



I know a
famous
person!

NOTORIETY

G I L O R M I N I

The Bronx, New York, nineteen fifty-nine, stark white slate skies overcast a storefront-lined street. Across the shifting waters of the Hudson stand the skyscrapers on the island of Manhattan, drearily nestled. Of those few working-class people managing to get on with the urban monotony of the early morning, one stood out. She was Miss Betsy Burkes. An attractive young woman, tall and healthfully slender, she made a call from within a telephone booth set adjacent to the sidewalk of the storefront-lined street. The plainly dress she wore in no way distracted from her effortless beauty. A pair of nylons hugged her legs. Dark seams ran a straight line down the back of her calves—the only portion of her legs visible below the opening of her molted skirt. Motionless, she lingered. Her eyes focused absentmindedly past the glass on some unseen point outside the booth.

In silence Betsy held, gazing. The phone rang in her ear, a hollow, repetitive drone. She remained for a short duration, entranced, pensively awaiting an answer. An autumn breeze threw up dry, dead leaves brushing them along the curb outside the glass box. The call went through, she turned away sharply, mumbled a few indistinguishable words, and hung up. She exited, sliding the booth's folding

door open as she stepped out onto the sidewalk.

Betsy approached the imposing entrance to a modern, newly built bank, a towering expanse of solid plate-glass. Her mirrored image walked steadily in pace beside her, a reflection in the bank's windows. The narrow-waist fit of her dress glimpsed in the glass accentuated her figure. Beyond her dim image, a uniformed guard was positioned within the lobby at the entryway. He was armed at the hip with a holstered revolver, his back turned to the window. The blank stare of Betsy's face gleamed at her through the glass entryway doors as she casually reached out to open them.

Betsy patiently waited for a teller, last in a long line of customers. She went about preparing a check that she had removed from her purse. At the central island, in her place where the queue ran, she used one of the cheap ballpoint pens secured to the desk by a chain to methodically fill out her deposit slip. The first letters she formed were without ink. She had to scribble at the margin before she could write.

There was a sharp break in the silence. The definitive sound of the glass entryway doors being knocked open echoed loudly throughout the lobby of the bank. Betsy, engrossed by the

task at hand, was caught completely unaware. The disturbance came as a shock; all attention was drawn toward the bank's entrance. There, a man brandishing a pistol wrestled the security guard's gun arm, denying him the removal of the holstered weapon.

Those with an inkling of what was about to transpire froze in place, unable to react in time to thwart it. Any in the bank not so attentive awoke with a jolt. A brief outcry had arisen only to be cut short by the piercing cry of a woman and the deafening crack and sudden white flash of a single gunshot. What was to follow eventuated in the twinkling of a second; a sequence of jumbled actions addled together to form one barely cohesive picture.

The blank stare of Betsy's face gleamed at her, a reflection in the bank's window; in actuality her face was at the glass, drawn unnervingly close, pressed firmly against it and distorted. Everyone had been funneled to the back of the bank and Betsy taken hostage. Fear and confusion were discernable in her gaze—when abruptly her head was jerked way back. The man was fierce and could not be reasoned with. The authorities were closing in on the bank and Betsy was his only leverage. He flattened her face against the glass, pulled her back, and threw her forward, her head connecting solidly with the window. Her head,

slowly, was drawn back by the man, only to reemerge after an excruciating pause—a smeared blur of loosely matted hair impacted so violently against the entryway doors that the glass cracked.

2

The authorities were positioned throughout. Further facilitation of the street was not permitted. The precaution of cordoning off the entire length of the block was taken and the redirection of traffic was arranged in an attempt to dissuade pedestrians from the scene. A large crowd of onlookers, newspaper reporters, and numerous cameramen had gathered, barely held off by the painted wooden police barricades set along the street and sidewalk. Betsy sat in a daze at the back of an ambulance. A paramedic dressed the minor scrapes and bruises to her face and forearms. There was a police officer present, a young greenhorn from the local district, who obtained her statement. He was sympathetic, essentially making her statement for her.

“Miss Burkes,” led the lawman in an officious tone. Pencil in hand, he scribbled onto a carbon pad he held out in front of his person. “The assailant...he was forcing you against your will. Is that right, ma’am?”

Betsy was distant though responsive. “Yes.

After he forced us all to the back of the bank.”

“And this was at gunpoint, ma’am?”

Betsy nodded. “It was horrible.”

The paramedic concluded his work, demonstrating with the application of a cooling pad to Betsy’s forehead. “If you would allow me,” he took her hand to show her where to hold it. “Keep pressure on it like this, miss.” and reassured her, “I’ll be just over here if you need anything.”

“Thank you.”

The officer continued, clearing his throat, “And he caused you these injuries?”

“H—he was going to kill me. He shot the security guard. When he threw me down, I didn’t—I only—”

Betsy began to tremble.

“It’s all right, ma’am. It’s all you could have done to protect yourself.”

The officer’s reassurance that she was not responsible helped her to regain control of herself. She blankly parroted, “It was all I could do to protect myself.”

A vacancy entered her gaze. Betsy stared off into the distance. The initial shock had anesthetized her from any detailed recollection of the incident. It was natural enough and preferable for her to block the memory. With the officer’s inquest she was forced to recall the details, and with difficulty related the

event.

3

The bank lobby was a bustle with police activity. A coroner handled the two corpses as a police photographer snapped pictures of the crime scene. Off to the side, Detective Henry Beyle concluded an interview with a witness, a gentleman in a three-piece suit—the bank’s manager.

“Is there anything else you can add, sir?”

“We were all scared to death,” the middle-aged, well-groomed man responded. “That maniac came in, and right off he started shooting.”

Henry openly wore his gold shield pinned to the outside breast pocket of his blue suit jacket, prominently displaying it. A twenty-year veteran on the force, the scene before him seemed self-evident, and the detective’s handling of it was somewhat lackadaisical.

“You’ve all been through a lot,” he concluded. “You should go join the others now.”

The gentleman persisted, “We were all sure he was going to kill her. What she did was brave.”

In the background, the police photographer busily positioned himself at various angles throughout the room, unobservant of the

detective, who grew increasingly irritated by the burst of the flashbulb and whir of the camera each instance the film advanced. At one point he crowded the detective.

“Do you mind?” Henry snapped, backing the fellow off.

The photographer respectfully left an adequate amount of space for the detective to work. Satisfied, Henry continued with his witness.

“She’s a very brave woman,” was his verdict. “You can go now, sir. Thank you.”

Henry turned to another detective, his partner, Richard Styke, who diligently wrote out a report attached to a clipboard. Styke was a less experienced cop than Henry and more soft-spoken.

“He held her there, at the front entrance to the lobby,” Styke pointed out. “This guy here in the dove-grey blazer, this was one Frank Scholetti. A three-time loser. No serious priors. Petty stuff really. A hothead with muddled aspirations. He had picked the woman out randomly from the crowd. He grabbed the woman...let me see here,” he made a check of the report on the clipboard. “Burkes, Miss Betsy Burkes. He grabbed her, roughed her up some. The cracked glass, evidently.”

On the marbled tile floor of the lobby, behind the pair, was the uniformed guard, shot dead,

in a pool of blood. “The guard was done earlier. The perpetrator had threatened to shoot the woman when the officers arrived. Apparently, the situation got sticky. The officers’ advance made things impossible for the guy. Desperate and seeing no way out, he gave. He threw the woman down on the ground, backwards and behind him.”

The detective went through the motions, illustrating the description as he read.

“He turned away from her toward the window, his hands raised. He still had the weapon. The officers moved in ordering him to the ground.”

Henry stepped to the cracked glass.

Styke continued, “Miss Burkes was sprawled on top of the dead guard. She spotted the guard’s revolver, pulled it, rolled over, and shot the guy. He never saw what hit him. The cops weren’t focused on the woman on the floor with the security guard’s service revolver. I think she was under duress. She fired three times. Shot him in the back. She killed him dead.”

“Listen, Dick, if you’re done,” Henry clicked, turning back to his partner. “Are you done with that,” he gestured to the clipboard.

“Yeah.”

“Then let’s get out there and talk to her.”

Richard nodded and followed Henry through the lobby and out the front entrance of the

bank. The two detectives passed the police photographer, who was taking photos of the cracked glass, the crooked lines of which stood out in stark contrast to the bright exterior light. Out of doors, Henry apprehensively scanned the crowd and the numerous news crews gathered nearby. He stopped to glance the scene over when his eyes fell on Betsy Burkes seated at the back of the ambulance.

"This is her here," he commented to his partner.

Betsy was staring off into space. Henry crossed the police barrier and approached her. He stepped up to address her, which broke her spell.

"Excuse me, Miss Burkes, my name is Henry Beyle. I'm the lead detective investigating the attempted robbery."

Betsy snapped awake.

"Yes?"

"I'd like to have a moment with you, ma'am, if you don't mind, before you're taken to the hospital."

"I've just finished giving my statement to one of the officers," she told him.

"I'll be sure to get that from him, ma'am. I'm sorry to take up any more of your time." Henry clarified, "I want you to know that you're not being booked for anything."

"I'd hope not."

“Do you mind, Miss Burkes, if I call you by your first name?”

“Not at all. It’s Betsy.”

“Betsy. Well, Betsy, I want you to be aware of something. After you’re treated, you’ll be released to us and brought to the station for further questioning.”

Betsy did not at all hide the fact that she was exhausted.

“I just want to go home.”

“It won’t take long. We just need to tie up some loose ends...go over your statement one last time. I’ll have an officer collect you at the hospital.”

At that moment, newspaper reporters and cameramen barged in. Henry was swept aside by the throng of media—reporters and journalists their notepads at the ready and the newsmen with their cameras thrust into Betsy’s face. A female journalist was first to arrive at the back of the ambulance pressing Betsy with several questions. Camera bulbs crackled and flashed. The woman jotted in a notepad as she posed a line of intrusive questions.

“Miss Burkes, this morning you defended yourself by shooting an armed robber here at the First Federal Bank.”

Betsy could only stammer, “Yes. Yes, I—”

“Tell us what happened. What were you feeling when he took you hostage, when he

threatened your life?"

The next day the story made the newspaper headlines. The front cover read: *BANK ROBBERY THWARTED BY LONE WOMAN'S BRAVERY*. A photograph showed Betsy, radiant, bright-eyed and excited to be in the papers. The shot had been taken later in the day, apparently, away from the scene and under more controlled circumstances. The interview read in the form of a stream of questions and answers:

News Journalist: *Tell us what happened. What were you feeling when he took you hostage, when he threatened your life?*

Miss Burkes: *I was scared. I thought he would kill me.*

News Journalist: *The people here are describing this as an act of bravery, saying you are a hero,...saying you saved their lives.*

Miss Burkes: *It was all I could do to protect myself. I'm not a hero.*

The *New York Post* ran an exposé some time later, one of many covered by the numerous syndications. The human element of her story had attracted much interest. In the *Post* article the point of Betsy's bravery came up once more:

Interviewer: *Quite a lot has happened since that day. It must be quite overwhelming.*

Miss Betsy Burkes: *Oh yes, very much so.*

Interviewer: *'I'm not a hero.' You've said that over and over again....Miss Burkes, how long is it going to take before you admit that what you've done is extraordinarily heroic?*

Miss Betsy Burkes: *What I did I wouldn't say wasn't brave...or even heroic. It's just that I'm not a hero.*

Interviewer: *Most heroes are the last to admit it.*

Miss Betsy Burkes: *Honestly, I did what I did for myself. I knew I would be killed if I didn't do something.*

The *New York Post* lay open on the long upscale bar at Mack's, a Manhattan lounge popular with the police officers of the precinct. Detective Henry Beyle sat casually conversing with a young, handsome, professionally dressed man, Charles Langley. Charlie finished a martini while he perused the article. After ordering another drink, he turned to Henry.

"A lot has happened."

Henry took a delicate sip off the top of his brimming drink before thoughtfully responding, "She's going to be a wealthy woman when this is all through."

"The sky's the limit," Charlie exclaimed.

Henry sat back and sarcastically joked, "I wouldn't bet my only hat on it, Charlie."

"Watch and see, Henry," Charlie continued. "She's got something special. She'll go the distance. Trust me. The media is eating the story up."

Henry laughed out, "Oh yeah, Charlie. She'll shoot her way right to the top."

This perturbed Charlie. In Betsy's defense he responded, "Most people couldn't handle what she went through."

Henry backed off. He gestured by holding his hands out, letting go of the argument before it had a chance to start.

"No doubt, my friend."

"I couldn't even imagine being caught up in a bank robbery."

Henry shook his head at this and remarked, "Robbery isn't quite the right word for what happened."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well, the guys talk."

"Yeah?!"

"So, on the morning of the robbery," Henry recounted, "there's this moron parked in a car outside the bank, right? He's there for maybe five minutes when a cruiser notices. You see, this guy's been casin' the bank for days and the officers know somethin's not right. So they pull up, and before they could even roll to a

stop, he bolts. I mean, out of the blue. Takes everyone by surprise.”

“He was parked diagonally. A tight spot.” Henry depicted a diagonal parking space with his hands. “The way he was blocked in by the cruiser, he wasn’t going anywhere.” His hands formed a T. “The look of this guy was cagey. Observant of procedure, the officers let out a single wail from the cruiser’s siren.”

“Both officers stated that they saw him reach into his glove compartment and extract a stout black pistol. It was then that he exited the vehicle and bolted toward the bank, gun in hand. The patrolman on the passenger side got out in pursuit. His partner radioed for backup. The guy bounded past up on the sidewalk.”

“At this point the officer was hot on his heels. The guy trips over a display set up on the sidewalk. The patrolman stumbled and fell right over top of him. The guy took a swing with the pistol, hitting the officer in the face. The blow bought him enough time to spring up and explode into the bank.”

Charlie cut in, “Why’d he head for the bank?”

“Damned if I know. He was an idiot!”

Charlie’s attention was brought back to the *New York Post*. On the cover, the color photograph captured Betsy in a dramatic pose, her arms held out as if aiming a gun and her head turned to the side with her eyes shut.

Below the picture a caption read: *It was all she could do to save herself.*

4

Betsy walked down the empty sidewalk of the storefront-lined street. She strolled calmly past the bank entrance and came upon a shop owner who busied himself with the setting up of a display of brooms and baskets. He smiled at her and greeted her warmly; she stepped out of his way and continued down the sidewalk, seeming not to notice the parked car.

Betsy stopped at a telephone booth just ahead, stepped inside, and made a call. While she waited, she glanced absentmindedly over at the parked car. Seated at the wheel of the car was a man. In the darkened interior it was difficult to make him out. The glow of a cigarette inhaled upon was all that was discernable. Distracted from her thoughts, Betsy stared unblinkingly. The moments lagged. When the call went through, she turned away sharply, mumbled a few words, and then hung up. She stepped from the booth heading in the direction from which she came, looked past the car, and entered the bank.

At a nearby pay phone, an unpleasant looking man, Jerry, dressed in blue jeans and a scraggly denim work shirt, hung up and stepped away. Double-time, he crossed the

street and climbed into a rundown van. No partition separated the cabin from the cargo space. He sat in the driver's side alone, slammed the door shut, and breathed deeply for a moment. The still and silent morning was calming.

Jerry lingered comfortably, all the while impatiently tapping at the steering wheel with his thumbs. There was an irregular though distinct rhythm to his tap, a song evidently to which he kept time within his head. He remained like this for a short time, stole a glance at his wristwatch and turned over the engine of the van.

There was an ease with which Jerry set himself to task, an indifference in everything he did. It was the cool disconnect that best suited the criminal type. Selfish, narrow-minded, and exploitive, he would do what he had to in order to see that he always finished first.

Jerry drove a ways down the road in the furthest right hand lane and came to a stop at a traffic light with his signal on, indicating he intended to turn. A flashing of lights caught his attention. He glanced to the right, down the storefront-lined street. The bank was under siege by the authorities. A squad car went screeching past, siren blaring, and took the corner in a tight turn. All the blood drained from Jerry's face; he stared straight ahead

white as a sheet. When the light turned green, he drove off.

5

Jerry knew Frank Scholetti from the old neighborhood. They grew up together in Jersey City, buddied up on a few small-time jobs, larceny mostly. It was a mutually beneficial relationship. Frank took all the risks. Jerry watched Frank's back and managed the monies. If it were up to Frank, there wouldn't be enough to go around to afford even a lock pick. Everything he did, he did on borrowed time. Jerry lent a certain professionalism to the jobs they did together. It was a good thing they had going. They managed to stay mostly to themselves—outside jobs, no connections, not any way to get close to them unless one of them slipped. Good times. That was until Frank got nabbed for a second strike on some trumped-up charge brought down on him from a crooked Jersey City detective named Eddy Arnold.

The law was the law and crime was on the rise. Jersey City was a cesspool. Every sort of vice thrived there on the city's narrow streets and overcrowded tenements, and with it came a lot of begging and wheedling, which meant that desperation ran rampant. Degenerates, hoodlums, crooks—the whole lot were in for it

as far as the law was concerned. No way out for a thrice-convicted man. The three strikes rule. A third conviction, no matter how petty, saw a guilty man to the door, landed him in the state penitentiary, and locked him up for life.

It was around the time of Frank's second conviction that Jerry started toying with the idea of moving out west. It was an idea he had before Frank got busted. He and Frank had some mutual acquaintances in Los Angeles, and the City of Angels—with the reputation it had and the west being a place to start anew—all appealed to Jerry.

When Frank was released, one of the first things he did was make a visit on his old pal in California. Jerry had settled for a less than perfect existence. Tinseltown was not everything he had bargained for. Frank's timing was perfect. His showing up put Jerry on the defensive. It might have been that Jerry owed him money or at least that was what Jerry thought the minute he laid eyes on him.

"Frank! I heard you were released a few months ago. You in California now?"

"It's been a long time, Jerry." Frank winced, blocking the California sun with his hand.

"Enjoying the weather?" Jerry shuffled his feet, glancing about uncomfortably.

"Well sure. What's wrong? You don't look all that happy to see me, Jerry." It was easy to tell

Jerry was nervous.

“No. Not at all.” He was perspiring.

“Bad time, is it?”

“Ya know. It is what it is.”

“You still running with our old friends? Nick around? That club of his is really fucking somethin’!”

“Uh, ya, Nick, sure. Listen, Frank, if it’s yer money ya want, well I owe it to ya, and I intend to pay up—”

“Listen, you do me a favor and we’ll call it even. How’s that sound? Fair enough?”

“The lot of it?”

“I got some things goin’. Good things. Profitable. I’ll need help from someone I can trust.”

The fact was that three years in the slammer hadn’t slowed Frank down. Already he had a girl and was staking out several “principles,” as he referred to them. His girl was an ex-teller in a bank and knew all the ins and outs of the business. She was the perfect asset to his overall plan. Together in Jersey City they had pushed over a few drug stores. It took a little strategizing and just the right amount of aggressiveness. It wasn’t until a dubious encounter late one night that Frank thought she was ready. They made a good team. She fit right in.

The night air had a stinging chill to it, foretelling of nothing good to come. Detective Arnold climbed into an unmarked cruiser. He knew Frank was out. He kept tabs on all the ex-cons that might come gunning for him. That the detective was about to become an obstacle between Frank and his new objectives, neither he nor Frank were even remotely aware.

“Get me that clipboard there,” he slurred to his temporary partner, Ted.

A temporary partner, because Detective Arnold went through many a partner, had always gone through partners. He had a reputation in the precinct. Maybe it was his temperament. Might just be that he was a no-good lowdown dirty bastard. No matter, Ted was his new partner by a single week, and he was already fed up with Arnold.

“Get it yourself!”

“Jesus Christ, what’s eating you?” Arnold snapped back, snatching the clipboard off the dash.

“Nothin’. I’m just trying to figure this out.”

Ted helped himself to a swig of whisky from a flask tucked in the dashboard. With a wince he passed it over. Arnold took a swig.

“Then just do as I ask!” Arnold added.

“You’re not the boss of me. What’s the big deal, anyway? You make us stand out here in

the freakin' cold. And for what? To take down some plate numbers!"

"I know what I'm doin'!"

"If you say so! Then you have us come on back here to the car. Could just as easily have taken the numbers down from inside. What gives?"

"I know that black Charger parked in the alley."

"What Charger?"

"The one beside that all-night drug store. Don't you pay attention?"

"Wasn't no Charger. Was a GTO!"

"Excuse the fuck out of me!"

"So? Some guy works there you know. You put him away or something? What of it?"

Arnold checked the clipboard. He turned his palm up and compared a few numbers he scribbled on his hand.

"Plate's numbers don't come up on registration. Car's registered erroneously."

"Come on! You're gonna bust the guy because he doesn't want to pay up for new registration?"

"I want to bust the guy 'cause I want to bust him."

"You're a real hard ass, you know."

Detective Arnold checked his service revolver and kicked open the door of the unmarked cruiser, but only after a big swig of whisky.

“I’ve got my reasons.”

He passed the whisky back to Ted, who after an empty tilt, tossed the dry flask back into the glove compartment.

“A real hard ass...”

