drink.

“Let’s not at this point disregard a strange coincidence. I correct myself. *Seeming* coincidence. I don’t believe in coincidences. Not in murder cases. I

refer to the fact that Ruth Collins disappeared from New York on Monday... the same day that Mrs. Harris flew to Miami and checked into the Beachhaven. She told her room-mate she was going to the Catskills on Monday to stay for two weeks, and she ostensibly did so. But she had cancelled her reservation the Friday before, and didn't turn up. So far as we know, no one has seen her since. Where did she go? Where is she now?"

Timothy Rourke sat erect excitedly. "Didn't you tell me that Gifford mentioned a strong resemblance between her and Mrs. Harris? Both blondes and beautiful and well-stacked?"

Shayne nodded with a grin. "I wondered when you were going to think about that."

"But, hell, it's impossible," Rourke objected, slumping back and taking a sip of cognac. "Too many people definitely identified this picture. If there was *that* close a resemblance, Gifford would have told you."

Shayne nodded. "Yeh. I don't think they were identical twins or anything like that. I still wonder where Ruth Collins has disappeared to."

Lucy Hamilton hesitated and then murmured, "If all those people could be mistaken about the picture... but, no." She shook her head decisively. "We know the dead woman is Mrs. Harris."

"We keep coming back to that," agreed Shayne. "And that brings us to another major question. *Why* was she beaten so as to be unidentifiable after she was shot? Everyone knows about fingerprints these days. If you really want to render a body unidentifiable, you have to cut off or mutilate the fingers."

"A stupid murderer might not realize this," Rourke suggested. "If he knew that her fingerprints weren't on record, he might think there'd be no way of checking... without realizing how simple it would be for police to get comparison prints from the apartment in New York."

"Sorry, Tim. I don't think Herbert Harris is stupid. In fact, I'm beginning to believe he came awful damn close to committing a perfect crime."

"You think he did it?"

"His wife is dead," Shayne said flatly. "He stands to collect a hundred thousand dollars from an insurance policy. He isn't too solvent, and he has another woman on the string. That's just too damned many coincidences for me to stomach. Yes. I think Herbert Harris is our boy. And, by God, I'm beginning to get a faint glimmering of how he pulled it off."

“How?” Lucy and Rourke spoke the word simultaneously. Shayne emptied his cup of cognac, marshaling his thoughts. He spoke very slowly, as though testing each word as he went along.

“Let’s suppose Mrs. Harris didn’t get on that plane at all in New York Monday afternoon. Suppose she was already dead in the New York apartment when the plane took off with Ruth Collins aboard, using Mrs. Harris’ ticket, carrying her luggage and handbag complete with credit card, and even wearing her rather distinctive wedding ring.

“When Harris gets back from the airport, after seeing Ruth off, it would be about time for him to put her in the trunk of his automobile, before rigor mortis set in. Ruth would make his alibi perfect. She plans to disappear Monday night, and he takes great care in New York to appear in the right places at the right times to make it impossible for him to have been in Miami either of those two crucial nights... as Gifford reported. He’s a partner in the brokerage firm, so it wouldn’t be too difficult for him to arrange the trip on Thursday night to Charleston. And it would appear perfectly natural for him to decide on the spur of the moment to drive on to Miami to spend the weekend with his wife.

“Wait a minute, Tim.” Shayne raised a big hand to still the reporter. “I know what you’re going to say, but let me think this out my own way. Ruth Collins had disappeared from the Beachhaven Monday night in a manner that makes two things pretty certain. One is, that no one will seriously look for her until Harris turns up and raises the alarm Saturday morning. The other is that when the body is found in the rented car, she has cleverly laid several false trails that Monday evening, and the police won’t really be surprised that she got herself murdered.