“We’ll see...”

“How do you want this to go down?”

“Textbook. Go around front and come in after me.”

“You’re going in the back?”

“Yeah, I’m goin’ in back! Textbook, man. Textbook!”

Ted cared little for Arnold’s procedures and even less about his motivations. He didn’t even bother to check his gun. Instead, he lazily got out after his deadbeat partner and followed the plan indifferently.

7

Drugstore holdups were a low thing for any self-respecting crook to do. The risks were high and the payoff low. Still it was a good proving ground for Betsy, Frank’s number one girl. Plus, relationships always grew closer after testing the limits like that. In a lot of ways, Frank got Betsy involved just for that reason. Guys like him can’t make serious relationships last. It’s something in the way his type only thinks of themselves, the instinct of self-preservation, a room for only one mentality.

“I’ve got two strikes against me as it is. I’m taking one hell of a risk pissing around with this small time shit!”

Frank had a way of getting things off his chest last minute, explaining as the couple pulled into the back alley behind the all-night drugstore.

“I know you are—”

“Three strikes and I’m history.” Frank killed the car’s engine. “Last time was all I could take. I swore I’d never end in the slammer again. Bet, I mean it. They won’t take me alive. If I’m cornered, I’m goin’ down shooting!” Of a sudden he became introspective. “I don’t mean to scare ya. I love you and all, but I’ll be damned if I let them hurt you. They’ll hurt you, Bet. You don’t know what it’s like inside. It would kill you to know how they treat you. They take away everything. I’ll never let them take me back!”

“I’m sorry, Frank.”

“Don’t be sorry. Just do what I tell ya!”

“I will. I did on the last job, didn’t I? And it went well, didn’t it?”

“I need you to be sure yer ready. I can’t hang around if things go wrong.”

“I know it, Frank.” Betsy reassured him, “This’ll be the last one and then I’ll be ready.”

“Don’t matter anyhow. Just do as we planned. I figure if everything goes well the

manager'll think I'm just another customer."

Frank couldn't help but to linger on the finer points, show whoever was listening just exactly how smart he was.

"I can do this, Frank."

"If it goes like it should, we'll be in and out of there in no time. Everyone sees me come in and shop around and shit. That's all! You come in and start the trouble. If anyone gets any bright ideas, I'll be there to cover you. Don't worry, though. Nobody's gonna stick their neck out! Nobody ever sticks their neck out. Not worth it to them. Remember, the customers we leave be, it's the junk were after. That's where the money is, in the junk. If you let the customers be, you're less likely to run into some cowboy who thinks he can save the day! Things'll go smooth. You'll see."

"Like last time then? Last time it went just like you said."

Betsy fed into his ego.

"Exactly. You shove the gun up the manager's nose and hustle him and whoever the fuck's in there with him into the wash closet. If anyone gives you any trouble, hit 'em with the gun. Just smack them in the head with the barrel. That'll shut anyone up fast! Meanwhile I'll make like I'm trying to duck out back. You come to get me yelling and screaming. We gather what we need and then

we'll clear out!"

Frank pulled a revolver from beneath his seat and passed it to Betsy. Without much ado she slipped it into her purse.

"Okay, Frank."

"Okay? It's more than okay!"

"Great then. Let's just do it!"

"Listen, I've got a lot riding on you."

Betsy was focused on the drugstore.

"You listening to me?" he growled and grabbed her face.

"Frank, don't be like that!"

She turned from his touch and shot him an annoyed look.

"Don't..." he snarled.

Frank was easily provoked to violent behavior and grabbed hold of a handful of hair at the base of Betsy's neck.

"Don't get curt with me!"

"I'm not cross, Frank."

"Then what's yer problem?"

"I've got a feeling about this one..."

"You've got a feeling!"

He relinquished his grip.

"Yeah, Frank." She was talking to a brick wall. "Forget about it!"

"Let's do this thing."

The drugstore had a rear entrance. Before midnight it was always left open. It was eleven fifty-seven. Frank went in first, followed by

Betsy a moment later.

8

Detective Arnold was not about to let his chance slip by. Midnight drugstore holdups were right up a two-bit thief like Frank Scholetti's alley. The detective knew him, knew him as a kid in fact, knew how he thought. Knew how to always be a step ahead of him. He made it his prerogative to know exactly what his type might do when desperate enough. And Frank was desperate alright, desperate enough to rob a drugstore and risk a third strike.

He and Frank went back to Frank's days in a state correctional facility for minors. In fact, Arnold landed him there. Frank bumped around from boarding school to boarding school. At one time, a foster family took in Frank. The father was a beat cop in Arnold's precinct. It was a miraculous thing, Frank getting the chance he did. In those days detective Arnold was a sergeant. This beat cop was a peer of Arnold's. A good cop, had a pretty wife, cookie cutter home. He did not deserve what came to him.

Frank didn't mean any harm—an unwanted kid forced to survive on the state's dime. He owed it to this new family to stay clean, to make a new start, which meant to clear out when trouble came looking for him. No one can

outrun the past. And even at fifteen, Frank had a past.

A couple of summers earlier, a few older guys ran a craps game in a tenement building in Frank's neighborhood. The game was a popular success, and a fair amount of monies exchanged hands. Frank would run interference for these guys if the cops showed. He was stationed on the curb outside the building's entrance.

Kids are kids. When you boil it down, Frank wasn't at fault. The police knew their job inside and out. Some stupid kid hanging around on the doorstep wasn't about to cramp on their sting, not one iota.

For Frank's part, he got a pat on the wrists. His craps shooting pals, on the other hand, caught hell for their enterprising ways. The oldest of the bunch got sent up for two years due to extenuating circumstances. And those two years spelled a lifetime of grief for Frank.

A couple of years later and a whole lot of water under the bridge hadn't made any difference. There was a score to be settled and it wouldn't take long to catch up to Frank, cop's house or not. Frank's new life was routine. A few shots through the living room windows at the right time of day would do the trick. When the dust settled and Frank was released from the hospital, he found himself without a home.

The family that took him in and showed such kindness was repaid by loss. The cop's pretty wife had been expecting—they lost the child. She recovered from a gunshot wound but succumbed to depression. She killed herself in the family car having locked herself up tight in the cookie cutter home's garage. Her husband fared little better, self destructing on liquor and losing his job and running himself ragged with regret.

Frank would meet up with him again years later. At least he thought the man begging him for money was his foster father. Difficult to get that sort of thing wrong, it was him alright. Frank gave him a fifty-dollar bill and even had the nerve enough to tell him to clean up, that he himself had.

Clean himself up, some strange notion Frank had about getting his life back on track. Not a week after Frank's second release from prison, Detective Arnold caught up with him. The detective was simply in the right place at the right time, as so often was the case with Frank and Arnold. It was as if their two fates were somehow intertwined. Frank was on a date with Betsy when it happened. It was one of the couple's first dates, in fact. Frank sure knew how to make an impression.

The detective was on his way home from work late one Saturday night. He had spotted

Frank at a malt shop and got a good look at his car, made a mental note of it. He would have preferred if Frank hadn't noticed him but, as things happened, he had. Arnold got out of his sedan and walked straight up to Frank's window. Brazen as that, he rapped on the glass with the barrel of his service revolver. Frank turned white, unrolled his window and sat tight-lipped. Arnold said nothing for what seemed an eternity. Betsy held her breath unsure of the situation.

"Frank?" she managed to gasp.

"Frank Scholetti..." Arnold sneered. "Let you out, did they?" He was eating it up.

"Evening, detective," Frank managed, his eye on the revolver pointed casually in his face.

Betsy squeezed Frank's hand, "Frank, what's going on?"

"Nothing, baby. We're old friends."

"Old friends, Frank? Come on now, you know me better than that. I don't have friends."

Frank nodded at the weapon, "You think you really need to be pointing that at us?"

"Just a warning, Frank. I've got my eye on you." And he walked off.

Frank had some explaining to do. Betsy was freaked out. She got the worst kind of feeling from Arnold, an uneasy feeling, deep down in the pith of her stomach. She knew instinctually that they would meet again in the near future.

Little had she known how life shattering their next meeting would be.

And this night is what it all came down to. Detective Arnold was not going to let Frank down easy. He was determined. One more collar and Frank Scholetti would be where he belonged.

A shout rang out into the alley, letting Arnold on to the situation before it had any chance of getting started. The hardboiled detective was quick to react. The time between the shout and his entering the drugstore left few precious moments for fate to catch up.

The drugstore manager, whose inadvertent summons had split the night air, recoiled from the pistol whipping he received from a young woman who had entered his store at the back.

“Get down on the floor!” Betsy hollered.

She was fierce. The half dozen customers in the store bolted out the front door. Frank hadn’t accounted for that. He was left standing at the front, so he made like a coward as they had planned and balked from the “robber.” The chances were that the manager wouldn’t notice.

On in years, the drugstore manager was no stranger to midnight holdups. He placated to Betsy pointing out Frank.

“Come on now, hon. Look, you’re scaring him. You don’t want this kind of trouble.”

“Stay behind the counter, grandpa, or I’ll shoot a hole in yer head the size of Texas.”

“Now I know you don’t want that—”

Betsy whipped him good upside the head. Frank took a step around her, his back to the rear exit. That was all Detective Arnold needed to see, Frank hovering over his bloodied victim. The detective was of half a mind as to shoot. What kept him from doing it, he would never know!

“On the ground, Scholetti!”

Frank spun on his heels. Arnold’s voice cut straight through him.

“Now! On the ground, you Ginnie piece of shit!”

The manager got himself to his feet. He viewed Frank as only an innocent bystander.

“No, he’s a customer!”

Betsy pointed her piece at the detective.

“Don’t...” Frank blurted.

“She’s the one—”

The manager was cut short by the blast of the revolver.

Detective Arnold crumbled to the floor. Frank snatched up his gun and faced Betsy.

“Bet—”

Betsy lowered the smoking gun, shocked at what had just transpired. The bell on the front door chimed announcing an arrival. Arnold’s partner came in behind the wave of fleeing

customers. Frank plugged three holes into Ted before the detective could assess the situation.

9

If that's how far things had to come before Betsy could earn Frank's trust, then damn Frank's trust. Secretly Betsy resented Frank for putting her into that situation. She would blame everyone first before she'd think to blame herself. And so far as ever hinting at her dissatisfaction, it was out of the question. From the minute Frank had scored even with Detective Arnold, he became more aggressive and reckless. A bank job was right up his alley. He was ready, ready as he'd ever be.

When Frank announced he was flying out to California, Betsy was relieved. If ever she had a chance of getting away from him, it was then. Little had she known how weak she was. Since childhood she had been taught to depend on the men in her life, to look up to them no matter what kind of looser they were.

And Frank was no exception. It only took a few days apart for her to realize how much she missed him. On the day of his return she went out of her way to surprise him. While he was gone she had contacted an ex-coworker of hers who still worked at the local Federal Reserve Bank. Through this contact she was able to acquire an overview of the branches' scheduled

delivery dates. With a little scrutiny it became apparent that the armored cars making the deliveries would pool the monies before being rerouted to a handful of designated banks. The memo containing this information displayed a list of numbers and a time chart typed on a legal size piece of paper. Frank was shocked.

“You took a real risk sticking yer neck out like you did!”

“I thought—”

“Who’s the guy anyway?”

“He’s a friend, Frank.”

“Friend? Why do I have to come home to trouble?”

“It’s no trouble, Frank. I’m here, aren’t I? I used the guy to get this stuff.”

“If it weren’t for how fucking incredibly easy this job is gonna be, I’d have had to have called it all off.”

“I just wanted to help.”

“Still, this guy you worked with at the bank, he’s a loose end. Whatever it is you’d done to get these papers, don’t matter. He’ll talk if we knock over any of the banks in his area.”

“He has no idea I took these papers.”

“Shit, you can see here,” Frank directed her attention to the route times, recognizing that they related to the armored cars only in so far as the departure times. “There are huge discrepancies. Take this car,” he pointed out an

armored car. "It departs a full six hours before this one. Or this. Here, have a look here."

Betsy was relieved to find him so enthusiastic.

"This one?"

"Yeah, here. This car doesn't pickup for another eighteen hours. Or this one, this drop isn't going to be performed until the next morning. Obviously there is a window of opportunity here. Several hours in which all the monies are just sitting there waiting for us."

"So, that's good then?"

"Good? Hell! What it means is all we need to do is pick the right bank."

"I think I understand."

"You don't understand anything."

"I understand these papers will help!"

"You did good, Bet. I'm just sore that you didn't tell me, is all. It's important that we always know what's happening. That's the difference between being professionals and just being a bunch of fuckups!"

"I just wanted to help. Show you that I'm ready."

"Okay, Bet. Where were we?"

"Picking the right bank..."

"That's right. Pick the right bank and wait and watch and see what happens."

"The armored cars, you mean."

"Exactly. It's that easy. Keep an eye on a few

banks. Be patient. Be meticulous. Watch the cars. Follow the money.”

10

“The greater the chances, the better the payoff!” That was how Frank put it to Jerry. The debt Jerry owed hung over his head like a dead weight. And Frank was certain to exploit it. He was vague as to how Jerry might come out even. To make matters worse, Frank had forked over the cash for a weekly rental in Queens for Jerry. Meanwhile, he and Betsy landed a plush pad in the working class neighborhood of Hoboken situated directly across the river from New York City.

A branch in Queens was going to be their target. Frank was giddy over the prospect. The banks were ripe for the picking. One job could put them up for the entire year.

“Just like old times, huh, Jerry?” Frank boasted with a smack on Jerry’s back.

“The old times were never like this!”

As far as Frank was concerned, it was a time to celebrate. And when he celebrated he drank, and when he drank he drank heavily. When he was drunk, he could be overly attentive to Betsy, placing his hand on her knee and patting her ass. It made her uncomfortable around Jerry. She could see from his prolonged glances that he wanted what Frank had—the way he

would shift in his seat, his eyes said the most. Frank played into it. After all, it was Frank who was in charge. He called the shots. He had the woman. And he was not afraid to flaunt her.

Frank would smack Betsy around on occasion. He hit her for no reason. It turned him on. He did it as a warning or when he was drunk. Violence was often associated with the way Frank handled Betsy. Not always as overt as when he hit her, it could be in his tone or even his posture. She was beginning to tell when he was on the edge. It was as if the undercurrent of violence was always present.

The way that Frank treated Betsy did not go unnoticed by Jerry. It was meant as an indicator to him, a way to control his behavior. If Jerry went off track, Frank took it out on Betsy. A particular occasion illustrated this best. It occurred on the night preceding their first job and had a negative effect on Betsy's performance the next morning.

It wasn't the first time Frank had sex with Betsy while Jerry was in the apartment. The couple was caught once in the bathroom. That time they tried to be subtle about it. Frank was high on some pills he and Jerry had scored. He was docile and Betsy was able to manage him. The idea was to get it over with quick. Jerry had passed out on the couch, as he often did. Come to find out, he awoke with the urgent need to

piss. And he got an eyeful.

Jerry watched from the hallway as the couple went at it. The bathroom door was open a crack. The hall was dark. Frank had Betsy sprawled on the counter. He was a fumbling mess.

“Frank, slow down.”

“Like that?”

“Stop pulling my hair!”

“Here, turn around then.”

“How do you want me?”

“Like this.”

Not until Frank spun Betsy toward the door had they noticed that they were being watched. Betsy thought she saw Jerry in the hallway.

“Stop, Jerry’s watching us!”

Betsy reached out and pushed the door closed. Frank sprang forward and pulled the door handle. Jerry hadn’t the wherewithal to retreat in time.

“Hey, you see anything ya like?”

Frank pulled Jerry into the bathroom. Betsy covered her nudity with a bath towel.

“No, it was an accident.”

“You like her, ya peeping Tom!”

“It’s not like that, Frank. I had to pee.”

“Well, get a good look!”

Frank yanked Betsy’s arm and tore the bath towel off of her.

“Frank!”

“How’s that! Have a good look!”

Betsy attempted to turn away. The grip Frank had on her he reinforced with a firm squeeze.

“Frank, don’t!” Betsy pled.

He gave her a shake.

“You just stand there. I don’t want to hear a word!”

The adrenalin was up. A beating was impending. Frank’s eyes bulged. He was excited by violence.

“I didn’t mean to walk in on ya! Honestly.”

“Look at her,” he yanked Betsy hard. “Turn around!”

“Come on, Frank...” Jerry managed.

“Look at that!” Frank yanked at Betsy’s hair and pinned her against the sink.

Jerry withdrew from the bathroom.

“No, Frank—”

Betsy would never know for sure if Jerry had watched as she was raped. She spent the night in the bathroom passed out in the tub. Frank had disappeared, left her alone with Jerry. After a while Jerry came to her. He leaned down and attempted to comfort her.

“You alright?”

“No, Jerry. I’m not alright. What do you want?”

Jerry petted Betsy’s hair with the back of his hand. She turned away from his touch.

“Don’t be like that. I only want to help you.”

“Help me, or help yourself!”

He touched her arm.

“Frank doesn’t deserve a girl like you.”

“You don’t say.”

“You’re so beautiful. I—I can help.”

Betsy shrank back. Her eyes were wide with fear. She hadn’t the strength to fend him off if he attempted anything. Jerry could see it in her eye. He reached in the tub.

“Jerry, don’t!”

She swatted his hand away. What determination he had to force himself on her depended on her complacency. The instinct to protect herself, however slight, was enough to dissuade his advances.

“You like me?”

“It’s not like that, Jerry.”

“Why not?”

Jerry leaned up on the tub.

“No!”

“Come on, I’ll make it easy.”

“No, Jerry!”

Betsy’s pressed her back against the tile wall. Jerry pulled her toward him.

“It’ll be easy for you. Just do what I want.”

“Get yer hands off me!”

She resisted him.

“You’ll like it!”

“I won’t! And I won’t let you.”

Jerry released her, his head lowered in shame.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean—”

“It doesn’t matter, Jerry.”

“I didn’t mean for this.”

“Jerry, I want you to leave this apartment.”

What little resolve she had to defend herself with was enough. Jerry got to his feet.

“Now, Jerry! Leave right now and I promise I won’t tell Frank.”

“I should just go back to California.”

“You can do what you want. A lot’s happened tonight. Why don’t we try to put it behind us?”

“I’m sorry if he hurt you.”

“I’m sorry you had to witness that.”

“Okay, Betsy. I’ll leave now.”

Jerry walked out the apartment without looking back.

11

The plans for the heist were all laid out. But first Betsy was going to wean Frank off of his dependency for drink. It was that or she was leaving. She got tough with him, stood up for herself.

“After all, Frank, it’s me that’s takin’ the risk.”

“You know I wouldn’t let anyone hurt you!”

“You’re hurting me, Frank! You’re hurting us!”

He would eventually agree. Betsy stayed on. Jerry showed his face a few days later. He was dead broke. There was no going back for him. Frank knew he'd come around. Sure, Frank was unreliable, but if Betsy would have him back, why not Jerry? The three of them made a good team, Frank thought. The three of them were going places.

"If I want something," Frank boasted, "I just take it!"

He pulled Betsy down on to his lap and groped at her.

"Frank, try to calm down!"

Betsy playfully fended him off.

"I'll be calm after I'm through with you!"

He scooped Betsy off her feet.

Betsy was in no mood, "Frank, stop!"

"We'll be in the bedroom," he shot to Jerry.

Jerry laughed it off helping himself to another beer from the refrigerator.

"You play nice now," he remarked.

"Put me down, Frank!" Betsy protested.

"Don't mind her," Frank quipped back to Jerry. "She likes to put up a fight!"

The plan was simple. Frank opened an account at the bank. On the day of the robbery, he would withdraw some money. The trick was to be inside the bank when Betsy started shooting up the place. She would pick him out, seemingly at random, and use him as a shield

while she emptied out the vault of all the monies that were scheduled for transfer.

Jerry's role was that of the getaway driver. He could not be counted on for anything more involved than that. Frank kept a tight rein on each and every facet of the job. And a lot was pending on Betsy's performance. In order for things to go smoothly, she would need to be fierce. If she did not convince the customers or the bank's staff, then Frank would need to initiate the fallback plan. At the first sign that Betsy was losing control of the situation Frank would take over. They agreed to this, but only as a last resort and only at Frank's discretion.

The nerve it took for Betsy to go through with Frank's plan, knowing full well that it was her performance alone that everything depended on, pushed Betsy beyond her limits. The slightest thing could upset their entire plan. Weeks of preparation would be ruined in an instant of indecision. And it was under these stresses that Frank chose to test Betsy's tolerance.

"Frank, I mean it. Put me down right this instant!"

"Shut up, ya slut!"

Frank's temper was usually manageable, drink had a way of placating him, and though his ire was easily roused, Betsy had become so accustomed to it that she was rarely caught by

surprise. Now that he was sober, he was impossible to judge. It was a dangerous situation for Betsy. Frank would lash out. He laid into her pretty hard. If there was anything the penitentiary had taught him, it was how to exert control over another person. And Frank controlled Betsy completely.