“Safest place to leave the rented car for a few days is in the hotel parking lot with a guest sticker on it. So we have Harris driving in from Charleston early Saturday morning, meeting his secretary with the convertible at a prearranged spot and transferring his wife’s body from his car to the convertible. She drives it back to the hotel lot and parks it again, and then goes back to wherever she’s been in hiding since Monday night. So, now we know why the face was beaten. To keep people who had seen Ruth Collins from failing to recognize the corpse. Harris knew damned well that fingerprints would prove the dead woman his wife. He had to have that in order to collect the insurance. How’s that for inspiration?” He beamed at

them happily and refilled his cup, splashing cognac on his desk in the process.

“It’s a hell of an inspiration,” Rourke said sourly.

“Everything fits,” Shayne insisted. “Remember, there wasn’t any blood in the trunk of the convertible. And remember that the people at the hotel, who might get a look at the body, had only seen the supposed Mrs. Harris briefly a few days before. Gifford describes Ruth Collins as similar in coloring and size, so they would accept the dead body as the woman they had seen.”

“But the picture, Mike.” Rourke stabbed his finger at it angrily. “You promised you wouldn’t pull identical twins out of the hat.”

“He’s right, Michael,” Lucy agreed gravely. “For a minute I thought you almost had it. And there’s the red dress, too. It was identified as the one she wore out of the Beachhaven.”

“How can you identify a particular dress?” scoffed Shayne. “In fact, that’s another point in favor of my theory. In planning this whole thing, all Harris had to do was to order a duplicate of the red dress from the shop where she bought it, and have it in readiness to dress the corpse in before putting her in his car. Damn it, Tim! Remember you told me the M.E. said the shot fired into her heart had not penetrated the dress, and you suggested it could have been pulled aside to let the bullet enter. Sure, I suppose it could have been that way. But it’s a hell of a lot more likely that she was wearing something else when she was shot, and the red dress slipped onto her afterward.”

“There’s still the indisputable evidence of the picture. Both this one and the other pose Painter has got.”

“Not very much evidence is really indisputable, Tim. It’s just come clear to me, goddamn it!” He pounded the desk happily. “Your mention of Painter’s picture broke it through to me. Sure. Harris handed out two snapshots of his wife which he just happened to have in his wallet. But, what do we actually know about those pictures? Only that Harris said they were of his wife. Suppose they’re pictures of Ruth Collins instead? Now, by God, ultimate evaluations are perfectly clear.” He exultantly poured his cup full of cognac and drank half of it off with a triumphant flourish.

“Wait a minute, now.” Dawning comprehension was beginning to replace the stubborn disbelief on Rourke’s face. “By God, Mike. By God, it would work.”

Lucy was nodding too, and her face was rapt as she held out her cup. “Let me have one more drink and I think I’ll understand exactly what you’re talking about.”

Shayne poured her cup full. Timothy Rourke got to his feet slowly, his eyes glittering with happy excitement. “Harris is taking off for New York this afternoon. He told me he planned to drive straight through with maybe a stop-off for a few hours to sleep. His wife was cremated this morning. If we call Painter, it may not be too late to grab him.”

“On what grounds?”

“Well, hell. You just outlined the whole thing.”

“In theory, Timothy. What do you think Painter would say about one of Mike Shayne’s drunken theories? No, let Harris take off. He’s not going to disappear. He’s a very contented and happy man right now. Everything has gone off without a hitch as he planned. His wife’s body is cremated, and there’s a hundred grand check to be collected from the insurance company. We need a picture of Ellen Harris that we know *is* a picture of her. Get Tim Gifford on the phone, angel.”

Lucy went in to her desk to put the call through. Rourke looked at his watch, pacing the floor excitedly. “It’s too late to hit today’s edition.”

“Save it for tomorrow, and you’ll have the whole story with a picture of Ellen Harris to prove it.”

Shayne’s buzzer sounded and he lifted his phone. “Jim? One more small chore and we’re going to hang a murder rap on Herbert Harris.”

“But I’ve told you, Mike...”

“Forget everything you’ve told me. Just do this one thing. Get me a recent picture of Ellen Harris pronto and send it airmail special delivery. There should be plenty around, with her being an ex-model.”

“Sure. They showed me a batch at the agency where she used to work.”

“Get one of Ruth Collins, too, if you can. Be damn sure to mark each one of them carefully, which is which. But if you can’t get Collins in time, see that one of Mrs. Harris gets on a plane tonight. I’ll be waiting for it in my office tomorrow morning.”

Gifford said, “Will do,” and hung up. Shayne reached for the half-emptied bottle of Cordon Bleu and drank from the neck of it.

18.

Michael Shayne reached his office at exactly nine o'clock the next morning, just as Lucy was unlocking the door. He was clear-eyed and cheerful, and when she mockingly said, "No hangover, Michael?" he looked properly shocked.

"On Cordon Bleu? That would be sacrilegious. By the way, when are you going shopping for office glassware?"

"Maybe when I go out for lunch." She preceded him into the office, but he caught her by the arm and swung her about.

"Go get some now. I'm sure Tim will be along in a few minutes, and we should be getting a Special Delivery very soon. We're going to have some celebrating to do and common, old paper cups just won't do. Get some snifters. Not the big ostentatious kind, but regular ones... you know." He cupped his hands to indicate the size.

Lucy laughed and said, "Genuine crystalware, I presume?"

"Nothing less. Get half a dozen, angel, to allow for breakage." He pushed her out of the office exuberantly, and went through the door to gaze fondly at the cardboard case of Cordon Bleu still sitting in the middle of his desk.

When Lucy returned with a large paper-wrapped parcel half an hour later, she found Timothy Rourke sitting with her employer, and they had a single bottle of cognac on the desk in front of them with no paper cups in sight. The rest of the case had been modestly removed from sight, and Shayne said reproachfully, "We've been waiting, Lucy. It took you long enough."

"No picture yet?"

Shayne looked at his watch. "Any minute now... if Jim got it on a plane." He helped her open the package and take out half a dozen spherical glasses of thin, rock crystal, which she insisted on rinsing at the water cooler before allowing liquor to be poured in them. She dried and polished them lovingly with paper tissues from her desk, and set two of the shining receptacles in front of the cognac bottle just as a voice called, "Special Delivery," from the outer office.

"Perfect timing," beamed Shayne, reaching for the bottle. "Bring it in, angel."

She hurried out, and reentered with a large manila envelope marked PHOTOGRAPHS. DO NOT BEND. She tore it open and pulled out two thin sheets of cardboard with two glossy studio photographs between them.

They were two poses of the same young woman. A very beautiful young woman... and very definitely the same young woman whose picture Herbert Harris had already furnished them.

The trio stared down at the two photographs in stricken silence. Shayne opened the center drawer of his desk and took out one of the blown-up prints of Ellen Harris and laid it beside the two which had just arrived.

There was not the faintest doubt in the minds of any one of the three that the same woman had posed for all of the pictures.

Shayne snorted loudly and lifted a snifter of cognac high into the air. "Here's to more and better theories." He drank deeply.

"That's not the way to use a snifter," Lucy protested. "You're supposed to..."

"Right now, I'm supposed to seek inspiration," Shayne told her grimly.

Timothy Rourke nodded solemnly and lifted his glass high. "To the clarification of ultimate evaluations," and tossed half of it down.

"I don't understand, Michael," Lucy said hesitantly. "You made it all so clear and logical yesterday. And I thought about it during the night and I just *knew* you were right." She puckered her forehead and looked down at the prints again, then drew in her breath sharply. "If one of those is of the secretary..." She turned them both over. On the back of each print Gifford had sent was printed boldly: "*Miss Ellen Terry one month before her marriage to Herbert Harris. Said to be an excellent likeness.*"

"No such luck," muttered Shayne. "No identical twins in this one."