What Frank had not anticipated was Betsy's complete loss of nerve. She had been worn thin. The thrashing she went through that night had broken her will. She was no longer on point; the bank heist had inherited a major flaw. Betsy resented the hell out of Frank.

12

Frank wore his Sunday best. He looked robust in a suit and uncomfortable wearing a tie. The weather forecast called for clear skies and seasonably low temperatures. Frank was sweating profusely. A good number of customers were already in line. There was no guard in the bank, only a couple of tellers and the bank manager. Frank's wristwatch read one minute to nine.

The trick was to look as innocuous as possible. For Frank to be believable in his role he needed to look the part. Any ordinary gutless businessman was the effect he was aiming for. He succeeded all too well.

"Excuse me," he muttered as he got out his

checkbook and commenced to fill a withdrawal slip. Beside him at the center island was a big fellow wearing a sports jacket and tan slacks. Frank made a mental note to stay close to this guy, to wait for him and to get in line behind him. From the looks of the customers, no one was going to give them trouble, no one except for this one fellow maybe. Frank took a quick glance as he wrote out his slip.

The fellow had no idea he was being measured up as a potential threat. Casually, he reached into his coat pocket and withdrew his wallet. That was when Frank caught sight of a pistol on the fellow's belt. His jaw dropped. The fellow smiled and opened his wallet.

"I'm a detective. Sorry to startle you."

Indeed, a shining gold badge identified the man as one of New York's finest.

"I see. Yes, of course," Frank managed.

"Are you finished?" The detective gestured to the pen Frank held.

"Yes, here you are."

Frank passed the pen over and forced a grin.

"Thanks."

"Not a problem."

Betsy would enter the bank at any second. They had no way of informing one another if something was wrong. He needed to buy some time, to signal Betsy to stay her advance. Frank retreated to the front door.

“Not a problem,” he spoke in his head. “This guy’s not here for us. He’s here like everyone else. Not a problem. This is not a problem.”

Pistol in hand, Betsy pulled at the door handle, her face held down low. Frank shook his head. He held the door against her. Betsy froze. Luckily no one was approaching the bank behind her and naturally enough no one inside was concerned with what was going on outside. Frank turned and faced the lobby. He shooed her away with his hands.

Quick as a flash, Betsy pulled the pistol back, concealing it in her waistband. She reached out and forced the entryway door.

“Frank,” she whispered, “Frank, what the hell’s going on?”

Frank spoke over his shoulder.

“Just back off! I’ll signal you when to come in.”

“No, Frank. We have to call this off.”

A customer exited toward the couple. She was a decrepit old thing. Betsy turned away.

“Excuse me, sir.”

“Yes, ma’am. Sorry, ma’am.”

“Well, don’t be sorry. Make up your mind. Are you coming in or going out?”

“In, ma’am. Have a nice day.”

The old lady humphed and waddled away. Betsy was back at the door.

“Frank, I’m not doing this!”

“You are doing this, that or I’m gonna beat the hell out of you. Now calm down!”

Frank shut the door in Betsy’s face. The detective glanced at Frank and stepped in line. Frank nodded and got in line behind him.

“Something the matter?” the detective was inclined to ask.

“Women, ya know!” Frank shrugged.

The sweat poured down his forehead.

“Not that it’s any of my business, Mack, but that little lady’s got you wrapped around her finger. I mean look at you, you’re a mess!”

“Yeah,” Frank swallowed, “She sure knows how to press my buttons.”

“A word of advice...”

“Yeah?”

“It’s the girl who’s worth the trouble who’s the one that really gets to you! I’d wrap up what you’re doin’ and get on out there before it’s too late.”

“Yeah, I’ll take that into consideration.”

The detective could only shrug and turn away.

Frank looked back toward the front entrance. Betsy was gone.

Without Jerry’s intervention Betsy would have been at a loss as to what to do. The position Frank had put them in was unacceptable. Jerry

knew something was wrong the instant he pulled the getaway van alongside the curb a few car lengths down from the bank entrance. Betsy gestured to him, indicating to pull forward. It was then that she withdrew from the bank's entranceway, and then that Frank mistakenly thought she had run off.

Jerry leaned over unrolling the passenger side window.

"What's wrong?"

"I don't know! Frank won't say."

"This is no good. We need to call this off!"

"That's what I said!"

"Here comes Frank now!"

Frank exited the bank in a huff. His posture said it all. Jerry opened the door for Betsy.

"He looks pissed."

Betsy turned back as she climbed into the getaway car.

"I can't deal with this," she shot back to Jerry.

"Keep it together."

Not wanting to cause a scene, Frank kept his mouth shut. He stepped around the front of the van and ordered Jerry to get into the back.

"Alright, Frank," Jerry conceded.

Frank got behind the wheel and pulled away from the curb.

"This was the right decision, Frank," Betsy started.

"Not my decision," Frank cut in with.

“What happened in there?” Jerry chanced asking.

“A cop was in the line ahead of me.”

“Was it just bad timing or was it something more, you think?”

“He had no idea. Bad luck, is all.”

Betsy chimed in, “I’m sorry, Frank. We’ll get it right next time.”

Frank was silent for the remainder of the ride back to Jerry’s apartment in Queens. It aggravated him that things had not gone according to the plan. That Betsy had not run off, exactly, abated his anger a little. Had she, and Frank would have had a problem. Not that he was all that certain that she wouldn’t have, if given the opportunity. It was a troubling thought that she might just as easily have walked away from him had he not come out when he did. Frank had no way to know for sure. All he did know was that Betsy choked. If she couldn’t be trusted one hundred percent, then the plan needed to be changed.

“We’re changing the plan,” he informed them that night after having gone over the papers and selected a second target. “This bank here,” he pointed to a map he had spread out on the kitchen table. “It’s a smaller, newer building. I know it. It’s not far from here. It’s perfect!”

The map was marked in red. All the banks and armored car routes were indicated.

Jerry spoke up, the voice of reason, "Tomorrow is the day of the pickup. We haven't got the time, Frank. We don't know enough about the bank. We need to wait it out."

"Frank," Betsy added, "we do this right and we'll come out ahead. If we're rash... None of us want this to go bad!"

"Fine," Frank gave. "We start from the beginning then." He gestured to the map. "It stays here in Queens. We worked too hard on this to just give up. We know the banks. We know their system. What changes are the players." He paused for effect. "Betsy, you and I are switching positions. As of right now I'm the front man. You're inside. Got it?"

"Okay, Frank. But you know it doesn't have to be this way. I can handle myself."

"I don't care. It works better this way. This is how it should have been since the beginning. I knew the second I spotted that cop that if things went wrong I'd have to intercede. And if I did, it wouldn't have been pretty! This is all or nothin'! Each of us needs to be the right person for the role we're given. You, Betsy, are better suited for the inside job. No one'll ever suspect you. It's perfect!"

Nobody was arguing. As adamant as she was that she could handle herself, deep down Betsy preferred it that way. A week was spent in preparation. Frank and Jerry diligently staked

out the bank. Betsy opened an account and went about regularly visiting the bank in the mornings. The day was set, the plot rehearsed. Every aspect of the crime was gone over. They overlooked no facet and took every precaution. No one wanted a repeat of the botched attempt. Betsy would call Jerry from a payphone before she entered the bank. Frank would wait in his car for her, count down three minutes before entering behind her. If she was in line, it was on. If she was not, they would call it off. Jerry would be a block away at a payphone. Once he had gotten the call from Betsy, he would give them three minutes. That was the plan. Simple, exact, informed and well coordinated. It was going to be a guaranteed success.

14

A car's headlights gradually approached a line of apartment buildings in the darkness of night. The lights came to an abrupt halt. The interior of the car lit as the passenger door swung open. After a short pause Betsy stepped out, waved goodnight to Detective Styke, and made for the entrance of the nearest apartment building. In her hand she still held the cooling pad given to her by the paramedic earlier in the morning. She walked up the front steps and entered the foyer.

Betsy stepped through the second set of doors into the ill-lit lobby and was startled to see Jerry, dressed in his denim garb, sitting on the stairs that led to the second floor of apartments. A severity in his expression read of his questionable intentions. He noticed her enter, took a long drag from his cigarette, put it out on the steps, and stood.

“Come on up,” he bade.

Betsy found it hard to conceal her surprise at seeing him.

“Jerry?!”

Together they ascended the stairs to her apartment. The climb was stifling for Betsy. Jerry inquired of her as to what the cops knew.

“Have you heard anything?” Betsy redirected, her breath held, braced for his reply.

“I’ve been holding up here all day. I haven’t heard nothin’. I’ve been waiting for you.”

Betsy paused as she flipped through her keys.

She clearly stated, “I killed Frank. I shot and killed him.”

Jerry did not blink. His immediate response was both contrary to what he had just stated and intentionally direct.

“I know.”

They arrived at Betsy’s door. She was slow to open it and hesitated before entering.

"We can't be seen together like this."

Jerry was bothered by her reply and her dismissive attitude. He got firm with her.

"I don't like this, Betsy."

Betsy cracked open the door.

Jerry restated, "I don't like it. We wouldn't be where we are if it weren't for you."

Betsy slipped into her apartment. Jerry strode forward. She barred his entry holding the door against him.

"This all falls on you, Betsy, if we're found out!"

"You're *incredible!*" she said with disdain.

Jerry stuck his foot in the jamb, allowing him to talk through the crack.

"We're in this *together.*"

"I'm exhausted," Betsy tried to convince him.

"Really, I've been through a lot today, Jerry."

He repeated, "*Together!*"

She shoved the door closed.

"I'll call you," she promised.

Betsy turned away from the door and leaned heavily against it. She stood and breathed in the loneliness of her dark apartment. She looked over at the clock to check the time, the phosphorescent hands glowing from clear across the room, and saw that it was still early. Set upon a table beside the door was a lamp which she switched on. In that instant her telephone rang, startling her. She promptly

answered the phone and rested it on her shoulder.

“Hello?”

She turned to peer through the peephole.

“Yes, hello.” The voice was that of a woman. “Hello, Miss Burkes. My name is Joan LeVant, calling on behalf of the *New York Post*. We’ve been contacted by Sid Chapman from *The Herald* and would like to discuss the possibility of setting up an interview.”

“Well, sure. I suppose.”

Betsy strained to see down the narrow corridor.

“I’m sorry to be calling so late. We’d be very interested in sending a journalist out to meet you, Betsy, tomorrow perhaps. Please take down my number and call me first thing in the morning.”

Jerry was nowhere in sight.

“Yeah. Sure. I’d like that very much.”

Betsy rifled through her purse for a pen and piece of paper. She took out a showy business card that had printed on it in a bold font: *CHARLES LANGLEY, EDITOR AND CHIEF FOR THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS.*

Henry accompanied Charlie up the narrow stairwell of the local precinct. The two men talked familiarly as they worked their way

through the busy station. The precinct was an active and merited center of the municipality to which it belonged and had been in service to the greater part of the local community for nearly a century. The officers in her charge were held in the highest esteem, and to wear the uniform was not just the civil duty of a select few, but an honor.

Henry explained to the newspaperman, "Alright. So, let's introduce you to her."

"Thanks, Henry. It'll only take a second."

"She's been through a lot today, Charlie."

Henry stopped him at the top of the stairwell. The room beyond them teemed with officers and was steeped in the usual commotion of a busy police center. "She'd really like to get home."

"It won't take long."

Henry led Charlie over to where Betsy had been seated on her own at one of many cluttered desks in the open, bustling room. Charlie was instantly taken in by her; his attention was drawn in particular to how she seemed so calm and collected. She really was beautiful, centered, and at peace, almost oblivious to the numerous patrolmen and detectives who crowded the large station house going about their various duties.

Henry got Betsy's attention.

"Miss Burkes?"

Betsy stood to address the two men.

"Hello, Detective Beyle."

Henry continued, "Let me introduce you to one of the city's finest newspapermen, Charles Langley."

Charlie introduced himself, "Hello, Miss Burkes."

Betsy took his hand and smiled tentatively.

"Please, Betsy."

"Sure, Betsy. Call me Charlie."

"All right."

Charlie laughingly joked, "Well, Betsy, if you've got any problems with these guys, just talk to me about it and I'll straighten them out."

Betsy brightened up and laughed with him.

"I will."

Henry chimed in before leaving, "Alright, alright. I'll leave you two alone."

Charlie nodded and thanked Henry before turning back to Betsy. Well-dressed and of fine stature, Charlie was unlike any of the men she had dealt with throughout the course of the day. She had his complete attention.

"So listen, Betsy. I've been in the newspaper racket for years, though I'm not here about your story *per se*. Henry and I go back, and as soon as I found out what you had gone through...well, I know how it can be. You're going to get a lot of notice from the press,

some of it uninvited. The news business can be cutthroat.” It seemed to Charlie that Betsy was exhausted and distant. “It’s late and you’ll be wanting to get home.” He handed her his business card. “Here’s a number where I can be reached.” Charlie removed a pen from his breast pocket and jotted a separate number beneath the printed information. “This is my home number. If you have any questions or run into any problems, professionally or otherwise, just call me.”

Betsy took the card and thanked him, “I don’t mind saying it was nice to meet you, Charlie, but do you really think it’ll be necessary?”

“Well, let’s see what happens. If you need anything, I’d be happy to hear from you.”

Betsy glanced down at the business card.

Betsy stood with her back to her apartment door, leaned against it. In her hand she held the business card. On the blank side she wrote Joan LeVant’s number from the *New York Post*. Aloud, she repeated the sequence of numbers back into the telephone receiver, answered goodnight, and hung up. She turned the card over, picked the phone up, and dialed the handwritten number. The phone rang. Charlie answered.

“Hello?”

“Hi. Charlie?”

“Betsy?”

“Yeah. You wouldn’t believe this! I came home tonight and got a call from the *New York Post*.”

“Who was it that called?”

“Joan LeVant from the *New York Post*. She was really quite nice—”

Charlie interrupted her before she was able to continue.

“Betsy, you should get some sleep. We’ll talk in the morning.”

“It can’t wait till then,” she insisted. “There’s more. Can we talk tonight?”

Charlie hesitated before he answered, “All right. Where?”

Betsy dragged the phone cord across her living room to her bathroom and freshened up as she spoke with Charlie.

“Do you know Mack’s on 32nd Street?”

“Sure, that’s a place I know pretty well. I’ve never seen you there.”

“Well, I was talking with your friend, Detective Beyle. He says you guys can sometimes be found there.”

“Well, yeah. What time tonight?”

“How’s ten?”

Charlie paused then answered, “Ten o’clock at Mack’s. I’ll see you there.”

“Charlie?”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks.”

“Sure thing. I’m glad you called, Betsy.”

16

The evening was not rushed—not rushed in so much as a late start will often cause its quick passage. Betsy sat alone on a stool at the long bar at Mack’s. An older gentleman, Al, Mack’s longtime bartender, approached her from the opposite side of the counter.

“What can I getcha, ma’am?”

Without blinking Betsy asked for a double bourbon on ice. She took out a piece of paper from her purse. The slip of paper had a few phone numbers jotted on it. She creased the paper, wrapping it around her first two fingers, and tapped it anxiously on the bar. Charlie came up from behind and sat down next to her.

“Hey, doll.”

Betsy smiled sweetly at him.

“Thanks for coming, Charlie.”

“No problem.” He raised an eyebrow asking, “What’cha having?”

At that moment, the bartender arrived with Betsy’s bourbon. Seeing Charlie, he greeted him familiarly.

“Evening, Charlie. The usual?”

“Sure. Sure thing. Thanks, Al.”

Betsy took no time to finish off her drink.

“Woah,” Charlie lightheartedly exclaimed.

“Slow down there!...I guess I don’t have to ask if you’ve had a tough day.”

Betsy laughed, “I’ve earned this.”

Al stood in front of the couple to mix Charlie’s martini. Betsy eyed the concoction.

“That looks nice,” she said to him. “I’ll have one of those.”

Al glanced slyly at Charlie, “You bet.”

Charlie curiously eyed the list Betsy had placed on the bar.

“What’s that you’ve got there?”

“These are a few numbers Henry passed to me from the newspaper people. I got that call from *The Post* that I told you about. I’m not sure where to start.”

Charlie scanned the list and stated, “Wow, you’ve made quite a few new friends, haven’t ya?”

Betsy rolled her eyes, laughed, and replied, “Sure have.”

Al slid the martinis in front of them. The glasses brimmed with liquor, a single olive garnishing each. Betsy thanked Al for her much-needed drink and turned to Charlie.

“How does this sort of thing work? I mean, I figure these papers would want the story exclusively. I wouldn’t even know where to start!”

Charlie lowered his voice and explained, “You’re not going to call anyone. Leave that up

to me.”

“You’ll help me sort through them, then?”

“Sure. Let’s see what happens.”

Charlie stuffed the list into his coat pocket and said, “I’ll call in the morning and feel them out.” Betsy finished her martini while he went on. “Couldn’t this wait, though? You must be exhausted.”

She rolled her eyes and placed down her empty glass. “I just didn’t feel like being alone tonight.”

Al returned, picked up the cold tumbler and topped off their martinis. Charlie thanked him and turned back to Betsy, continuing his thought.

“It seemed much more important than that....There was something you said about there being more?”

Betsy downed her drink and then leaned over to him, whispering in a grievous tone.

“I’m in trouble, Charlie.”

Charlie straightened up, asking her in earnest, “What kind of trouble?”

Al came over once again and interrupted to inquire if he could get Betsy another martini. She nodded politely in confirmation, turning her attention back to Charlie. It was a few moments before she responded.

“I’m being threatened,” Betsy warned.

Taking her seriously, Charlie replied, “By

someone you know?"

Betsy tightened her lips. She nodded.

"Right before I called you."

Al reappeared and mixed a new round of drinks. Fresh glasses were presented. He paused as he poured into Betsy's glass to ask her if she was who he knew she was.

"I'm sorry, but you're the gal all the buzz is about, Betsy Burkes. Am I right?"

"Yeah?"

"I heard all about it, ma'am. I think what you did was really brave."

"Well, thank you."

He looked over to Charlie and announced, "Charlie, your drinks are on me!"

Charlie reached for his wallet and insisted on paying for them himself.

"Don't think of it," Al contended. "I insist."

"Thanks, Al. You're the best."

Charlie turned to Betsy.

"Well, I'll call in the morning and feel my way around those numbers."

Betsy began to get antsy.

"Let's talk about it later."

17

Well after midnight, the couple stepped out from the bar together. The evening was sublime. They headed arm in arm down the sidewalk and stopped alongside a parked

taxicab. The night air had a pleasant warmth to it. All around, a stillness in the spacious sky and a quiet on the empty streets brought out a certain inwardness in Betsy.

“Nice night,” she reflected. “How come things always have to change?”

Charlie pressed the issue once more.

“So, who threatened you?”

Betsy answered, “Charlie, I’ve gotten into a lot of trouble.”

Charlie tried to reassure her.

“I’ll make a call. I’m friends with the detective that you—”

“No, don’t,” she interrupted.

Charlie gave Betsy a stern look. The reproving of his glance incited a thin smile, and disarming him, she countered with a proposition.

“Take me home, would ya, Charlie?!”

Charlie swung open the cab door and exclaimed, “Well, get in, then!”

It was enough that he consented and the conversation was, for the moment, dropped. Betsy stepped inside and gave the driver her Hoboken address.

Within the taxi, there was a comfortable silence as Charlie and Betsy were driven to her apartment. They enjoyed the nearness of one another passing through the city streets, across the George Washington Bridge, and over the

river into Hoboken. The cab pulled up slowly to a row of middle-class apartments and came to a rolling stop, where Betsy had pointed out her building to the driver. She then turned in her seat to face Charlie.

“Could you walk me up?”

“Sure. Sure thing.”

He leaned up to the cabbie.

“Give me a minute.”

Charlie lazily opened the passenger door and scooted out of the car. Close behind him, Betsy leaned forward, pulled some cash out of her purse, and slipped it into the money slot built into the partition. As she slid out after Charlie, she caught the driver’s eye and gave him a wink.

“Have a good night,” Betsy offered.

Together they entered the foyer and walked up the stairs, stopping just outside of Betsy’s apartment door. Charlie sympathetically watched as Betsy fished for her keys. Back and forth her hand worked in the swollen handbag. He lightly took her arm and had her face him.

“I want to help you, Betsy.”

She gave no response.

“You’ve got to not keep things from me.”

She resumed her search and came up with her key ring dangling it in the air, a voiceless *cheer* to her success.

“If only you’d let me help you,” he remarked

candidly.

Betsy unlocked the door to her apartment. At the slightest push it opened. She showed some reluctance to enter. The black rectangle of the doorframe stood like an impasse, something impenetrable to her that had to be surmounted in order to gain passage. Charlie waited for her to go inside. Betsy advanced and let loose a cry as she stepped inside.

“Oh my God!” she shrieked, hanging momentarily in the frame of the doorway.

Charlie stepped past her and entered the apartment.

“What is it?!” he exclaimed.

Her apartment had been broken into and was in complete disarray. Everything in the living room had been turned upside down. The room was utterly trashed. Betsy followed Charlie inside and collapsed onto the couch.