Lucy peered inside the Manila envelope and said, "There's a note inside." She withdrew a single sheet of paper with a typed message which she read aloud:

"Mike. I enclose two poses of Ellen Harris taken shortly before her marriage. Unable to locate a picture of the elusive Ruth Collins, but probably can, if you want me to keep trying. It's signed, Jim," she ended, dropping it to the desk.

Shayne grimaced and seated himself in his swivel chair. He leaned forward with his forearms on the desk, idly turning the cognac snifter in his hands. He said slowly, "I've always distrusted theorizing. But this one seemed to fit so damn perfectly. What else *does* fit?" he demanded. "Why

did Ruth Collins disappear from New York last Monday afternoon, if she didn't come down here masquerading as Ellen Harris? Where is she all this time, damn it? If that *was* Ellen Harris at the Beachhaven... and I guess there isn't any doubt about it now... why did she set herself up as a sitting duck for murder? Don't tell me," he groaned, "that she loved her husband so much she set out deliberately to get herself bumped off, just so he could collect insurance on her and have his secretary, too. This, I refuse to accept."

"I guess I haven't got any new lead for today," Rourke muttered morosely.

"Not unless Painter's got one for you. Talked with him lately?"

"Just before I came here. For the first time in his life Petey cautiously admitted that all his clues had petered out. He's about ready to mark it off as the work of a homicidal maniac."

Shayne tossed off the rest of his cognac and set the fragile glass down gently. He lifted both of his palms to his face and said in a queerly subdued voice, "Both of you go in the other room. I've got thinking to do." They looked at each other and Rourke shook his head and led the way out. Shayne sat there for a long time with bowed head and closed eyes. There was a faint smile of satisfaction on his rugged features when he got up and went into the outer room where Rourke was perched on the low railing, talking quietly to Lucy. They both looked up at him expectantly.

He said, "Call the airport, Lucy. Book me on the next jet flight to New York that has a vacancy."

She nodded alertly and started dialling. Rourke slid off the railing and demanded, "Another brainstorm, Mike? You got another answer?"

Shayne said, "It's a brainstorm all right."

"What is it?"

Shayne shook his red head and said flatly, "No. I made a damned fool out of myself yesterday by jumping to conclusions without any proof." He drew in a deep breath. "Think where I'd be today if I had let you call Painter and persuade him to hold Harris."

"But you didn't."

"I shot off my mouth to you and Lucy," Shayne growled. "I sat in there and guzzled cognac and outdid Sherlock Holmes with my deductive prowess. This one, I'm keeping strictly to myself."

Lucy told him, "The first flight that has space will put you in International at four-forty this afternoon."

He nodded and said, "Fix it. Then get Gifford on the phone." He stalked back to his desk, picked up the cognac bottle and corked it tightly, deposited it in a drawer of a filing cabinet behind his desk. Turning back to see Rourke observing him from the doorway, he said with a wry smile:

"Mighty potent stuff... Cordon Bleu. Induces delusions of grandeur and pipedreams. I'm strictly off the stuff until I tie this case up in a knot."

"Which you're going to do in New York this afternoon?"

"Which I *hope* to do in New York this afternoon," Shayne corrected him.

His buzzer sounded and he lifted the phone. "Jim? Those were mighty pretty pictures you sent me, but they were a real monkey wrench. No chance you made a mistake, huh?"

He listened a moment and nodded glumly. "All right, Mike Shayne rides again. You got a pretty good pipeline into the New York Police Department?"

"Couple of guys there will give me the time of day... if I pay for it," Gifford told him cautiously.

Shayne grinned at the phone. "I know you better than that, Jim. Listen. I'm arriving by jet at International Airport four-forty this afternoon. Lucy will give you the airline and flight number. I want you to meet me, Jim. Wangle a duplicate set of Ellen Harris' fingerprints from Headquarters. Miami Beach sent them up for positive identification of the body. And have a fingerprint man at the airport with you. It would be nice if you could bring along the same man who took the comparison prints from the Harris apartment in New York."

"Would you like the Police Commissioner to come along, too?" Gifford demanded sarcastically.