“Let’s get out of here. We’ll go to the police,” he postulated.

“No! Don’t! We can’t,” Betsy pleaded in frustration. She started to break down into tears.

“What aren’t you telling me?” Charlie demanded. “Who’s doing this to you?”

“I-I can’t—”

She turned away from Charlie to face the window, shaking her head.

“The police will know what to do.”

She refused to listen.

“No, Charlie,” she remained facing the window; her gaze drifted out onto the street. “You have to try to understand—” Betsy suddenly ducked down out of sight of the window. “God, he’s there! He’s out there right now!”

“What?!”

Betsy was frantic.

“He’s out on the street!”

Charlie darted over to the window to have a look for himself and saw nothing. The street was empty.

“Who?” he exclaimed. “I don’t see anything. Are you sure you saw someone?”

Betsy jumped up and grabbed him by the arm. Excited and wild-eyed, she pulled him away from the window.

“He’s not right, Charlie! Come on, come with me!” she shouted with a crazed look in her eye and dragged him through her apartment by the hand. “We’ve got to get out of here!”

Confused, Charlie went along with Betsy. She pulled him into her bedroom and forced open the window. The window led out to a rickety fire escape. She spun and looked back at him with resolve. A calm came over her for an instant. She pressed his hand firmly, liken to an old lady taking the small hand of a grandchild, grasping it unintentionally hard. In her

enthusiasm to show how sincerely she felt, she emphatically squeezed at his hand.

“I’m sorry I brought you into this.”

They climbed through the window and clambered out onto the fire escape. Betsy frantically released the counter lever freeing the ladder, which clanked noisily down to the ground. Charlie assisted her over the rail and followed down the stairs, spilling out into a dark, tight alleyway. They scurried through the alley onto a back street between apartment buildings. A car roared past barely missing them as it shot down the narrow street. The brake lights of the car ignited behind them.

Jerry was at the wheel of the car. He saw the couple and had slammed on the brakes, screeching to a stop. He checked the rearview mirror and looked over his shoulder. Even in the grey half-light of the alley he recognized Betsy and angrily threw the car into reverse, peeling out and gearing after them. The engine roared and the wheels jerked. With so much force, the rusted beat-up boat of a car lurched back uncontrollably. The steering was made difficult; right was left, left right. The car bounced from the back street walls before Jerry regained control.

Betsy and Charlie ran like mad just ahead of the swerving rear end of the speeding car. Panicked, the couple ducked to their side down

another cramped alleyway. The car passed near enough to be felt. Together they came to a chain-link fence at the end of the alley, where Charlie gave Betsy a boost and climbed over after her.

His having missed, Jerry jammed hard on the brakes and violently pulled the car forward. The alley was too small. He swung open the door and jumped out of the car to see that they had already cleared the fence. Cursing, he punched down on the hood in frustration, then hopped back in and sped off down the back street in pursuit.

Betsy and Charlie emerged from the alley onto a large well-lit main road. They were both shaken by the entire incident. Charlie was buckled over trying to catch his breath.

“Wh—What’s goin’ on?...Who is that?!”

A car’s headlights approached. Betsy grabbed Charlie by his jacket and tried to pull him back into the alley before realizing that it was a cab, not Jerry’s car. Charlie rushed out into the street and hailed it to a stop.

Jerry hurriedly made a right hand turn onto a small street. When he made the turn he did not take notice of the cab passing at the intersection up ahead. Jerry got to the intersection, looked about, made another right hand turn and drove off. He had lost them.

In the safety of the taxi, Charlie held Betsy.

She was clearly shaken up.

"I'm sorry, Charlie," she sighed.

"It's going to be all right, Betsy," Charlie replied.

He put his arm around her protectively, her head resting on his chest. He reassured her with a soft kiss on her forehead. Her eyes swelled with tears. After a moment like this she pulled herself up and turned to him. She looked Charlie in the eyes.

"I'm sorry I brought you into this....I didn't have anyone else to turn to."

18

Betsy woke, alone, in a large bed at daybreak. The events of the previous day had faded in a whirl. She was brought out of a deep sleep to discover herself in a comfortable, well-furnished room. She yawned and stretched herself out, wondering as to where she was. In that instance, Charlie entered dressing himself, finishing his necktie.

"You're awake," he noted.

Betsy was flooded with the pleasant memories of the previous night. She remembered everything, brightened, and smiled fondly at him.

"Charlie!"

"I have to get to the office."

He leaned over to kiss her forehead.

“I’ll make some calls.”

Charlie read Betsy’s worried expression.

“I’ve got to go in. You’ll be safe here....Just don’t go out. Here—” In handing to her a piece of paper he explained, “Here’s my personal number at the office, in case anything happens.” She took the number as he continued. “Stay by the phone. I’ll call you as soon as I set something up.”

“When should I expect you?”

“Around five. Make yourself at home. But don’t go anywhere...and don’t call anyone,” he warned her. “Wait for me and make sure to screen all the calls. Stay by the phone, okay?”

Charlie stepped toward the bedroom door, speaking all the while. Betsy nodded and waved goodbye as he walked out of the room. For a moment she waited before sitting up in the bed to watch from the window as Charlie stepped out the front door and headed down the sidewalk. She turned away, casually picked up the bedside telephone, and dialed.

Across town, Charlie exited the cab and made his way up the main steps to the news building where he worked. The neoclassic facade with its columns and narrow windows were in awkward contrast to the glass, boxlike skyscrapers that surrounded it on all sides. Upon his entrance, Charlie rushed through the central lobby and took the elevator up to the

offices of the *New York Daily News*. He greeted several people in passing before entering his own office where his personal secretary, Miss Williams, sat at her desk.

“Good morning, Mister Langley,” she welcomed him.

“Miss Williams, could you cancel my appointments for today?”

“I could, Mister Langley,” she said lightheartedly, “if you had any.”

Charlie checked his brusque behavior. “Good morning, Jane,” he grinned. “Is that better?”

“Better, yes.”

She glanced over the rim of her coffee mug and took a careful sip.

At this Charlie smiled and responded, “Well, just tell anyone who calls that I’m not in.”

Miss Williams responded in a singsong voice, “Certainly, Mister Langley.”

“Thank you, Jane.”

Charlie dismissed himself and stepped into his private office closing the double doors behind him. He had the list of phone numbers Betsy had acquired, and picked up the desk telephone. He dialed.

Within a dreary, ill-lit apartment a solitary phone abrasively rang. The tiny space was made that much more miniscule by the

pervasive smell of stale cigarette smoke and lack of open windows. It was poorly decorated, graying wallpaper, a worn birch wood floor and with a could-care-less mismatch of furnishings. Jerry answered.

“Yeah?”

“You son of a bitch!” Betsy slighted.

“Oh, yeah?”

Betsy was on the telephone in Charlie’s bright, spacious Manhattan apartment.

“You’ve made your point,” she said sternly, “Now stay out of my life.” As she said this she walked from the bedroom to a large, closed-off bathroom. There was a long pause on the other line. “You hear me, Jerry?” Leaned forward, she looked closely at her reflection in the mirror spanning the entire length of the marble counter top.

“I’m looking at you,” Jerry taunted.

“What?”

“Right now....I’m looking at you.”

Betsy quickly scanned the bathroom. There was no way for him to see her.

“*What?!*”

“I’m looking at a picture of you in the paper,” Jerry menaced.

“Stay out of my life, Jerry.”

There was silence from the other end of the line.

“Jerry?”

"I know a famous person," he stated matter of factually.

There was another moment of silence from Jerry's end. Then he burst into a fit of laughter. Betsy disconnected and slammed the phone down onto the counter top.

The morning was quick in passing. Betsy idled at the kitchen counter wearing Charlie's bathrobe, a towel wrapped round her head. She poured milk over a bowl of cereal while she curiously watched a news report on the living room television set. The report was about herself and the events which had transpired the day before. The phone rang. She did not answer. A moment later it rang again. She was not sure. A call once more, and on this occasion she answered.

"Hello?"

"Betsy. Good. I was afraid you weren't going to answer."

"Hey, Charlie!" she exclaimed excitedly. "Guess what?"

"Uh...what?"

"I'm watching myself on the news!"

Charlie seemed distracted.

"Yeah? Listen, you wouldn't believe who just left my office."

"Who?" Betsy asked, interested.

"The first thing is," he told her, "I'm on your side."

Concerned, Betsy pried, "What do you mean, Charlie? Who was in your office?"

"I need you to get ready. I've arranged for a cab. It's on the way to pick you up. It'll be there in about fifteen minutes."

"What for?!"

"To bring you here."

"But—"

In a calm tone Charlie tried to explain the situation.

"It's all right, Betsy. I've just spoken with the Justice Department's main man, the district attorney of New York, and an old friend of mine."

"But I thou—," she interceded.

"Listen, I need you here in my office."

"I—," she stammered.

"You're gonna sign an affidavit," he stated as he got to the point, "and do a press release."

"Why do I need to sign anything?"

Charlie reiterated, "We're in this together, baby. I'm watching after your interests."

"Am I in trouble, Charlie?"

"No," he conferred. "You're just giving them all the facts. Telling the truth will make you safe. Once you've come out, you're out."

"By making a press release?"

"That's right. There's safety in telling them what happened."

Betsy finished getting herself ready when she heard a honk from outside. A cursory glance out the window and she spotted the taxi Charlie had called waiting for her by the curb. She rushed downstairs exiting the posh Upper East Side town house apartment.

The ride was smooth and uneventful. A moment to reflect did her nerves a world of good. She trusted in Charlie. She knew he had her interests in mind and that he could be counted on. The cab pulled up to the curb in front of the steps that led to the offices of the *New York Daily News*. There was a small crowd and the media waiting at the entrance. As Betsy emerged from the cab, cameramen and journalists swarmed all over her.

“Is it true, Miss Burkes,” one journalist asked, “that the Justice Department suspects you to be at criminal fault for the slaying of Frank Scholetti early yesterday morning at the First Federal Bank?”

Stunned, Betsy stammered taken completely off guard.

“I—I don’t know what to say. I only—”

“Do you feel you may have over-reacted when you shot Mister Scholetti?” another journalist interrupted.

The first journalist cut in, “Do you feel guilty for the slaying, Miss Burkes?”

Charlie came to Betsy's rescue and took her by the arm. Over his shoulder as he and Betsy stepped away, he addressed the pushy reporters.

"Miss Burkes is not available for an interview at this moment."

"Mister Langley," a journalist persisted, "will the District Attorney's office be charging Miss Burkes wi—"

Charlie pushed through the crowd with Betsy in tow.

"Miss Burkes will be making a press statement later this afternoon."

"Mister Langley, will you be—" another reporter attempted to question.

Upon getting to the front entrance, Charlie turned around to face the cameras.

"This afternoon the Justice Department informed our office that they will not be pressing charges against Miss Burkes. The District Attorney's office has agreed to arrange for Miss Burkes to have an affidavit written. Again, a public statement will be made later this afternoon. Thank you."

A few moments later Betsy and Charlie entered his office. Charlie addressed the secretary, "Miss Williams, would you get Jim on the phone for me?"

"Mister Langley," she informed him, "NBC is on the line."

With a turn to Betsy, Charlie gave a wink.

"Today with Dave Garroway. Been holding for some time, too," Miss Williams impressed upon them.

That afternoon the press conference was held in the huge central lobby of the *News* building. Betsy spoke confidently at an imposing podium cluttered with microphones. Behind her, Charlie stood in support. Photos were being taken and news cameras were trained on Betsy as she finished with her statement.

"...doing everything I could to protect myself," she concluded before stepping away from the podium.

In front of Betsy's television Jerry reclined on the couch. Situated comfortably in her trashed living room he watched, entranced by the news program. He witnessed in disgust Betsy profess her innocence. On the screen she and Charlie descended the platform and made their way through the crowd. The news clip ended, turning the program back over to a news broadcaster.

"A lot of controversy surrounding this brave lady," the broadcaster reported. "We'll keep you updated on any further developments in the story. A program note: Tuesday morning on *Today with Dave Garroway*, tune in to NBC for an exclusive interview with Betsy Burkes."

Repulsed, Jerry shut off the television set,

pulled himself up, and walked toward the kitchen stepping over the coffee table, which was littered with empty beer bottles and take-out Chinese food containers. Distracted by the news, he opened the fridge, and already knowing that it was empty, slammed the door shut.

21

Charlie and Betsy lay comfortably on a large sofa in Charlie's apartment as they watched the evening news. The moment they were waiting for came on. Betsy straightened and leaned in, in anticipation. It was another clip of her, this time reading the affidavit followed by a short interview that she had done earlier that day.

"No matter how many times I see myself,...I swear, I just can't get used to this!" Betsy exclaimed. "It's so bizarre."

"Tomorrow's going to be a big day. If you still want your things from your apartment, then we should leave before it gets too late."

On an empty street corner later that evening, Charlie and Betsy exited a taxi and stepped out onto the empty sidewalk. A grave and sinister quality pervaded. Not a single streetlight was working. They were in Betsy's Hoboken neighborhood. Her apartment was situated nearby.

“What’s with the broken street lights?” Charlie chanced.

As if his asking had some beneficial effect, the row of lights buzzed on in quick succession. With a flicker the lamps ignited, lighting a path up and down the vacant streets.

“That was strange,” Betsy wittily observed.

“Ask and you shall receive!”

The couple strode down the sidewalk stopping at a side alley. The dark and empty street provided them their best opportunity.

“Looks like no one’s around.”

“What now?” Betsy inquired.

“We’ll go up the back, then,” Charlie reminded her, “like we talked about....Just in case he’s around.”

The couple cut down the side alley. In silence Charlie led Betsy to the back of her apartment building. He gave her a boost to scurry up the same fire escape that they had hurriedly lowered the night before. Without causing too much of a racket, they climbed up the metal ladder to the back window and went quietly into Betsy’s bedroom. Not to waste a second, Betsy grabbed a suitcase, flung it onto her bed, and began to pile clothes and personal belongings into it. Charlie’s attention was drawn by a faint sound.

“Do you hear the television?” Charlie asked cautiously.

Not concerning herself, Betsy brushed it off by saying, "I'm sure it's the neighbors. I'll be quick."

"I'm gonna go get something to drink," Charlie told her.

"There's some beer in the fridge."

Charlie swung open the bedroom door, stepped over some trashed furniture, and walked out into the darkened living room. He heard a television. Not thinking it could possibly be Betsy's, he walked right into the room. Quickly, Charlie realized that something was not right. He saw that the television was on and that fresh trash was scattered all over the coffee table. Charlie didn't miss a beat. He spun on his heels and headed straight back to the bedroom.

Knowing something was not right, Betsy looked up. Charlie stood in the door white as a sheet.

"What's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost!"

"Shhh!" he whispered. "He's here...Come on!"

"You're kidding!" Betsy uttered in disbelief.

"No, I'm not!...Come on!"

Betsy slammed the suitcase closed and the two of them took off, out the window, down the fire escape, and through the alley.

Charlie and Betsy sat comfortably in the plush lobby of an elegant Upper East Side hotel. Engrossed, they looked closely over a packet of legal papers when approached by a few well-dressed business people—a woman, Miss Artese, and two men, Teddy Donnel and Ronald Mosley. Miss Artese, an articulate, middle-aged woman, greeted them warmly.

“Miss Burkes!”

“Hello, Miss Artese?”

“It’s so nice to meet you, Betsy.”

Betsy politely stood and shook the hand of Miss Artese.

“Likewise.”

Attentively, Betsy turned to the two men. Teddy Donnel, an older man, stepped forward and extended his hand taking the opportunity to introduce himself.

“Hello, Miss Burkes. I’m Teddy Donnel, the producer of *Today*,” he said turning to the other man. “This is Ronald Mosley, our attorney.”

He motioned to the papers in Charlie’s hands.

“We can go over any of that for you. I’m sure you both have plenty of questions.”

As Teddy spoke, Ronald shook hands with Betsy.

“This is Charles Langley,” Betsy informed the two men. “He’ll be checking things for me.”

Affably, Charlie shook hands with them and said, "It's nice to meet you. I think this contract is good. We've discussed it and we're very pleased."

"Why don't we go into the other room," Teddy suggested, "and have a chat over breakfast? We're going to go through the entire show so you know exactly what to expect."

The group adjourned into a luxurious room brightened with a crisp light and humming with people seated enjoying breakfast. The host seated them at in a cheery corner, taking an order of coffee for the whole table. Miss Artese began the discussion of the upcoming interview.

"I don't want you worrying about anything. Each and every step will be taken one at a time."

The waiter placed a cup in front of each of them and poured. As Betsy stirred her coffee, she got immediately to the point.

"So, I've never done anything like this before. What should I expect? How do you see this all coming together?"

"Well now, if you don't mind me being direct..." Miss Artese started.

"No, not at all."

"How we do this," Miss Artese continued, "is going to be up to you."

"How so?"

“Well, Mister Garroway expressed how wonderfully strong you seemed. You know, the show’s viewing audience is comprised mostly of the American housewives, and well, he felt that if you were to display the conviction you had on that morning, Betsy—”

“Conviction?”

“At the back of that ambulance,” Miss Artese illustrated. “I mean, people really connected with you. What you did was extraordinary...You seemed so strong and heroic.”

Betsy was taken back by this compliment.

“Really!”

“So incredibly strong. Otherwise, Betsy, we wouldn’t be as interested in doing this interview as we are. We all think what you did was really brave.”

At this point, Teddy added his thoughts.

“Miss Burkes, your heroism has been a reminder to men and women, all Americans in fact, of the ability we have to stand up for ourselves, to say no, to do something right,...to make a difference and stand out.”

Miss Artese nodded in agreement, saying, “That’s what Mister Garroway would like to see, Betsy. That’s what we’re looking for—a heroic woman. A woman who does what she has to in order to protect herself. How many times have you said that yourself?”

Again, Teddy supported Miss Artese’s

argument.

“Betsy, fame is an opportunist, and I truly believe that this can be an opportunity for you to become famous.”

23

Betsy sat across from Dave Garroway on the sound stage before a live studio audience. They were fronted by teleprompters and huge television cameras. The taping of the interview was coming to an end. Betsy smiled for the cameras.

“Thank you so much for having me.”

“You are an extraordinary woman, Betsy,” Dave concluded. “I want to thank you again for talking so candidly with us about what has happened to you.”

His signature salute to the cameras concluded the filming. Stage engineers came from behind the cameras and removed the microphones from Betsy and Dave.

“That was wonderful, Betsy,” Dave congratulated her.

“Thank you, Dave. I was a little nervous. It didn’t show, did it?”

“No, dear, you were great. Good luck with everything. I’ve got to finish shooting the show. Thanks again, Betsy. Thank you so much.”

The soundstage was confining and Charlie decided to get some fresh air. Unbeknownst to

Betsy, he had slipped out just as she was finishing the taping of the interview. A black sedan was parked along the curb. The engine turned over as Charlie exited the studio. Henry was seated at the wheel and leaned over to open the passenger door. Charlie hopped in and was driven off. The men's demeanor was perfunctory. Nods were exchanged. The two men, seated beside one another in the car as they were, made apparent their mutual understanding; a silent, casual though respectful professionalism shared between them. Henry brought the sedan to a stop at a traffic light, removed a single piece of paper from a crowded folder he had on his lap and handed it over to Charlie.

"This is where the bastard lives."

The paper had a list of names and addresses typed on it. One in particular was highlighted. As the light changed, Henry quickly handed Charlie the folder. Henry made a right-hand turn and drove slowly down the road as Charlie read through an inch thick of papers he had removed from the folder. They came to the next light and glided through another right-hand turn.

"This guy's got a colorful past," Henry added.

"Yeah, no kidding."

"Aggravated assault, attempted murder, two and a half years in San Quentin for extortion."

Henry came to the next intersection and made a right turn.

“This guy’s bad news, Charlie.”

Charlie nodded his head. “Thanks for this. This is a lot.”

“Well, don’t worry about it.”

Henry came to one last light and made another right, which brought the car around to the entrance of the studio. He stopped the car.

“If you’re in some kind of trouble, I can always help.”

Charlie, nodding, reached into his coat and pulled out an envelope.

“Thanks, Henry,” he said as he handed the envelope over to Henry, who off-handedly tossed it onto the dashboard.

“Keep in touch.”

The men shook hands. Charlie stepped out and walked into the studio. Henry watched him enter before he drove off. Coming to a stop at the light, he grabbed the envelope off the dash, opened it, and thumbed through a wad of cash.

Behind the scenes, in the greenroom, Betsy waited around for Charlie to return. Grips and assistants scrambled about. Teddy approached her.

“Miss Burkes! Good show!”

“Thank you.”

“You’ve truly risen to the occasion. I understand you’re meeting with Dean from

Look magazine.”

“That’s right,” Betsy confirmed. “For an interview.”

“Have John do your photos. Tell Dean you talked with me about it.”

At this, Charlie came over to them.

“Charlie!” Betsy exclaimed.

“Hey. How did it go?” he asked. “You look great, like you took on the whole world and won!”

“I feel like I just did.”

The couple embraced. Charlie shook hands with Teddy Donnel and thanked him.