Shayne said cheerfully, "Bring him, by all means, if he wants to come along. See you at four-forty, Jim. Lucy, give him the flight dope."

He hung up.

"Won't you give me an inkle, Mike?" pleaded Rourke. "You're beginning to look as though you'd swallowed a whole cage full of canaries."

"That's the reason you don't get even an inkle," Shayne told him firmly. "I felt this same way yesterday afternoon, and look what happened."

19.

Jim Gifford, who met Michael Shayne with a hearty handclasp at the International Airport in New York that afternoon, was a big, smiling man with an intelligent face and an easy grace. They had known each other since the old days when both were operatives for Worldwide, and had retained a mutual respect and liking for each other after they both branched out on their own.

With Gifford was a short, somewhat stout man with an olive complexion, a bushy, black mustache and an affable smile. Gifford introduced him as Angelo Fermi, a detective on the New York police force, and he told Shayne as the three of them made their way out of the crowded terminal toward Gifford's car in the parking lot, "Only inducement I could hang in front of Angelo's nose to get him out here this afternoon, was that that you'd tell him how to get a Fermi show on television."

Shayne grinned and told the New York detective, "You wouldn't like it. If you ever watched my show, you'd know why I don't."

"I'd like the money that is in it," Fermi told Shayne with conviction. "I have this idea for a series built entirely on the use of fingerprint evidence to solve otherwise insoluble cases. Everything authentic and taken from the records. I have been gathering material for twenty years, but I do not know how to approach the networks." His liquid black eyes were hopeful.

Shayne said, very seriously, "I'll tell you what, Fermi. If this thing comes off this afternoon the way I think it will, Brett Halliday will be up here getting the dope from you to help him make a book out of it. Brett is the one who knows all the T-V angles. You talk it over with him and he'll give you the straight dope." Gifford had stopped beside a plain, black sedan in the parking lot, and was opening the door on the driver's side. Shayne let Fermi get in first, and followed him. "You've got a set of Ellen Harris's fingerprints?" he asked as Gifford pulled out of the lot.

"Yes. And my kit in back." Fermi hesitated, his dark eyes alertly curious. "Jim has not told me exactly why I am here with you this afternoon."

Shayne spoke past him to Gifford at the wheel. "I want to go to Ruth Collins' place on the West Side first. Will her room-mate be home?"

“I think so.” Gifford looked at his watch. “The only time I’ve been able to catch her there is between five and seven in the evening.”

“Are you the one who was assigned to check the dead woman’s prints in the Harris apartment?” Shayne then asked Fermi.

“Yes. A routine assignment. Do you have any question about the validity of the identification, Mr. Shayne?”

Shayne said, “I’m sure you know your job. But there’s some hocus-pocus here that I hope I’ve got figured out. I don’t want to tip my hand beforehand to what I’m hoping to find because I don’t want you to be influenced in advance. Let’s just say I want you to do the same sort of job on Ruth Collins’ apartment as you did on the Harris apartment last Sunday for the Miami Beach police.”

At that time in the afternoon, Gifford chose the Triborough Bridge as his best approach to the upper West Side, and he was able to make fairly good time through traffic so that it was slightly before six o’clock when he drew up in front of an old four-story brown-stone building on West 76th Street.

They all got out, and Angelo Fermi got his black leather case from the back seat that looked like a doctor’s bag, and they mounted the steps leading into a small foyer with mailboxes on either side. Gifford checked the boxes and found one with the typewritten names, Collins-Cranshaw, under the number 1-C.

He pressed the bell button under the number, and after a moment there was a buzz from the automatic door release. Shayne turned the knob and led the way into a dim-lighted hallway with numbered doors on either side. A door on the left-hand side opened down the hallway and a striking brunette peered out. Shayne was in front and close to her, and he asked, “Miss Cranshaw?”

“Yes... I’m... Kitty Cranshaw.” She peered curiously past him at Gifford and Fermi, and half-closed the door, asking, “What is it?”