“Teddy’s given me the name of a photographer at *Look* magazine,” Betsy told Charlie.

“Is that right?”

An assistant approached with a bouquet of flowers and handed them to Betsy. “Miss Burkes, these arrived while you were taping. Congratulations!”

Betsy thanked the assistant slyly glancing over at Charlie, smiling with wide, knowing eyes. Charlie waved a hand in the air and shook his head.

“No, not me. I wonder who sent them.”

“Well, let me leave you two,” Teddy interceded. “Congratulations, Betsy. You had a wonderful interview.”

She thanked Teddy as he turned to leave the

couple to themselves. The flower arrangement was extensive and no doubt costly. Charlie reached into the flowers and found a folded note.

"Let's see it," Betsy said as she grabbed the note from him before he had a chance to read it. "You really didn't send these?"

She read the note and froze.

"Shit! He's not...oh, you've got to be kidding!"

"What is it?" Charlie inquired.

He took a look at the note and exclaimed, "I can't believe this!"

"He wants to meet," Betsy informed him.

"You're not..."

24

Charlie and Betsy stood alone on a subway platform waiting for a train.

"He wants you in the last car," Charlie reiterated. "I'll just sit at the front like we discussed, and if he gives you any trouble I'll be there with this."

Discreetly, Charlie pulled back his jacket revealing a nickel-plated revolver concealed in his inside pocket. Betsy was alarmed wanting nothing to do with the weapon.

"No! Don't you bring that!"

"Only if we need it," he refuted. "I'd rather not be without it."

The rumble of an approaching train emanated from the depths of the tunnel.

“Well, keep it out of sight.”

The train screeched up to the platform. Betsy was forced to yell over the deafening noise.

“And don’t let him see it unless you plan to use it.”

It was late. Very few people were on the train. At the end of the platform, Betsy and Charlie boarded the last car, which was completely deserted. Betsy stood alone at the very back of the car. Charlie took a seat further up at the front.

The entire evening Henry spent at the wheel of his dark sedan parked across the street from a rundown apartment building in Queens. He straightened up watchful of Jerry, who exited the building, traversed the street, and walked past on the sidewalk. Inconspicuously, Henry got out of the sedan and tailed close behind him.

Jerry walked purposefully for a few blocks, unaware of his pursuer. They arrived at a subway entrance. Jerry hurried down. Calmly, Henry followed. Just as Henry entered the station, a train arrived. At the kiosk he rushed to get a token, jumped through the turnstile, and ran for the train barely catching it. Climbing on board, he noticed Jerry step into the car at the end of the platform. Henry had

entered the train a half dozen cars up from the last.

Henry rushed through the train, door to door, bounding through the vestibules between the cars of the subway train. He arrived at the second to last car, entered the vestibule, and peered into the last car from the rear door window. The blustering wind and jerk of the train fought against Henry as he wrestled with his curiosity. From the narrow space between cars he watched Betsy and Jerry argue. Through the filthy glass partition the detective was just able to manage to see what was happening in the last car.

Charlie's presence at the back of the car encouraged Betsy to be brazen. Without discretion, she quarreled.

"You got some nerve trying to push!"

"You should shut your mouth before you make this worse on yourself!"

"I'm not listening to you, Jerry."

Jerry angrily grabbed her by the wrist. Charlie immediately rose, blocking Henry's view, and rushed to Betsy's aid.

In the car, Betsy faced Jerry, who had his back to Charlie. Her teeth gritted, Betsy recoiled, wincing at the force of Jerry's hold.

"Get off of me, Jerry!"

"Don't think you can get out of this," he warned.

Imprudently, Charlie approached gun in hand. Betsy saw him near and glanced up, her eyes telling Jerry that something was not right. Jerry spun on his heels, keeping a grip on Betsy, and firmly elbowed Charlie with his free arm. He landed his blow right in Charlie's gut. Charlie gasped and reeled back. Betsy let out a yelp and lunged forward. In a flash, Jerry moved his grip from Betsy's arm to her throat, stopping her in her tracks. At this, Jerry took the revolver from Charlie, who was bent double writhing in pain, and pistol-whipped him with it. Charlie folded over helplessly onto the floor. With all of his strength, Charlie tried to rise but was too weak. Betsy desperately pleaded with Jerry.

"Stop, please!"

"Is this what you had planned?" Jerry laughed angrily.

"Just stop. He's only trying to protect me."

The train entered a brightly lit terminal and began to come to a halt. Jerry put the revolver in his coat pocket, releasing Betsy. Concerned about Charlie, she knelt to assist him. Teary-eyed, she stared at Jerry.

"Jerry, I didn't mean for this..."

Jerry moved to the doors, and as the train jarred to a stop, he replied, "Don't play games with me, little girl. I'll ruin everything."

The train stopped and the doors slid open.

“I’ve got nothing to lose,” he threatened.

Hastily, Jerry stepped out, leaving Betsy and Charlie behind. Henry also retreated from the vestibule and into the second to last car. From where he stood by the doors, he watched Jerry exit the train; The detective followed him out onto the platform. The train departed with Betsy and Charlie still on board.

Jerry walked off ahead of Henry to the entrance of several connecting tunnels. A scattering of transients and homeless littered the terminal. He paused and looked up at a sign to decide which tunnel to take. Henry stepped up beside him, also looking casually up at the sign. Jerry glanced over at him as if pretending not to notice. Henry turned away to leave the station as Jerry headed off down one of the connecting tunnels. Henry stepped away nonchalantly glancing over his shoulder to find out which tunnel Jerry had taken.

As Jerry entered the long transfer tunnel, he passed a transit cop. The two exchanged nods acknowledging each other.

The cop mumbled, “Evening.”

Jerry walked silently past. The cop found Jerry to have a suspicious demeanor and turned to follow him.

Wasting no time, Henry headed up the stairs and exited the subway station. He was still walking, but fast. A skip out onto the street and

Henry picked up the pace, charging down the sidewalk. He hurried a few blocks and came to the stairs of another subway entrance, which he rushed down. Just as he arrived in the station's lobby, he saw Jerry pass heading for the platform. The transit cop stepped into the lobby, stopping just in front of the turnstile in order to keep an eye on Jerry. Deftly, Henry jumped over the turnstile and took out his badge. The transit cop turned around.

"Hey! Buddy! Wait right there!"

Henry flashed his gold shield to the cop.

"Oh," the transit cop humbled himself. "Good evening, sir."

Pulling the transit cop aside, Henry quietly asked when the next train was scheduled to pass.

"Not for a while now. Maybe ten minutes."

"Do me a favor, will ya? Go up the stairs. Let no one else in."

"All right. Is somethin' up?"

"Don't worry about it. Just wait up there for me a minute."

Henry entered the station, spotted Jerry down a ways waiting for the train, and approached the only other person on the platform—an old bag lady who was seated at one of the public benches. Walking straight over to her, he discreetly showed her his badge, and with his back to Jerry asked her quietly to exit the

subway station. She did so, though quite annoyed.

“So what do you think? You own the place or somethin’?” she grumbled.

Henry remained in place. It took the bag lady several moments to gather her things together and pile them in a shopping cart she had somehow gotten into the station. Off to the side Jerry watched everything and seemed a bit perplexed. He headed over to Henry. As he was coming, the bag lady was going. Jerry lingered long enough for the woman to get to a connecting tunnel. Henry was facing the tracks, ignoring Jerry and at the same time keeping an eye on the old lady. Just as Jerry was on top of him...

“Hey, fella!” Jerry announced.

...the old lady exited. Henry swung around in a flash, wailing Jerry in the groin with a closed fist. Jerry, whose hands were in his jacket pockets, was defenseless and went down hard.

Henry stooped down and searched Jerry’s pockets, found the nickel-plated revolver, and put it in turn into his own pocket. Jerry started to resist, so Henry kicked into him viciously as he lay on the ground, completely debilitating him. When Henry was done, he leaned over Jerry with his hands on his knees.

“Hey...fella,” Henry mocked back.

Jerry rolled over writhing in pain. After a

pause, he looked into his assailant's face.

"I know you!" Jerry choked.

"Seen me around, have you?"

"On the news," he struggled. "Yeah."

Henry sucked through his teeth.

"What do you want with the woman?"

"What woman?" Jerry grunted in pain.

"Betsy Burkes...what've you got on her?"

"I don't got anything."

"Oh," the detective threatened, removing the revolver from his jacket, "I don't think you get it."

"All right....She's a lying bitch. She was in on the robbery. I know. I was in on it too, and I'm getting my share!"

There was the distant sound of a subway train.

"Your share?"

Tensed, Jerry eyed the revolver in Henry's hand. Henry nodded the barrel up and down. A sudden change in air pressure passed over the men from up on the platform.

"Come on," Henry prodded.

"She's famous now. And I'm getting a share of it."

As Jerry spoke, the train screeched into the station forcing Henry to talk loudly.

"Fame's a bitch."

He smiled disdainfully at Jerry.

"You'll get your share, just not all of it."

Henry stood and backed off. Over the clamorous rumble of the subway train he yelled, "I'll be seeing ya."

Before the train pulled all the way in, Henry tossed the revolver into the subway tracks and walked off.

25

A jetliner made a nighttime landing into Los Angeles International Airport. Charlie and Betsy entered the terminal, passed through the airport, and waited at the baggage claim to collect their luggage. Charlie watched the conveyer belt for their bags; Betsy stood off to the side daydreaming. Half to herself she spoke out loud.

"I wonder if it always happens this fast."

With his back turned, Charlie barely heard her remark. He retrieved a piece of their luggage and asked as he placed it down before her, "What's that you said?"

Betsy turned the small, hard-sided rectangular bag on its end lengthwise and sat down on it.

"Nothing, really. It's just that this all seems to be happening so fast."

Charlie grabbed another of their suitcases, opened it up, and pulled out a strap.

"That'll about do it."

The couple was prepared to leave the airport.

The flight from New York to Los Angeles, though short by normal standards, hardly six hours by jet, was exhausting. After Charlie attached the strap and slung the bag over his shoulder, he looked at Betsy.

“Are we forgetting anything?”

Betsy rose and pulled the handle from her case.

“I think we’re ready.”

“There should be a car waiting for us out front,” Charlie informed her.

“I can’t wait to get to our hotel.”

“We’ll get some sleep.”

Charlie led Betsy out to catch their ride. Where the chauffeurs were usually found standing with their signs, a throng of photographers awaited. Betsy passed her case to Charlie and commented, “Really, what’s next?”

Betsy stepped forward she smiled and waved to the nonstop clicking of cameras. A limo driver motioned to her, took the couple’s luggage from Charlie, and escorted them to a limousine parked at the curb.

The trip from the airport on the stretch of open highway to their lodgings in Santa Monica was painless. The contented moments passed the couple by in scarce the time it took Charlie to acquaint Betsy to the city of Los Angeles. The driver brought the car up a narrow drive

and parked below the awning of an upscale hotel. From the drive, stepping out through the sultry night air, Betsy and Charlie entered the cool lobby of the luxurious hotel. A receptionist warmly greeted the couple as they approached the front desk.

“Good evening. Welcome to the Grand Hotel.”

“We’ve got a room under Charles Langley,” said Betsy.

“Yes, Langley...,” the receptionist repeated as she checked the hotel registration. “Here you are. You’ll be in suite eight-sixteen. Let me get someone to help you with your bags.”

Inside their suite, Charlie flopped onto the king-size bed, exhausted. Betsy checked out the apartment-sized suite top to bottom.

“My God,” she exclaimed, “this place is beautiful!”

With a delightful laugh, she jumped onto the bed beside Charlie.

“Let’s order up some champagne,” he winsomely suggested. “What do ya say?”

Betsy smiled at him in way of an answer.

“We’ll just spend the night in. Order some room service.”

“Sure thing, Charlie.”

He rolled over and picked up the phone to order.

“Grab me the menu.”

The next morning Betsy and Charlie enjoyed breakfast in bed while they watched television. A host on one of the morning shows spoke of President Eisenhower's recent admittance of Hawaii as the fiftieth state of the union. Charlie was mildly interested in the topic and leaned back from the television set listening contently.

"Honey," Betsy asked sweetly, "what's our schedule like this afternoon?"

"Well, we're having lunch in Beverly Hills with *Look* magazine's senior editor at three."

"What's going on before hand?"

"Our morning's free until then."

Charlie was glued to the set. The man speaking mentioned the addition of Alaska as the forty-ninth state in January previously that year. He commended the president and the decision to expand the nation's resources. It was a terrible bore to Betsy.

"Are they having a car pick us up?"

"No, we're borrowing a car for the week from one of these fancy rental agencies," he replied, filling her in on the arrangements he had made. "We'll just meet them at the restaurant."

"That's great! If we've got wheels, Charlie, then let's use them."

"You can count on it!"

"I was reading a little before bed last night.

Los Angeles is basically just a bunch of neighborhoods all connected to one another. It's a lot like the boroughs of New York."

"Not exactly. New York's something special. Los Angeles is more like one huge suburb."

"That's not a very romantic way of looking at it!"

"Well, there's always the good weather."

"And let's don't forget all the beautiful people and great fashions. That reminds me, I'd like to do some shopping beforehand. I look like a mess."

"Sure, baby. We'll get you set up. While we're there maybe we'll go to Rodeo Drive."

"I'd really like a chance to see the city."

"I don't know how many chances we're gonna have, Bet."

"I don't want to hear it. Time's a wastin'!"

Betsy climbed out of bed.

"Where ya going!?"

"Well, I'm gonna get ready. Let's spend some money."

Betsy lifted the breakfast tray off of the bed as Charlie laid on his side, leaning on his hand.

"All right," he said, gazing fondly at her.

Early in the afternoon Henry entered the lobby of the Grand Hotel. Charlie and Betsy had long since left for the day. He approached the front

desk and asked the pretty receptionist stationed within if he could speak with the hotel manager.

“Was there anything I could help you with today, sir?”

“No, thank you. May I speak to the manager, please?”

“Is there a problem?”

“No. No problem.”

Henry stood there unmoving. A smile alit his comely features, eliciting a smile in return.

“Let me see if he’s available.”

The woman disappeared into the back office. The manager was summoned and asked how he could help. Henry handed the man an envelope. A name was written on the outside.

“This is you?” Henry asked.

The receptionist glanced nosily at the envelope.

“Yes.”

The manager rudely shooed her away. The girl was a bit taken aback and giped under her breath as she conceded the counter.

“Yes...Yes it is, sir,” said the manager. His only concern was addressing the issue at hand.

“We spoke on the phone earlier,” Henry explained, prompting the manager into action.

“Yes, sir. Everything has been arranged. Your room is waiting for you,...Mister...Smith.”

The manager reached under the counter and

presented a set of room keys to Henry for which Henry thanked him.

“Enjoy your stay,” the manager said, slipping the envelope under the counter.

The detective accepted the keys and retreated through the lobby, checking the room number on the plastic key fob. The number read: 817. Henry called the elevator and stepped inside. Soft music played as he took the elevator to the eighth floor - a Henry Mancini jazz medley to which Henry whistled. The elevator stopped, its door opening to his floor. Henry exited the elevator and strode down the hall.

He came to his suite, the double doors of which mirrored those of suite 816. He threw his bags on the bed, took the Do Not Disturb sign and posted it outside his door. Only then did he check out the suite, spotting an adjoining room door. Henry returned to his luggage, opened one of the bags, removed a small zippered leather pouch, and headed over to this door. He opened his side of the door, listened carefully, and promptly unzipped the pouch. Inside was an assortment of lock-picking tools, and with them he adeptly forced the adjoining door's lock.

Opening it, he stuck his head in, stepped through the door, and entered Betsy and Charlie's empty suite. Henry strode directly

over to the front door of their suite and posted the Do Not Disturb sign, closing the door behind him.

28

Betsy and Charlie were seated at a white cloth covered table in a showy restaurant joined by a few well-dressed Hollywood types. So far the day was bright and encouraging. They talked extensively, laughed agreeably, and ate well.

“Teddy tells me that you’re one of the best photographers in the business,” Betsy stated charmingly.

She addressed a young, arrogant-looking man, Stanley.

“What Teddy knows, Miss Burkes,” he replied, “is that I shoot the covers for *Look* magazine.”

An executive type, Dean Reams, cut in.

“Stanley is invaluable to the magazine. *He is Look’s face.*”

“You shoot all the covers for the magazine?” Betsy asked.

“The covers and exposés.”

Dean added, “Stanley’s an award-winning photojournalist. There’s no one better in the business.”

“You don’t have a thing to worry about,” Stanley stated. “I’ll have a cover shot inside an hour.”

“Cover shot?” Betsy probed.

Dean elaborated, “Betsy, I don’t have the last word on this, but I would like to see you on our cover. I really admire what you’ve done.” He hesitated a second before continuing. “I understand it’s not anything anyone would ask for, but when forced into a situation of that kind I can’t imagine anyone acting as bravely as you did.”

To this Betsy said, “When I was told *Look* magazine wanted to interview me, I was flabbergasted.”

“People want to hear your story. They find it inspiring.”

Betsy was nonplused. “It’s just me.”

“There isn’t any reason why you shouldn’t be recognized for the things you do.”

“I know, but it’s all so surreal.”

“Betsy, you’re a beautiful woman with incredible courage. Your story is exactly what people are interested in reading.”

“Yeah, still...*Look* magazine. I mean, the whole country reads *Look*!”

“It’s true, Betsy. A lot of people read our magazine,” Dean told her. “It’s not a favor I’m doing you. You don’t have to thank me...You did this.”

“But the cover!” she insisted. “I mean, I don’t even know what to think.”

“Then don’t....Let’s just explore the effect

alone that a cover will have for you. *Look* is not the only reason you're in Los Angeles..."

"No."

"You're getting a lot of money for your story. But it's not just your story that the public's after. Publicity, the right kind of publicity, could make you a celebrity."

29

Following an exhausting yet successful afternoon of taking meetings, Betsy and Charlie wandered back to the hotel. The driving was what got them down the most. The need to traipse all over town to make each appointment was numbing. The couple rode the elevator up to their floor feeling spent and drained of all their strength.

"What a day!"

"Not over yet."

"Oh, don't remind me! I feel like a title boxer fighting his way out of debt."

"Our mistake was not hiring a car."

"Yeah, but who knew?"

Having arrived at their suite, Charlie opened the door and removed the Do Not Disturb sign, not giving it a second thought.

"We'll relax for a few hours, grab dinner early, and—"

The couple stumbled into the suite and stood frozen in shock to find that it had been turned

upside down.

“Oh, not again!” Betsy cried. “This is...this is ridiculous! This is...”

She was so angry and fed up. Charlie came around her, his posture defensive. A quick check confirmed that the remaining chambers of the suite were also in a considerable state of disorder.

“We don’t know it was him,” he said in way of consolation.

“It’s not a coincidence.”

“Well, how do we know?”

“It was him, Charlie!”

The phone rang, which caused them both to jump out of their skin. Betsy remained in place. Charlie took a tentative step toward the phone.

“Well, get it!” Betsy snapped at Charlie.

“Should we?”

“Answer the phone!”

Charlie reluctantly picked up the telephone.

“Hello?”

He was silent.

“Who is it?” Betsy whispered.

He glanced over at Betsy.

“Uh huh? All right,” he responded to the person on the other line. “There’s a package at the front?!”

“What!? What is it?” Betsy asked.

“There’s a package downstairs,” he repeated to Betsy. “She’ll have it sent up,” he informed

her.

“No!”

“No!” Charlie frantically parroted into the phone, “That’s not necessary.”

“We’ll go get it,” Betsy coached.

“We’ll come down and get it,” Charlie repeated into the receiver. “We’re on the way down anyway....No, no....It’s not a problem. Thank you.”

On the front desk sat a small square package covered in brown shipping paper. The parcel was innocuous enough. The woman at the counter put it aside with little regard.

“All right, sir,” the receptionist replied into the phone. “Just ask for it at the front desk.”

30

Betsy and Charlie sat on bar stools at a high table in the Grand Hotel’s third floor lounge. The small brown package lay on the table between them. They each had a more-than-half-finished specialty drink served up with pineapples, orange wedges, and cherries in an oversized Collins glass.

Charlie took a big swig and asked the inevitable, “So, should we open it?”

Betsy thought it over a second and sternly responded, “Let’s throw it away.”

“What?!”

“Why not?” she reasoned. “That bastard.”

“Throw it away just like that?”

“Yeah, just like that.”

Charlie smiled in adoration at her and proudly consented, “Throw it away then.”

“Oh, Charlie! You mean it?”

“Let’s stop this right here.”

This disturbed Betsy.

“But—”

“He won’t say anything,” Charlie contemplated. “He’d only incriminate himself.”

“It’s not that easy.”

“Then open it, Bet,” Charlie shrugged and removed his wallet to pay their tab.

“If we’re going to play this game,” Betsy said, “then let’s call the shots....I’m throwing this thing away. I’m not here to deal with him.”

That was fine with Charlie. He offered a thin conciliatory smile and placed several bills down onto the table. Betsy slurped her drink and gave him a wink.

“Ready?” Charlie baited.

“Let’s.”

The couple got up to leave. A new course was set. On the way out Betsy made sure to drop the package into a nearby trash receptacle. She absolutely beamed.

“I’m proud of you, Betsy.”

“Thanks, Charlie.”

In the third floor hallway, Betsy called the elevator.

“How are we going to keep him off our back?” Charlie asked.

“We’re not. He’s already found us.”

The elevator dinged when it arrived. They both entered.

“That’s what I didn’t want. Listen, you are going to make a lot of money.”

Betsy punched the button. “If we let him think he’s going to see any of it,” she informed him coyly, “then he’ll have to do what we say.”

“If?”

“Let tomorrow take care of itself, Charlie.”

Betsy turned away to watch the numbers climb. Charlie stood in silence behind her. The elevator reached the eighth floor and stopped, Betsy stepped out. The couple walked down the hall toward their suite. Charlie pulled Betsy close to his side.

“We’re not giving him what he wants?”

“I don’t know,” Betsy said. “If we start now, it’ll never end.”

“I don’t know what to say to that.”

“You don’t know this guy, Charlie. He won’t stop.”

“What can we do?”

“For now we’ll just throw him some crumbs...stall for a while...whatever it takes. And then disappear.”

They arrived at the door of their suite.

“There’s enough money,” Charlie thought

aloud.

“He’s got no idea. There is so much stupid money in this town. We’ll make it together and then we’ll disappear.”

31

Jerry sat alone at the back of a seedy club. Onstage near the bar a few scantily dressed dancers performed. Jerry looked distracted. The owner of the club, Nick Sonders, approached his table with a woman, Mary, on his arm. They joined Jerry. Nick was an older Mafioso type, Mary a tramp. Everybody knew everybody. This mobster was doing Jerry a favor.

“Tell him what you told me,” Nick said to Mary.

Mary scooted into the leather booth and leaned heavily onto the table, propping herself on one elbow and giving the two men an ample view of her cleavage. She held an unlit cigarette between her first two fingers, waving it around as she spoke. “Frank and me,” she said conspiratorially, “before he was killed, we would spend time together.”

She nimbly picked up a book of matches from within a crystal ashtray on the table and lit up, screwing up her face, blowing some smoke out of the side of her mouth before continuing.

“Anyway, he’d fly out here pretty regularly to do business, whatever.”

She flicked her ashes at the ashtray in front of her.

“So he’d talk about this guy, some big shot agent. And Mister Sonders, he thinks—”

“That’s enough, Mary,” Nick interrupted.

He removed his wallet from within his suit jacket and handed her some cash.

“Here, get lost.”

“Thanks, Nick,” said Mary. She got up and planted a kiss on his cheek. Her lipstick smeared onto his face, which she rubbed gingerly with her thumb. Nick waved her away.

“Nice to see you, Jerry.”

She squelched her cigarette in the glass ashtray and left the two men to their business. Nick observed Mary closely as she departed from the table, content to watch her. Jerry inquired as to Nick’s relationship with the woman.

“You and Mary still an item?”

“On again, off again. You know these dames.”

“Frank and her, I didn’t know—”

Nick sat back and relaxed.

“So, how’ve you been, Jerry?”

“It’s been a long time, Nick.”

“Big Apple been good to you?”

“Yeah. So what was that about Frank and some agent?”

“Frank worked some jobs with this talent

agent at MGM, Vince Shawn. Vince is on the payroll, works the guild for us.”

He pushed the dirty ashtray aside.

“When you asked me to help you find this woman, I thought of Frank and Mary and this agent she says Frank knew. I thought maybe I could have him get in touch with Betsy.”

“All right,” Jerry agreed. “So, where is this guy?”

“I just spoke with Vince. He’s been to see her, to convince her she needs an agent. He’s on his way here.”

“What’s this guy know?”

“What I tell him,” Nick said slyly. “He knows nothing.” He clarified, “Jerry, you know and I know...and Betsy knows.”

“That guy she’s with, the reporter...he knows.”

“No. She’s stringin’ that shmuck along. And he’s on her side. He’s goin’ nowhere.”

Nick got serious of a sudden.

“Listen, Jerry, if I find out you’re keepin’ anything from me—”

“No way!”

“You’re tellin’ me everything I need to know?”

“That’s right.”

“You’d better not be holdin’ out on me, Jerry,” Nick warned him. “I don’t want no surprises.”

“You know what I know.”

“Well, here’s where you can find her,”

Nick handed Jerry a piece of paper.

32

Charlie settled into a couch next to a sharply dressed businessman, Vince Shawn. They were at the back of a warehouse that served as a vast photography studio. At the far end of the studio Betsy was in the process of having her photos taken for *Look* magazine. Against a stark backdrop and the hot portrait lamps she had become the sole subject of attention; assisted by several women, trying different dresses and having her makeup done, Betsy was central to the bustle and the charged atmosphere of the room. Stanley, *Look’s* top photographer, seemed more pleased with every subsequent pose his model tried. Charlie sat back taking in the scene.

“All of this is incredible, isn’t it?”

“It’s *Look* magazine,” Vince said charmingly. “Incredible isn’t the half of it. This is the big time.”

“It happens fast, doesn’t it?”

“Fame is buoyant. I heard that once. It’s always stuck with me.”

“I hope you can understand that Betsy doesn’t feel she needs an agent.”

“Well, first things first, Mister Langley. I’d like

to take a brief moment to thank you and Betsy for seeing me on such short notice.”

“It’s nothing.”

“I want you to know,” Vince continued, “how I got here. The senior editor of *Look* magazine, Dean Reams—”

“Sure, Dean Reams,” Charlie interrupted, “we had lunch with him earlier this afternoon. He seems like a good guy.”

“He’s the best. I’ve worked with him many times on the magazine, and he felt like I could help you.”

“I don’t see why. I mean, we’re doing great.”

“Let me be as frank with you as possible.” Vince set himself squarely and pivoted in his seat to face Charlie. “As you may know, *Look* magazine is part of a conglomerate....It belongs to Cowles Communication Incorporated. I’m willing to offer you my services in part because the Cowles are my sole employer.” He paused just long enough for Charlie to absorb what he was saying. Charlie might have attempted to say something but not before Vince was able to continue. “I’ve also been told to bring a few offers to the table. You see, Cowles owns more than just *Look*. The family runs a number of programming stations, publishes other magazines such as *Family Circle*, and owns several prominent newspapers, which I’m sure you’re aware of.” He arrived at the point. “My

fee is low and with me comes an exclusive offer from Cowles Communications. This is the chance of a lifetime. I'm coming to you with more than any agent in this town could dream of, and it's because Cowles believes in Miss Burkes. They want her on all their magazines, not just *Look*. They want her on television, the news, and they'd want it that she'd sell them the book rights to her story."

33

The telephone in Henry's suite rang. The irksome sound blared a few consecutive times before being answered. Henry made some cordial acknowledgements scrawling down a flight number and arrival time on a pad of notepaper. A brief word of thanks was exchanged and the detective hung up, grabbed his hat and suit jacket, and quit the room, careful to leave by the stairwell at the end of the hall rather than make use of the hotel's elevator.

Henry's destination was Nick's Lounge. A bus dropped him off at the office building on a corner bus stop across from the lounge. Before long, Jerry and Nick Sonders stepped from the front entrance, accompanied by Vince Shawn. From Henry's vantage point he readily observed the trio exchange handshakes. Jerry parted from the company of the two men,

entered a rental car parked at the curb, and drove off. Nick and Vince conversed alone. Moments later the men embraced and went their separate ways.

Hat worn low, Henry skipped off the curb, crossed the street and trailed behind Vince. A purposeful and direct gravity entered his measured stride. Keeping himself at a distance, the detective eyed Vince as he headed down an alley and around the back of the building, unaware that he was being watched. Vince passed alongside an automobile in the rear parking lot of Nick's Lounge with his keys at the ready. There was no one else around. He inserted his key into the door lock, hesitating to swing open the door, startled by the sound of footsteps behind him. He whirled around to find Henry pointing a partially concealed gun at him.

"Relax," Henry said calmly. "Open the door."

"Sure, man. No need for that, man. If you want the car—"

"Shut up and do as I say."

Vince opened the driver's side door.

"What do you want?"

Henry patted him down.

"Just to talk. Give me the keys."

Vince handed over the keys.

"Get in," Henry demanded.

"Whatever you say."

Vince got in. Henry closed the door behind him, opened the back driver's side door and slipped in, returning Vince's keys over the front seat.

"Drive."

"What's this about?"

Henry repeated himself. "Just drive."

"Where are we going?" Vince asked as he pulled the car out of the parking lot.

"Drive around the block."

Vince made eye contact with Henry in the rearview mirror.

"Don't I know you?"

"I doubt it."

"No, I recognize you."

"Maybe."

"I can't place it."

"If you do what I tell you," Henry changed the subject, "you won't get hurt."

"That'd be just fine."

"Pull over here," Henry commanded as he motioned to a dark, foreboding alley.

"No way am I doin' that!" Vince exclaimed.

"Pull the car over," Henry repeated sternly.

"You won't shoot me while I'm driving. If you want me to stop, then find a place that's in the open."

Vince watched in the rearview mirror at Henry's for his reaction. He searched the detective's face. There was something familiar

about this man. That was for sure.

“Here then. At the curb.”

Henry gestured with the pistol. Vince pulled the car over to the curb and came to an abrupt stop. A light bulb went off in his head.

“That’s right, that’s it! Now I know. You’re that detective in all the papers.”

He spun around in his seat to face Henry.

Withholding, Henry responded, “Oh yeah?”

“You’re here with Betsy Burkes, then.”

After a pause he deigned to answer, “I’m looking after her interests.”

“Then why are you here? And why are you pointing that thing at me?”

Vince motioned to Henry’s pistol, which Henry promptly put away.

“I can see you’re fairly reasonable,” Henry assessed.

“What’s this all about?”

“Hand over your wallet.”

Vince took his wallet from his coat pocket and handed it back over his seat.

“You’re robbing me, detective?!”

Henry smirked reaching up to turn on the overhead light. He fingered through Vince’s wallet finding a driver’s license and a few business cards. It did not take long to deduce that Vince was an agent. He also found Charlie’s card with Betsy’s hotel number and address written on the back. Henry put it all

together.

Henry switched off the interior light. "I'm sorry, I didn't know Betsy had an agent."

His face disappeared in the darkness.

"That's understandable..."

"You can never be too careful," Henry said as he handed back the wallet. Vince reached over the seat to take it.

"That's all right," Vince agreed. "You can't be too cautious."

In an unexpected movement, Henry grabbed Vince by the arm and hauled him bodily over the front seat. He twisted Vince's arm back and stifled a cry, clutching his throat. Trapped like this, Vince ceased to struggle.

Henry growled, "I don't think much of these people you're associating with."

Henry released his chokehold. Vince was absolutely stunned.

"What?!" he cried.

Henry grabbed Vince's throat again and wrung his arm hard.

"Work with me," he said through his teeth.

"What is it you think I'm after?"

Again, he released his grip. Vince choked.

"Nick Sonders?" he coughed.

Henry nodded, indicating that Vince was on the right track.

"He uses me...for the guild."

"And that other guy, outside the club?"

"I've never seen him before in my life."

That was the wrong answer. Henry choked him. After a short while he let go.

"I swear it....I don't know," Vince stammered. "I've never seen him..."

Henry strangled him some more. Vince grew weak—he could hardly keep himself together.

"I'm told nothing," he gasped. "I don't know anything."

Henry choked him until Vince turned blue in the face. It was a pathetic sight and the detective grew weary. Once he let go, it took a moment for Vince to catch his breath.

"God, please! I'll tell you anything. Just stop!"

Henry was all ears.

"I swear, I don't know anything. Sonders has me sticking close to Betsy. He's got me acting as her promoter, her...her agent," Vince stammered. "That's all I know. I swear, that's all I know."

"Comprehend this," Henry said in a deadly serious manner, "you've never seen me. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"I understand. I never saw you." Vince was desperate. He reiterated, "I never saw you."

Sparing him, Henry released the hold he had on Vince's twisted arm and casually stepped from the back seat of the car.

Betsy and Charlie settled in for the night at their suite at the Grand Hotel. The trying day had completely exhausted the two. Early on they had straightened the room and were preparing themselves for bed.

"Tomorrow morning we check out, then," Charlie called from over his shoulder. "You're sure about staying on tonight?"

"We're fine," came from the other room. "What was it you were saying about Vincent?"

"I like the guy....I don't see a problem," Charlie seemingly tried to convince them both.

"I don't know, Charlie," Betsy admitted as she stepped out from the shower into the bathroom. "I feel like I know him from somewhere."

Charlie looked up at her from the bed. Betsy was toweling her hair.

"Where?"

"It's not like that. I don't know." She leaned over, wrapped her hair up, and wrung the towel tight.

"I talked it over with Dean, baby. He said Vince is legitimate."

"I know. I suppose that this is all just hitting me at once."

"It happens to everyone, Bet," Charlie reassured her, "and you know you can't trust any of these people anyway."

Henry too was settling down for the evening.

The hotel's embroidered comforter he had pulled down to the foot of the bed. He sat at the edge with a tall glass of water by his side; he wore a pair of striped pajamas and had just turned off the television. As an afterthought he went over to the door that divided his and Betsy's suite and put his ear up to it, listening for anything. No sounds came from the room.

Betsy and Charlie were in bed, lights out. They seemed to lie together peacefully asleep. Close scrutiny of Betsy, however, revealed that she was still awake.

Henry went into the bathroom, brushed his teeth, turned off the light, and headed back over to the adjoining door. He heard nothing, crossed the room, and climbed into bed switching off the bedside lamp.

Betsy lay awake in bed motionless. Hours seemingly passed before she dare turn over and swing her legs out, sitting up on the edge of the bed. She wore only a slip.

"You awake, Charlie?" she whispered softly.

After a significant pause, she stood and snuck over to the bathroom to grab a bathrobe. She groped around in the dark, inadvertently knocking over a plastic toothbrush holder, which made a sudden and loud crack as it hit the tile floor. Betsy froze, listening for Charlie.

Henry abruptly sat up in bed and turned his ear to the dividing door. He sat still without

breathing for a long moment.

From the bathroom doorway Betsy snuck a peek over at Charlie, who grumbled, rolled over, and snorted falling back to sleep. She found the robe, threw it on, and crept silently over to the front door. As she headed for the door she noisily stumbled over some other object in the dark. Confounded, she froze once more, staring over at the bed waiting for Charlie to wake. He did not move, apparently still asleep.

“Charlie?”

Henry was sitting up in bed, listening, his ears perked. Getting himself up he silently went over to the front door, peering curiously through the peephole. He watched carefully, straining to see as much as he could of the entire hallway. Betsy, as seen distorted through the curved lens of his peephole, stepped out of her suite, silently closing the door behind her. Henry turned his head, straining to see as she tiptoed down the hall and out of sight. Slowly, he opened his door and listened but did not chance exiting the room until he heard the ding of the elevator and the doors slide open. At this, he peeked his head out and sighted Betsy enter the elevator.

Henry gave her a moment before he rushed over. The elevator doors shut completely. He called the second elevator. When the doors

opened, he held them, all the while watching the numbers on the indicator dial of Betsy's elevator descend. Seven, six, five, four, three. Betsy got off on the third floor—the lounge.

Henry stepped into the elevator that he held and punched the fourth floor button.

35

Jerry stood alone in the warmth of the night, took one last drag from his glowing cigarette, and tossed it before entering the bright lobby of the Grand Hotel. At so late an hour the hotel seemed deserted; he approached the lobby's front desk. The receptionist was busy filing papers behind the counter her back to him. Jerry politely cleared his throat. Startled, the receptionist turned around to face him. She smiled and stepped forward ready to assist him.

“Oh, good evening. How can I help you, sir?”

“I was told I could meet a few friends of mine here tonight.”

Jerry took a casual look around him as he spoke with the receptionist. He acted calm and collected, like it was nothing—his being there so late.

“Uh, are they staying here at the hotel, sir?”

“Sure are. Told me I could find them here.”

“What's their room number? Maybe I could call them down for you.”

“Well, they’re under Langley. Charles Langley and Betsy Burkes.”

“I’m sorry, sir, I need you to give me their room number.”

“Well,” Jerry persisted, “I guess they forgot to give it to me. I was told to meet them here around three o’clock.”

The receptionist looked around the empty lobby.

“Maybe they meant in the lounge. The bar’s closed now, since around two, but maybe you’ll still find them there. I’d call their room, but it’s rather late.”

Jerry saw that she would not budge.

“No, that’s okay. I suppose they meant the lounge. Where’s that?”

“It’s on the third floor, sir.”

Jerry was unresponsive as the woman pointed over his shoulder.

“The elevators are over there, sir.”

“Thanks.”

Jerry headed over to the elevators.

Betsy exited the elevator on the third level and entered the empty, dimly lit lounge. Through the dark she headed past the bar and directly over to the same trash receptacle where earlier she had dumped the mysterious package. She found that it had been emptied. Disappointed, Betsy looked around not quite sure of what to do next when she saw a

janitorial rolling bin near the supply closet. She walked to the closet and rummaged through the garbage in the cart, determined to find the package.

The moments lagged. Henry impatiently watched the numbers count down the floors as his elevator descended. Seven, six, five. The elevator stopped. The doors slid open and a janitor backed in blindly, a cart in tow piled high with bathroom and cleaning supplies. Henry was put off by the obliviousness of the janitor and hastily tried to squeeze past him.

“If you don’t mind.”

“Excuse me. Sorry, sir”

The janitor rolled the cart over the seam between the floor and the elevator causing the cart to jar. A number of the supplies fell to the floor.

“Come on, will ya,” Henry protested.

Clumsily, the man fumbled about, picking up toilet paper and soaps, blocking Henry’s path.

“I’m sorry, sir. Excuse me, sir,” the janitor apologized.

Jerry caught a free elevator in the lobby, quickly got himself in, and punched the third floor button. He figured it was the only thing that he could do—to just play his lie all the way through so that the nosey receptionist lost her suspicions.

It took Betsy no time to find the package in

the garbage. As if in response, the instant she fished it out, the elevator dinged, announcing its arrival. Ducking off to the side she slipped into a tight, dark corridor concealed from view. She snuck a peek around the corner to see who it was.

It was not Henry. Henry had managed to push past the janitor and head toward the stairwell door at the far end of the fifth floor hallway, but not before Jerry stepped into the lounge. Betsy observed him. He passed the bar, stopping suddenly, having had the feeling he was being watched.

“Who’s there?” he called out.

Jerry unknowingly closed in on Betsy prompting her to retreat down the corridor and enter a large, near pitch-black banquet hall. She could barely make out the banquet tables that lined the floor facing a small, raised stage. Jerry, not quite aware of what was happening, continued down the corridor following his nose into the banquet hall. He stepped into the room and to his astonishment found himself face to face with Betsy.

36

Henry descended the stairwell floor by floor in quick secession. The whitewashed wall of each floor was prominently marked in stenciled red lettering. At the third floor he exited into the

hallway and was promptly alerted to someone's presence. Garbled voices escaped from a closed door immediately in front of him. On the door read a sign, "Backstage Access Only." Henry gave it a light push, opening it. Before him stood a blind passage. Through the dark he followed the faint sound of voices; he felt his way along the wall until he emerged at the back of the banquet hall stage.

From the ill-lit stage Henry watched Betsy and Jerry argue bitterly. After he reacquired his bearings, he quietly withdrew into the dark of the stage and swung around to the opposite side of the hall. Not seen nor heard, he flanked the banquet tables and made his way to a stage engineer's operating station set up at the rear of the room. He witnessed the drama unfolding before him.

"What is this all about, Jerry?" Betsy firmly questioned.

Jerry was taken completely by surprise.

"I...you're asking what?"

Aware that she had caught him off guard, Betsy pushed past Jerry and headed for the door.

"Damn it, Jerry," she said. "I don't need this."

The unexpectedness and randomness of the encounter paralyzed him momentarily. She was not to pass; he grabbed her by the arm and spun her around.

“You’ll get your money, Jerry!” Betsy stammered.

“Not so fast!” he said as he pulled her close.

“If you’re going to get what you want,” Betsy threatened, “you’re going to have to do what we say.”

“That’s not how these things work!” Jerry refuted angrily.

Betsy broke his grip and turned her back to him. There were a few steps leading up to the stage, which she casually took. Jerry remained at the base of the stage blocking her exit.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

Betsy rested against the on-stage piano, placed the brown package on it, and calmly strummed her hand across the keys. She realized the danger she was in.

“You’ll get your money,” she tried to convince him.

Jerry moved to the end of the stage, leaning his back against it. He fiddled with a cigarette as he spoke.

“It’d be nice, Betsy,” he mumbled inwardly, “if things were like they used to be.”

Betsy came around the piano to the front of the stage.

“Things can’t be the way they were,” she reasoned.

“What’s in that package?” Jerry asked.

“That’s not funny.”

Jerry looked hard at Betsy.

“Don’t you feel anything? Don’t you wish you could take things back?!”