“Police, Miss Cranshaw,” Shayne told her pleasantly. “About your room-mate who appears to be missing. May we come in and ask a few questions?”

“Have you found Ruth?” She opened the door and drew back to let the three men file past her into a large, high-ceilinged room in a pleasant state of disorder.

Shayne said, "Not exactly, Miss Cranshaw. It's a matter of identification," he explained. "This is Detective Fermi, who would like to collect some fingerprints. And Inspector Gifford," he added casually.

"Fingerprints of whom?" she demanded suspiciously, following them into the sitting room.

"You first, Miss Cranshaw, if you don't mind," Fermi said briskly, crossing to a center table and opening his bag. "Just for the record, so we'll be able to definitely distinguish between your room-mate's prints and yours." He removed some articles from his bag and placed them on the table. "It'll only take a moment, if you'll just come here and put your fingertips on this inked pad."

Miss Cranshaw stood back with her hands nervously clasped behind her. "Isn't that an invasion of personal privacy? I think I've read that no one can be forced to have their fingerprints taken for the record unless they are charged with a serious crime. You're not charging me with any crime, are you?"

"This isn't actually for the record, Miss Cranshaw." Fermi smiled disarmingly. "We have to positively identify Miss Collins' fingerprints from those we can find here, and in order to do so, we must have a set of yours, so they may be eliminated. You should be able to understand that." He didn't say, "*Even you,*" but it was implicit in his tone.

She smiled dubiously and said, "Well, I guess so." She advanced hesitantly and let him expertly ink the tips of her fingers and get her prints on his pad, and he thanked her and then asked, "Do you have separate bedrooms?"

"Yes. Ruth's is there." She pointed to a closed door, "On the right. I don't think... I've been in there since she left."

Fermi thanked her and disappeared with his bag through the door she indicated. She turned to Shayne and Gifford and asked in a worried voice, "What have you found out about Ruth? Didn't she go to the Catskills at all?"

"Apparently she didn't, Miss Cranshaw. In fact..." He hesitated. "Detective Shayne is from Miami, Florida," he told her firmly. "There is some reason to think... did she ever say anything to you to indicate that she might be planning to go to Florida instead of the Catskills? Did you notice, for instance, whether she packed things more suitable for the South than the mountains?"

“No,” she said instantly. “I didn’t notice that at all. Quite the contrary. What do you think has happened to her?”

Before Gifford could reply, Fermi pussy-footed back from the bedroom. He carried his bag closed and there was a look of satisfaction on his face. He nodded to Shayne and Gifford and said, “All right as far as I’m concerned.”

“Get what we wanted?” Shayne asked.

“Plenty.” He went briskly toward the door and the other two men followed him out leaving a very perplexed Miss Cranshaw standing in the middle of the room staring after them.

20.

When Jim Gifford pulled in to the curb in front of a large apartment building on the East Side, he nodded with satisfaction at a dark blue 1962 Buick parked directly in front of his car. "Our friend, Harris, made it all right. That's his Buick right there."

"How do you know it's his?" Shayne asked as the three men got out. "You've never seen it... or him either."

Gifford chuckled as they walked to the entrance. "I know his license number. Hell, I can tell you the color of the socks he wore on his last birthday."

There was no doorman. They entered a parqueted foyer with neat rows of shining brass mailboxes. Detective Fermi, who had been there before, said, "I think it was Seven D," and glanced at a mailbox to confirm the number. He nodded and led the way to a self-service elevator that was waiting, and they went up to the seventh floor.

Shayne pushed the button on 7-D, and after a moment Herbert Harris opened the door. He was in his shirtsleeves and tieless; his face was unshaved and haggard. He had a highball glass in his hand, and he looked at Shayne and the others in disbelieving astonishment. "Mr. Shayne! What on earth are you doing in New York?"

"You hired me to do a job," Shayne told him levelly, moving forward while Harris backed away into a large, pleasant and very neat sitting room. A suitcase stood near the bathroom door with Harris' jacket draped over it. "You paid me a fair-sized retainer," he added. "And I intend to earn it. These are two New York detectives, by the way. Gifford and Fermi."

Harris nodded politely, but it was evident that he was more puzzled than before. "I hired you to help find my wife when she was missing," he blurted out. "I'm perfectly satisfied with the results you got."

Shayne said, "I'm not. I'm still looking for her, Harris."

"You're still... looking?" he asked weakly. "But she... her funeral was yesterday morning."

Shayne shook his head. "Not your wife's funeral. The body of Ruth Collins was cremated in Miami yesterday morning. Where is your wife hiding?"

“This is utterly fantastic.” Harris dropped into a chair, rubbing the back of his left hand across his eyes. “Have you gone mad? Dozens of people in Miami identified my wife’s photograph.”

Shayne said easily, “Oh, it was your wife who was in Miami Monday evening drawing attention to herself. But it wasn’t her body in the trunk of the convertible she had rented. That was Ruth Collins.”

“But she... it *was* Ellen,” Harris cried out desperately. “The Miami Beach police checked her fingerprints here in New York to get a positive identification.”

Shayne said, “I know all about that. Detective Fermi, here, is the man who came to this apartment to get comparison prints. Tell us how you went about it, Angelo.”

Fermi shrugged and said, “The place was neat as a pin, just as it is now. Of course, there are always prints to be found if a place has been lived in, no matter how carefully it’s been cleaned. I dusted in the bathroom and bedroom, particularly a dressing alcove there that the wife would normally use. I found plenty of clear prints, all about a week old, that corresponded exactly with the set sent up by Miami Beach. There were also a man’s prints, and a few of another woman which I assumed to be the maid.”

“There you are,” said Harris. “How can you go against what this detective tells you?”

“I don’t go against it. I just have a different explanation. I’m sure that you and your wife cleaned up all her prints as carefully as you could before she left for Florida on Monday. Then you brought your secretary in after you left the office that day. Ruth Collins had left her apartment that afternoon with her bag packed, ostensibly for a two week vacation in the Catskills. Instead, she moved in here very happily to play house with you for two weeks. You encouraged her to use the bathroom, of course, and your wife’s dressing table. When you were sure the evidence was complete, you shot her in the heart, Harris, and then beat her face in beyond recognition. You must have really hated her to do that sort of job. What was she holding over your head? Something from the office? Had you been dipping into company funds? Is that why you needed the insurance money on your wife so desperately that you’d murder another woman to get it?”

“No, no, *no!*” Harris cried out wildly against the flood of accusations. He jumped to his feet, dropping his glass on the rug. “This can’t be happening to me. It’s the most insane thing I ever heard. The autopsy

showed that my wife's body had been placed in the trunk of the convertible within a couple of hours after her death... not later than Tuesday night."

Shayne said coldly, "The autopsy indicated that her body had been crammed into the trunk of *some* car within a couple of hours after her death. But it wasn't the convertible, and it wasn't in Miami, Harris. It was the trunk of your Buick right here in New York. The New York police have your car down at their chemical laboratory right now," he ended disgustedly. "They're making tests that will prove beyond a shadow of doubt that your secretary's body spent four days in the back of your car before it was transferred to the convertible in Miami early Saturday morning.

"We've just come from Ruth Collins' apartment where Fermi found dozens of fingerprints proving that the dead woman had lived there. Now, where is your wife hiding? We have to arrest her as an accessory before and after the fact, and a co-conspirator in the premeditated murder of Ruth Collins. If there's any justice at all, she'll go to the chair with you."

"She's... oh, my God, she's..." Herbert Harris dropped into a chair and covered his face with his hands and began sobbing.

Shayne shrugged and told Fermi, "He's all yours. Peter Painter isn't going to like this one little bit, but the crime was committed in your jurisdiction. Come on, Jim, let's find a bar where they stock Cordon Bleu."