“I can’t just take things back. It’s not that easy.”

Betsy could not look at Jerry. The way he saw her made her feel ashamed. And the disdain of such a lowly person only served to worsen Betsy’s regret. Not that Jerry was sensitive enough to have guessed it. He was only capable of being reactive and leapt up onto the stage. Betsy wheeled around and flinched back against the piano.

“Jerry,” she said defensively, “your whole life has been spent taking something for nothing.”

He rushed at her.

In her panic she cried, “Listen!”

In an instant Jerry was on top of her, lasciviously pressing her against the piano.

Groping disdainfully at her, he growled, “It’s not that easy, is it!”

“Stop it!” she shrieked.

A spotlight from the rafters opposite the stage engulfed them. Startled, Jerry craned his neck to see behind him. Seizing the opportunity, Betsy shoved him, putting him off balance. She bolted from the stage but only after giving him one last stiff push causing him to fly. From up on the raised stage Jerry crashed down onto a banquet table, which

flattened with a tremendous thud under his weight.

Concealed in the darkness Henry waited behind the stage engineer's operation panel as Betsy frantically withdrew from the banquet hall.

37

Charlie rolled over in bed and reached for an absent Betsy. He pawed about a bit before turning over onto his back. The realization that he was alone registered slowly in the half-daze of disrupted sleep. He called out.

"Bet?"

Betsy exited the elevator, rushed down the hall and safely entered her suite. She found the lights were on and Charlie missing.

With a groan, Jerry tumbled off of the flattened banquet table. He got on his hands and knees. It took a moment to catch his breath. An uncomfortable feeling in the pith of his stomach clued him in to the fact that he was not alone. He looked up to find the detective standing over top of him. A significant amount of his energies went into collecting himself. He pulled himself up on his haunches and raised his hands in exasperated complacency.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asked Henry.

“Me?!” Henry gestured to himself.

Jerry pivoted and pointed out the wrapped package Betsy had inadvertently left on top of the grand piano.

“What the fuck is that?” he asked plainly.

“I’m trying to get control of this thing,” Henry contended. “She’s on the lam. You made her run.”

This elicited anger from Jerry.

“Me? I made her run? *Me, Goddamn it?!?*”

Jerry stood and pulled out a pistol pointing it at Henry.

“Why the fuck shouldn’t I shoot you?”

Taken aback, Henry raised his hands.

“You’d better slow down!” Henry said, trying to regain control of the situation.

Jerry puffed himself up.

“Man...I’m about to cut the fuck loose right here in front of your face!”

“Boy,” Henry said coolly, “I’ve got a file that’s waiting on you in New York, you understand, all earmarked for you to take the fall if anything goes wrong.”

“Don’t think I’m gonna sit on my ass while you double cross me.”

“Put the gun away. This racket has to have attracted attention.”

Jerry could not let go. He motioned with the gun.

“I’m the one in control of this thing!”

The ding of the elevator shut Jerry up.

"Come on," Henry urged, eyeing the weapon in Jerry's hand.

Taking a gamble, Henry turned his back on Jerry. Confident that he was not going to shoot, the detective climbed onto the stage. Jerry hesitated. Noticing this, Henry turned back and confronted him.

"Let's go!...Jerry, come on!"

Swiftly, Jerry put the pistol away as he followed Henry onto the stage and into the blackness of the backstage area. Jerry apprehensively went along with Henry, letting him lead the way.

"Where are we going?"

"There should be a stairway through here."

They heard someone enter the banquet hall and soon recognized Charlie's voice as he called out for Betsy. Jerry was inclined to leave. Henry wished to remain.

"Hold on."

"What?" Jerry whispered impatiently. "Let's keep going."

Henry was curious and pivoted in place.

"No...just hold on a minute."

The two men crouched down behind some props, watching from the back of the stage. Charlie stepped through the door and checked out the banquet hall.

"He's with Betsy," Jerry murmured.

“Shut up!”

Charlie unsuccessfully groped in the dark, feeling along the wall for a light switch when he noticed the package on the piano in the spotlight. Giving up on the switch, Charlie wearily approached the stage. Unsure of himself he hesitated. He stood in the middle of the room looking down at the broken banquet table that lay at his feet. Suspicious of the scene laid out in front of him, he turned toward the spotlight raising his hand to shield his eyes from the white glare.

Henry and Jerry were squatted, hidden backstage. Jerry grew increasingly impatient. It was the instinct of a two-bit thief that bade him to leave. Henry preferred to evaluate the situation and quickly realized that he had forgotten to take the package.

“The box!” Henry muttered.

“What?”

“On the piano.”

Charlie proceeded cautiously toward the stage. The elevator dinged. Charlie turned to listen.

“Who’s there? Betsy?!”

A hotel security guard exited the elevator onto the third floor lounge inserting a key above the call button in order to hold the doors open. He pulled out his nightstick and headed down the corridor.

In hopes of finding Betsy, Charlie emerged from the banquet hall and called out for her, when abruptly the lights went on. The flare-up of artificial light was keen. He squinted and stopped short. The security guard stepped around the corner.

“Stay where you are!” the guard half yelled.

“What’s going on?” Charlie objected confusedly.

“Just stay put!” the guard ordered. “I’m sorry, sir, but I need to know what you’re doing up here.”

The guard interrogated Charlie, distractedly sticking his head into the banquet hall. The broken table lay scattered on the floor, caught in the glare of the spotlight.

“Have you seen a woman around?” Charlie questioned. “I’ve been—”

“What’s this mess?” the guard interrupted.

“I’m looking for a woman wi—”

The security guard tugged Charlie’s collar.

“That’s enough. What happened in here?”

“I have no idea,” Charlie explained in frustration. “I was actually looking for—”

“You’re gonna have to come with me,” the guard broke in interrupting him.

“But—” Charlie protested as the security guard escorted him back to the elevator.

“Let’s talk about it downstairs.”

Charlie agreed and the men exited the

banquet hall. As they boarded the elevator, the guard removed the key from its place and punched the lobby button.

At the sound of the elevator door closing, Jerry rose. Henry pulled him down.

“Not yet!”

“What? They’re gone!”

Jerry was forced to wait until the floor was silent.

“I don’t hear nothing,” he pointed out.

Henry stood and stepped from backstage collecting the package from the piano. Jerry remained in the dark.

“So, what’s in the box?” Jerry asked at Henry’s return.

The detective measured his opponent and played the odds, understanding the game better than Jerry.

“Here!” Henry tossed the package to Jerry. “It’s just crap...meant to pressure her.”

Jerry handed it back.

“Keep it. Where’s the exit?”

Henry led him backstage, throwing the package away as they passed a garbage bin.

38

The security guard entered the lobby of the Grand Hotel with Charlie in his custody. A smug, idiotic grin was worn upon the man’s priggish face. Forcibly, he brought Charlie

around to the front desk receptionist.

“Listen,” Charlie tried to settle with the guard, “my girlfriend’s not in our suite.”

The guard pushed Charlie up to the desk. The receptionist was confused and asked what was happening. Charlie attempted to explain but not before the guard cut him off.

“That’s enough—”

“What’s going on?” the receptionist demanded,

The guard turned to her and asked, “Is this the guy? I found him loitering upstairs.”

Shocked, she turned to Charlie apologetically.

“Mister Langley?”

“There’s a mess up there,” the guard added in support of his case.

“This man is one of our guests.”

“Oh,” the security guard petitioned, “well, I found him—”

“I’m so sorry, Mister Langley,” the receptionist interjected. “If there’s anything—”

“Betsy’s missing,” Charlie replied, worried, “She’s missing. She’s not in our room.”

“I haven’t seen her. She hasn’t been down here. But a man went up to the lounge earlier. He was looking for you,” she told him.

“I found a mess in the banquet hall,” the security guard said to the air.

The receptionist was thoroughly annoyed with the incompetence of the security guard.

“Well, get back up there, then!”

She turned to Charlie and offered, “I’ll call the police, Mister Langley.”

“No, don’t do that,” he insisted. “Not yet. She may have just gone for a walk. I’ll go up with the security guard.”

The second Betsy realized Charlie had gone to find her she knew she was in trouble. She cursed her bad luck as she anxiously waited for the elevator to arrive on her floor hitting the call button impatiently over and over again in utter frustration.

“Come on....Come on!”

She had waited for as long as she could bear. There was no way of knowing that the security guard had disabled all the elevators when he stopped on the lounge floor. Just as she gave up and turned for the stairway, the arrow lit up.

“Thank God!”

The numbers climbed and the elevator arrived, the doors opening to her floor. Betsy took the elevator directly to the lobby. The doors opened and she found herself bumping smack into Charlie and the security guard.

Charlie and Betsy spoke simultaneously.

“Are you all right?!”

Then, at almost the same moment, “Where have you been!”

“Charlie, I’m fine,” Betsy thankfully answered. “I just went for a walk.”

He was relieved to see her.

“Don’t do that!” He came back with.

“I came back to the suite, Charlie, and you weren’t there.”

“I went looking for you.”

“You’re all right, then?” the guard asked both of them.

“Yeah, thanks,” Charlie responded. “We’re gonna go back up to the room. We weren’t expecting anyone. We don’t know whoever this guy is who’s looking for us.”

Together the couple retreated to the elevator.

39

Henry and Jerry scurried down the stairwell.

“The lady in the lobby was pretty suspicious of me,” Jerry said nervously.

They got to the lobby level door.

“Don’t worry about it. We’ll go out this way. We can get around to the side exit.”

The two men exited out into a hallway, took a corner, and quietly stepped into the hotel’s courtyard. Henry guided Jerry past the darkness of the courtyard, through an open doorway, and into an empty sitting room. At the back of the room a door led to the street. Henry held the door open for Jerry.

“You can get to the front of the building by going around the corner,” Henry informed him.

“Don’t think this is over,” Jerry warned.

Henry reassured him, “I’m gonna set this thing up so that we both benefit from it.”

“Why should I trust you?”

At this, a Stranger came toward them from outside.

“Hold the door!” The Stranger called out.

Henry held the door for the man. The tall, and otherwise nondescript Stranger passed between them, thanking Henry, discreetly looking him up and down. The detective was turned to Jerry.

“You’ll hear from me. Don’t get any smart ideas.”

Jerry shrugged and walked off. Henry watched him as he disappeared down the street. Looking around uncomfortably, Henry re-entered the empty sitting room. The Stranger was nowhere to be found.

Back in Betsy’s suite, Charlie voiced his concern.

“I can’t believe he found us so fast!”

“He and Frank had friends here,” Betsy told him, “the kind of friends who know how to find people who don’t want to be found.”

“What’re we getting into, Bet?”

“If we sign this contract with what’s his name...” she trailed off.

“Vince Shawn?”

“That’s right. Well, how much is this contract

worth?”

“It’s an exclusive deal, Bet. But it means we can’t go anywhere else.”

“Yeah, but it’s a good deal, right?”

Henry crossed the threshold of the courtyard; The Stranger approached from behind him holding a small object in his hand. Henry heard the clack of footfall. As he went to turn, he was jabbed in the kidney—felled to his knees by the blunt shock of a nightstick. The force of the blow was enough to paralyze the detective. The pain was excruciating. The Stranger kept Henry from falling forward, grabbing the back of Henry’s head by his hair. He leaned in from behind to talk low into the detective’s ear.

“Consider this your only warning,” he said as he gave Henry a yank. “Do you hear me?”

Henry nodded his head weakly.

“If we find out you’re not gone by morning, you’re dead.”

The Stranger threw Henry forward onto his face and stepped over him toward the exit. Before blacking out, Henry rolled over in time to get a good look at the Stranger as he passed through the door. The Stranger climbed into the back of a shiny black Lincoln that had pulled up to the door in the alley next to the building.

Jerry strolled past the windows of a corner restaurant in the ritzy shopping district known as the Golden Triangle of Beverly Hills. He furtively glanced inside the restaurant while fiddling with a pack of cigarettes. Inconspicuously, he spied as Betsy and Charlie were seated at a table with Vince Shawn, their new agent. Jerry ambled by, hanging around on the corner. He was out of sight of the restaurant's window keeping a constant eye on the front door.

Across the street, a Big Guy sat casually at the window of a coffee shop watching Jerry loaf outside the restaurant, doing his best to keep a low profile. The Big Guy idled inanely at his table. There was a long line at the counter, and at the front of it stood The Stranger making an order. The Big Guy had an even-tempered way about him. It was fine with him to be sitting and watching. The Stranger stepped away from the counter carrying a couple of paper travel cups brimming with hot coffee. He joined The Big Guy, placed one of the cups down in front of him, and took a seat making himself comfortable.

After being sure to take a careful sip from his hot coffee, The Stranger asked, "So, what's he doing?"

"Nothing. I take cream."

"Well, help yourself. We're gonna be a

while.”

Jerry loitered on the corner leaning against a newspaper dispenser. The two men watched him case the restaurant for nearly an hour. He appeared to be bored, half asleep, when suddenly he snapped into action. Through the window of the restaurant, Jerry spotted the trio getting ready to leave. The moment Betsy and Charlie exited the front entrance with Vince, Jerry scrambled into a nearby doorway keeping within earshot of their conversation. The group paused outside of the restaurant.

“Everything’s set,” Vince concluded. “His people got in contact with mine. Call me when you receive the check....we’ll have dinner to celebrate!”

“Thanks for everything, Vince,” Betsy said graciously.

“Don’t mention it! It’s like I said, you talk about something and how it goes, and then you’re there.”

The group departed, Betsy and Charlie one way, Vince the other. Down a ways, Vince walked past Jerry, whose back was turned to him. Jerry got behind Vince and tailed him down the sidewalk to a parking garage. Not noticing he was being followed, Vince proceeded through the side door that led into the stairwell. Jerry grabbed a hold of the door before it closed completely.

Vince climbed the stairs a couple of levels, opened the stairwell door, and entered the garage. He looked around disoriented before realizing he was on the wrong level. Reflexively he stepped back into the stairwell. Jerry turned the corner practically smacking right into him. Vince recognized Jerry.

“Hey...Jerry, right?”

Jerry feigned surprise.

“That’s right. Vince, isn’t it?”

Vince sensed something was up and became immediately suspicious of Jerry.

“Yeah...”

“Well, how are things?”

“Good...uh...”

Vince acted cool, though turning toward the door to make an escape.

“I’ll...uh...see ya around,” he said, trying to keep his head.

He pulled the stairwell door. It opened toward him. Jerry stepped in and with a stiff arm pushed the door closed.

“Sonders tells me you’re the guy to talk to about our *investment*.”

“No. I was told not to talk about that,” Vince carefully responded.

“Come on, if you’re talking about it with him, then he’s told you about me.”

“Honestly, I don’t know anything about you.”

“Don’t give me that!” Jerry spat.

"I'm not kidding. Really, I swear to you," Vince promised. "Sonders tells me nothing."

Jerry was getting frustrated with the conversation.

"Well...you know Betsy, don't you?!"

"I am her agent."

"What sort of deals have you gotten her?" Jerry demanded angrily.

"I can't answer that."

Fed up with Jerry, Vince motioned to step past him, but Jerry held him back.

"Tell me what she's making."

"Don't ask me that," Vince stammered. "I can't talk about it. Might I suggest that you bring it up with Sonders? Now, if you'll excuse me."

Vince pushed past Jerry, who stepped aside to let him get by safely to open the door. Pulling the door open, Vince attempted to step through. Jerry stood behind him, getting a firm hold on the door with one hand and grabbing Vince's collar with the other.

"Get off of me!" Vince yelled, almost in a panic.

"Tell me!" shouted Jerry.

Jerry held Vince steadily, lining him up. He shoved him headlong into the door while simultaneously slamming the heavy door, connecting it solidly with Vince's face. There was no blood; it was Vince's forehead that took

the blunt of the impact. Vince was dazed, slow to recover from the blow. Jerry pulled him back into the stairwell.

“Tell me!” Jerry seethed.

Vince was completely stunned.

“O—Oh...damn...all right, all right...She’s only signed a couple things.”

“For how much?”

“Nothing....It’s nothing.”

“What do you mean, it’s nothing?”

“It’s nothing,” Vince said, desperate to get out of the situation. “There’ll be a lot more...You’ll see.”

At this, a couple could be heard climbing up the stairwell. Jerry let go of Vince and gave him an icy stare as the young couple passed. Something was off kilter about the two men. It was obvious. Jerry shot the young man a glaring look. The young man’s spouse knew trouble when she saw it and hurriedly exited the stairwell.

Not one to take chances, Jerry started down the stairs. Vince called after him.

“If Sonders finds out I talked...”

“Well,” Jerry shot over his shoulder, “who’s gonna tell him?!”

Jerry left Vince behind. He seemed pissed by what he had learned. He exited the garage stairwell out onto the sidewalk. The shiny black Lincoln was idling outside of the parking garage

on a one-way road. Standing beside it was The Stranger. At the wheel was his partner, The Big Guy. Jerry exited the parking garage, noticed them, and quickly walked down the sidewalk in the opposite direction. Nervously, he glanced over his shoulder. The Stranger motioned to his partner and stepped away from the curb as he pursued Jerry on foot.

Jerry quickly made his way down the road with The Stranger on his tail. The Lincoln came around and pulled up ahead of him. Some ill intent was apparently meant for him. Jerry was not about to wait and find out and crossed the road to avoid the car. With an authoritative gesture The Stranger motioned to the Lincoln. The car crossed lanes on the one-way road and pulled up along side Jerry, slowing down to a walking pace. Ignoring the car, Jerry unexpectedly cut up a back street. The Stranger pointed and indicated for the Lincoln to go around the block.

Jerry moved fast down the seemingly endless alley with The Stranger not far behind. Used mainly to facilitate garbage removal, the back street cut a narrow passage in back of several boutiques and restaurants. At the moment that Jerry was about to escape at the far end of the alley, the Lincoln jerked to a stop, blocking his path. He hesitated, wavering between the car and The Stranger. The Big Guy jumped out and

the two men forced Jerry into the back of their car.

41

Henry had settled into a dank, cheap hotel room—a shoebox in comparison to the suite of the Grand Hotel. He had hennaed his hair and was dressed down in denim and a ratty secondhand button-down. The detective was seated at the window with the curtains drawn, allowing little light to enter through the crack. Before him stood a surveillance camera set upon a tripod, through which he peered. He was able to see directly to Nick’s Lounge across the street. The lounge appeared to be, for all intents and purposes, closed.

Henry took an occasional break to sip a cup of coffee and watch the television. In progress was a narrated nature program about Africa’s wildlife. A crocodile had just gotten a kill at a crowded watering hole and was having difficulty bringing the dead animal out of the shallow water. Hidden, a young lion watched for an opportunity to steal the crocodile’s prize. As the crocodile struggled with the carcass, it inadvertently pulled it up onto the bank. This gave the young lion the chance he had been waiting for. In an instant he leaped, snatching the kill from the crocodile’s jaws and dragged it off into a nearby patch of tall grass.

Henry turned back to his telescopic camera, all along listening to the narration of the nature program. Through the camera Henry saw a large man, Bear, step out of the entrance to Nick's Lounge. Bear hung around a moment as Henry snapped several photos. A red sports car drove up to the curb. Mary climbed out of the car and walked around to greet Bear. She obviously knew him, acting very familiarly. Bear held the door to the lounge open for her. As she stepped in, she turned and tossed her keys to him. Bear closed the door behind her, got in her car, and drove away.

Henry turned back to the television. At this point an elephant, the matriarch of the African plains, had been attracted by all the excitement. The lion took a few grabs of the dead animal's flesh. Fearless, the elephant advanced unnervingly close and chased the lion off. Meanwhile, a cheetah lurked in the branches of a nearby tree, waiting for the chance at an effortless meal.

Hesitantly, Henry glanced back through his camera, and seeing nothing, turned to continue watching the television, infatuated by his program. On the screen, the elephant wavered away from the carcass, busy dissuading the attempts of the young lion to reclaim his stolen property. Without hesitation, the cheetah sprang into action, getting a firm hold and

making off with the bounty.

Henry tore himself away from the television in time to spot Mary stepping out of the lounge accompanied by Nick Sonders. He had his arm wrapped around her waist, hugging her firmly. She gave him a goodbye kiss on the cheek as Bear arrived at the curb in her red sports car. Before she left she gave Nick one last kiss. As she turned to climb into her car, he snuck in a swift pat on the butt. Mary situated herself behind the wheel. She gave a wave and sped off. Henry took several photographs, including close-ups of the license plate.

42

Jerry sat uncomfortably in the back seat next to The Stranger. The Big Guy was at the wheel and maneuvered the car to the front of Nick's Lounge where Bear was standing outside on the sidewalk. He came over to open the passenger side door.

"Come on, then," grumbled The Stranger.

"What's going on?"

"Just get out!"

The Stranger shoved Jerry out of the car toward Bear, who reached in to grab him. Stern-faced, The Stranger ordered The Big Guy to stay put. Bear heaved Jerry up gruffly and shoved him toward the door.

"Come on now," Jerry resisted. "We can work

this out!”

“Is that so?” The Stranger answered. He came around the automobile, took Jerry by the collar, and gave him a few thorough slaps. “Now shut your face.”

Inside everything was quiet. There was no one around except for Nick, who was contently smoking a cigar behind the bar at the back of the lounge. He was on the phone when the three men entered. Nick looked over and winced. The outside light from the front door as it was swung open was harsh and glaring. Bear approached him, The Stranger and Jerry in tow, the door closing on its own accord behind them. Nick stuck up his finger, gesturing for them to keep quiet. The Stranger edged Jerry forward prodding him from behind. Nick wrapped up his conversation, hung up the phone, and strolled around the bar holding a scotch and cigar.

“You can go back out front, Bear.”

Nick stepped up to Jerry and patted him on the back as he guided him toward the back of the club.

“So, how are you, Jerry?” Nick asked coyly.

“All right, Mister Sonders—”

The Stranger, interrupting, showed Nick a gun.

“He had this on him.”

Nick reached back and took the pistol.

“Let’s see that,” Nick hummed as he examined the weapon. The piece was an automatic, a laughable .22 caliber. He looked at Jerry and inquired, “Expecting trouble?”

“Not me, Mister Sonders,” Jerry said nervously. “Just another day. I always carry.”

“Sure. A working stiff. I understand that.”

The Stranger moved ahead of Nick and Jerry and paused at the office door set to the side of the bar. At the right time, The Stranger swung it open for them.

“You gotta have respect for the blue collar worker,” Nick postulated.

Nick walked Jerry into the office; the furniture had been pushed against the walls with the exception of the single chair and lamp that had been placed in the center of the room. A tarp covered the floor. Jerry nervously scanned the office. With an open palm Nick motioned to the chair.

“Sit down, Jerry.”

“What’s this all about?”

The Stranger closed the door and grabbed Jerry by the collar, seating him in the chair. Nick made his way across the room to a desk where he tossed Jerry’s gun down.

“When you get big, you don’t need to carry.”

On the desk there lay a bundle of rope and a pair of brass knuckles. Nick grabbed the rope and tossed it to The Stranger, who was

standing directly behind Jerry.

“Tie his hands back.”

“There’s no need for this,” Jerry said with mounting nervousness.

The Stranger swatted Jerry hard upside of his head with the bundle of rope.

“Shut your mouth.”

Nick swallowed back his drink and puffed his cigar while The Stranger tied Jerry’s arms back fastening them securely to the chair. When he was finished, Nick picked up the brass knuckles and went over to him. He handed The Stranger the weapon, gave him a hard look, and walked out. Fear closed Jerry’s throat. The Stranger took his jacket off and shut the door behind him.

Henry spied on Nick’s Lounge from the window of his hotel room through the telescopic camera. The phone rang, which he answered promptly.

“Hello?...All right, hold on a second....”

He seized a pad and pen and wrote as he listened.

“Go ahead....Is that right? Mary Francis. On South Beverly? Got it....Okay. Thanks, Ed. I owe you one.”

Little if no sound was discernible behind the closed door to the club’s office. While Nick

waited for an outcome he enjoyed a second scotch at the bar. The Stranger soon emerged from the office, wiping his sweaty brow with a rag. Moans escaped the darkened office, as The Stranger did not bother to close the door behind him. The groaning was low, appeared arduous and suppressed. The Stranger simply walked up and leaned against the bar, his back turned to Nick.

“He’ll talk,” he said to the air.

With a single gulp Nick finished off what remained of his drink. There was no cause to feel hurried. The objective was to browbeat Jerry into making a confession. Nick moved toward the open door.

“I worked him over as cleanly as possible,” The Stranger continued dryly.

A pause and a nod and Nick entered the office closing the door firmly behind him. Jerry was slumped in the chair, his hands still tied securely behind his back. Raw markings around his wrists were denotative of a struggle. He looked weak and scared. Nick said nothing as he walked over to the desk and pulled out a second chair, swinging it out in front of Jerry. Its legs skidded over the tarp laid upon the floor. He sat down, leaning forward with his fingers knitted together. Distractedly, he puffed the cigar, vigorously tossing it around in his mouth. Nick checked Jerry out, inspecting him

closely. To his surprise there was no indication that Jerry had pissed himself. Most guys piss themselves when worked over like this. He had retched a bit though; there was blood in the vomit. Nick held the cigar in his hand and stared at it in thought. Jerry moaned a bit, breaking Nick's spell.

"Try not to speak, Jerry," Nick said. "There's nothing to talk about anyway."

Jerry was in bad shape, though he remained conscious and was listening.

"You're stupid, really stupid. We've known each other for how long now? You and me, we're cut from the same cloth. We're from the same neighborhood. Have had the same friends. Fucked sisters of the same families. We know how people like us think. Hadn't it occurred to you that I'd have you watched? How could you think I wouldn't find out about that detective you got involved with?"

Nick held off for a few long seconds to look Jerry up and down before he continued his thought.

"I warned you about this, Jerry. I told you, I said I don't like surprises. Hey, I play fair. You had a choice. Oh, and don't worry about Detective Beyle. He's been taken care of."

What Henry saw through the lens of his camera said all that needed saying. His having observed The Stranger bring Jerry into the

lounge and now stepping out supporting him; no doubt Jerry had dealt the wrong people into their card game. Bear was quick to step up and lend a hand as together the two men flung Jerry into the Lincoln parked at the curb. Henry reclined back in his chair and shook his head. He grabbed the pad on which he had jotted down Mary's name and address.

44

Jerry sat slumped in back of the Lincoln. The Big Guy was driving, The Stranger beside him. Bear remained at his post outside the door to the club. The three men took a long ride, the duration of which Jerry was unconscious. He grunted when he came to. The Stranger shifted in his seat in order to face him.

"So, where are you parked?"

Jerry strained and looked through the passenger window, realizing they were in Beverly Hills. There was no describing the relief he felt in that instance.

"Well?"

"Down on Reeves," he responded weakly.

The Stranger knew the street and indicated to The Big Guy to turn, "Make a left here. It's up just ahead," turned back to Jerry and taunted, "So, you really pissed Nick off, didn't you?" He smirked and went on, saying, "Don't answer that. Just tell us when to stop," and

spun back around to face the front.

Jerry stumbled out of the stopped town car and collapsed against his rental. The door of the Lincoln closed from within and the two men drove off. Jerry got to his feet and staggered into the driver's seat of his automobile, parked parallel along the side of the street. He plopped his head back, closing his eyes.

Jerry was startled awake by a tapping at his window. A warm glow cut an orange swath through the car's interior. The sun was quickly setting. Jerry realized that he had slept the entire day. He unrolled the window to find a patrolman standing beside his car.

"I've had a complaint about you being out here. I'm going to have to ask you to leave," demanded the patrolman.

"Yes, sir. I must have fallen asleep."

"You live in the neighborhood?"

"No, officer, visiting a friend."

"This is residential parking."

"I'll be moving along."

"Well, move on, then."

Jerry turned over the rental's engine. The patrolman peered inside the car and noticed Jerry did not look well.

"No problem, officer."

"You doin' all right?"

"Yeah, I'm fine....I've had a tough day."

A radio call came in at the patrolman's

cruiser parked beside Jerry's rental. The dispatch was pressing. He glanced over to the call then back to Jerry.

"Well, have a good evening," the lawman broke off with as he stepped back to his cruiser.

"Evening, officer."

Jerry promptly turned over the engine of his rental. The patrolman climbed into the front seat of the black and white and grabbed the handset. The dispatcher reported a robbery on South Beverly. The patrolman took the call and drove off.

45

Mary stood outside of her house, a Spanish style single family home in an upscale neighborhood in Beverly Hills, waiting for the police. A present to her from Nick, the deed was under her name and was hers for keeps. Things having been arranged in this way afforded she and Nick privacy. Mary was accompanied by her neighbors, an older Jewish couple she thought of as a second set of parents, Mister and Misses Eikyl.

"So, he was just here," Mary asked the Eikyls, "right before I pulled up?"

"That's right, honey. Mr Eikyl caught him snooping around," Mrs Eikyl added proudly.

"I wasn't gone ten minutes."

“That’s all it takes now a days,” Mrs Eikyl admonished and turned to her husband. “Isn’t that right, dear?”

“The neighborhood’s changed some since the war,” he confirmed.

“You can’t even imagine, sweetie,” Mrs Eikyl added. “Such a different world. I hardly recognize the place.”

Mr Eikyl pointed ahead and observed, “Here comes the police now.”

“About time,” Mrs Eikyl griped.

The cruiser swiftly pulled up to the house, lights flashing. The patrolman contacted his dispatcher and stepped out of the car. The small group, headed by Mr Eikyl, approached the municipal vehicle.

“Let me do the talking,” he said to Mary and his wife with solicitous intent. “It’d be better if we didn’t all talk at once.”

“Did you report a robbery?” the patrolman asked.

“No...no, sir. We reported a prowler.”

“A prowler?”

“Yes, sir.”

“There hasn’t been a robbery?”

“We didn’t report a robbery,” Mrs Eikyl clarified. “We caught a man looking through her windows.”

The patrolman questioned Mary, “This is your home, ma’am?”

“Yes, officer,” she replied. “I just got home a minute ago. Mister and Misses Eikyl are my neighbors. They saw someone trying to break into my house.”

The patrolman clarified, “This is your home, though it wasn’t you who reported the robbery?”

“There was no robbery,” Mrs Eikyl interjected.

“All right, let me get this straight. What you saw was someone trying to force their way into the home.”

“He was sneaking around back,” Mr Eikyl explained, “peeking in the windows.”

Mary elaborated, “You can see my backyard from the Eikyls’ kitchen window.”

“He ran off after we called the police,” said Mrs Eikyl.

“How long ago was that?”

“Not fifteen minutes ago,” Mr Eikyl took over.

“Can you give me a description of the man?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Was he a vagrant?”

“Yeah. As he ran off I got a pretty good look at him. He was a white guy, about your height, and he definitely looked to me to be homeless.”

“Uh-huh. I’m pretty sure there’s nothing to worry about. He probably thought the house was vacant. Take the women inside for now

while I check the back.”

46

Late the next morning Mary and Nick were in Mary’s kitchen enjoying a cup of coffee together. Nick was standing, half talking to himself as he juggled his cup and his shirt, which he sloppily tucked into his pants. Mary was leaning against the kitchen counter beside the coffee maker. A bathrobe was all she wore. A familiar air was shared between them. The routine and pleasant tranquility of the morning after which they shared was anesthetizing. Mary’s glance wandered out the kitchen window to her backyard. She slowly sipped her drink and interjected into the silence.

“That reminds me!”

“How do you mean?” Nick asked.

“Last night, I forgot to tell you. Somebody tried breaking into the house.”

Nick did not like this telling news. He stopped to ask, “What, someone broke in?”

“No. The neighbors...they scared some bum away. He was peeking through the windows.”

Nick placed his coffee mug down squarely onto the counter and stared hard out the kitchen window, composing himself.

“We can see each others’ yards,” Mary pointed out the Eikyl’s house, “They saw him back here—”

“How could you forget that?”

“I just thought of it now,” she said innocently.

“Baby....You can’t do that! If anything out of the ordinary ever happens...”

“It was nothing, really. One of those things. I mean we live in the city, ya know.”

“If anything out of the ordinary happens, Mary,...and I mean anything!”

“I’m sorry, Nick! I didn’t think anything of it.”

“It’s all right, nothing’s happened. Come here,” he consoled her with an embrace. “But if you see anything funny going on ever again, you’ve got to tell me.”

“I will....I’m sorry.”

Nick looked deeply at her and said, “This is our safe place. Right, baby?”

“Yeah, our safe place,” she responded with a smile.

“It’s up to you to make sure of that, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Can I leave it up to you, baby?” Nick asked sweetly.

“Yeah, Nick.”

They kissed.

A few hours later Henry, stationed at his camera in the hotel across from Nick’s Lounge, observed the club’s owner return. He checked his wristwatch, made a mental note of the time, and sat back. Across the street Nick was seated on the passenger side of Mary’s red

sports car. The couple chatted for a few moments; he gave her a brief kiss on the cheek and got out onto the sidewalk, where Bear was waiting.

Nick ducked his head back into the car, "Take care, baby."

"Will I see you tomorrow?"

"I'll have to call you. Come here!"

Mary leaned in. They kissed one last time before Nick headed into the club.

47

Henry secured the door of his room and headed down a tight, rundown hallway. The paint on the walls peeled in places, so unkempt and hopelessly dilapidated was the building. The detective passed the out-of-order elevator and headed down the stairwell to the exit of the hotel. Inconspicuous, he hustled down the sidewalk. Across the street, Nick's Lounge was a bustle with the late lunch crowd. A band of riled-up businessmen had quit the club moments earlier. They stopped short at a car parked at a metered space in front of the hotel as Henry passed them by. One of the men figured Henry for a bum and offered him a dime. Henry declined with a shake of his head.

The fellow got indignant and called out to his drunken mates, "Get this fucking homeless bum, my money ain't good enough for him!"

“No offense,” Henry pacified.

“None taken. Why don’t you get a job, you fucking bum!” the Good Samaritan bantered.

It was a bad time to attract attention. Bear, habitually situated at the club’s entrance, glanced in the direction of the ruckus. Henry double-timed it down the sidewalk arriving at the street corner and quickly ran to catch a departing bus.

The ride from downtown to North Hollywood was surprisingly fast and comfortable. Upon his descent of the bus Henry entered a seedy hotel located just off the stop. The building was practically as bad as that of the detective’s. At Henry’s entrance the desk manager called out before Henry could step through the front lobby and asked what business he had being there. The detective gave Jerry’s name and room number and was permitted to pass.

Jerry was slouched on the bed in his underwear drinking beer, completely inebriated. There was a knock at the door. He hurried to get up and barely managed to fumble to the door, tripping and toppling things over.

“Who—“ falling into the door he yelled out, “Who is it?...Wha’da’ya want!”

“It’s me,” Henry’s voice responded from the opposite side of the door.

Jerry suspiciously checked the peephole

opening the door only a crack.

“What do you want?!” he said sloppily.

“I know what happened, Jerry.”

“I thought you were dead.”

“Come on,” Henry forced his way through the door, saying, “Let me in.”

Dizzy with intoxication, Jerry stumbled back into the room and headed over to a grocery bag on the bed. Careful not to attract attention, Henry closed the door behind him and stepped all the way into the room. He flinched as Jerry spun around and tossed a bottle of beer his way.

“Have a beer.”

Henry caught the beer and fumbled with the wet bottle before getting a firm grip on it.

“Sure. Thanks.”

“It’s warm, maybe.”

“Yeah, well—”

“If they find us together...” Jerry started.

“You’ll be fine. No one knows I’m here.”

“Yeah, I thought you looked funny!” Jerry said with a smile, noticing the detective’s ridiculous new look.

Henry looked Jerry over and retorted, “They really roughed you up. How much have you been drinking? You look horrible!”

“Me?” Jerry laughed. “You look like some kind of funny looking...yourself!”

“All right,” Henry said as he sat Jerry down.

“How am I gonna get you to the airport?”

“What! Who’s goin’ anywhere?”

“I was hoping you could get there yourself.”

Henry removed a plane ticket from his coat pocket, presenting it, “Here’s a ticket back to New York.”

“I don’t want no ticket back to New York!”

“How much money do you have, Jerry?”

“None, thanks to you.”

Henry handed the ticket over, tucked into a cardboard sleeve emblazoned with the blue PAN AM globe of Pan American World Airways, and said, “There’s a hundred bucks in here...just to hold you over for a while.” Jerry reached for the ticket, but Henry kept a firm hold. “With Nick Sonders in this thing, neither one of us is going to see anything. You know that, don’t you? I mean, you’ve really gotten us into a seriously death-defying situation here!”

He let go of the ticket.

“I’ll meet you in New York tomorrow night,” he continued.

“What are you gonna do?”

“For now, we’ve got to get you to the airport. Go clean yourself up and get dressed. I’ll pack your shit.”

“I don’t know about this,” Jerry grumbled to himself.

Not in any position to argue, Jerry moped over to the bathroom. Henry found an empty

duffel bag, tossed it onto the bed, and began to clear out the dresser drawers.

“Oh,” saying to himself, “you’ll know about it come tomorrow...”

The drawers were a disheveled mess. Henry randomly threw Jerry’s garments into the bag, repulsed by the filth. He stuffed the clothes in as he spoke out loud.

“As a matter of fact, you’ll thank me.”

Jerry, dressed, came out of the bathroom and handed his shaving bag to Henry, who squeezed it into the duffel bag and closed it by sitting on top of it in order to zipper it shut.

“You’re probably being watched,” Henry warned Jerry. “We’ll have to get you out of here without being noticed....” He turned to Jerry who was now seated beside him and asked, “Got any ideas?”

Jerry was busy slipping on his shoes. Leaned over he paused, glanced up at Henry, and shot him an annoyed look.

“I don’t know. This is your thing.”

Henry got up and motioned toward the door.

“Grab your bag.”

The two men were out quick. A couple was checking out at the lobby counter.

“Where you parked?”

“Around the block.”

“You’ll head out first.”

Henry and Jerry hung back by the derelict

elevator in the hotel lobby. When they had the lobby to themselves, Jerry proceeded to turn in his key while Henry kept an eye out. The coast was clear. Jerry finished up and was ready to leave.

“You’re going to head out first. Walk down the road like nothing.”

Jerry’s attention wandered.

“Are you listening to me?!”

Henry grabbed a hold of Jerry and gestured past the window, indicating with his thumb.

“You go out the opposite way.”

Jerry produced a set of keys from his pants pocket and passed them to Henry.

“You said you’re parked around the block?”

“Yeah, right behind us. A Buick Skylark, four-door blue rental. If you go left and around the block, you’ll get to it before me.”

Henry walked down the sidewalk carrying Jerry’s duffel bag. He glanced back prior to turning the corner to check on Jerry, down the block strolling away from him. He picked up his pace taking the corner, hurried around the next corner, and jogged to Jerry’s rental car. Henry pulled out the keys and got in the driver’s side, leaving the door unlocked. After chucking the bag in the back, he inserted the key into the ignition and slid over to the passenger seat, laying down low. After a minute, there was a pull at the driver side door. Jerry sat in, talking

under his breath. Quietly, he told Henry to shut up as he leaned over him and unrolled the passenger side window.

The black Lincoln was parked opposite Jerry's rental. Inside the Lincoln sat The Stranger with his partner, The Big Guy, at the wheel. Jerry bent over Henry to hear better, getting close to the open window.

"Hey, what's goin' on, guy?"

"Sonders wants to talk to you, Jerry," said The Stranger.

The tension was heavy. Jerry glanced down. Henry revealed a gun. Beads of sweat gathered on his forehead.

"Right now?" Jerry asked, looking back up at The Stranger.

"Come by the club tonight at closing."

Jerry let his eyes fall down on Henry, who nodded his head in confirmation.

"All right....Tonight, around two?"

"What's wrong, Jerry? You look nervous," The Stranger badgered him in a serious tone.

Breathless, Jerry tensed up.

"Why not come early and enjoy a drink?" said The Stranger, laughing at his own foul sense of humor.

A nod directionally, The Stranger smiled at his partner indicating for them to leave.

"I'll see you around," Jerry said, keeping his cool.

The Stranger gave an annoyed look as the Lincoln pulled off. Jerry sank back into his seat and exhaled hard. Henry stayed put.

“Are they gone?”

Jerry discreetly checked his rearview mirror and nodded.

“Yeah, they’re gone.”

Henry situated himself in his seat and turned to Jerry, tucking the gun away. He stared hard at him for a moment in dumbfounded silence.

“I’ll see you around?!” Henry sarcastically parroted.

Jerry shrugged and guffawed. The two men laughed out, relieving all their tension.

48

Sunlight streamed into Mary’s kitchen through the window curtains above the counter producing a soft haze, adding a pleasant lightness to the air of the surroundings. Nick had on an undershirt and a pair of pants, belt undone. Mary was wearing only Nick’s dress shirt.

“Earlier this morning,” Mary pried, “was Bear talking about Jerry?”

Aggravated by Mary’s question, Nick gave her a stern look and chastised, “Baby, you know better than to ask me about work.”

Nick planted his cup down on the counter and turned to leave the kitchen.

“I didn’t mean to pry,” she stammered, “it’s just—”

“Just...let’s don’t talk about it. I’m gonna go get ready.”

Nick walked through the kitchen threshold, down the hallway and into the bathroom. Mary continued to talk to him from the kitchen. She raised her voice so he could hear the rest of her story.

“Well, it’s just that I ran into him last night at the airport.”

Nick was hunched over the sink washing his face. The door remained open so he could talk with Mary.

“You say you what?!” he yelled in between rinsing.

“I saw Jerry,” Mary shouted, “last night at the airport.”

“You’re kidding!” he exclaimed while toweling his face.

He hung the towel beside the sink. A creaking of the floorboards caught his attention, which he thought was Mary coming from the hall. Not bothering to investigate, Nick removed a comb from his pocket and ran it through his hair.

Occupied, Mary prepared some lunch. She reached into the refrigerator when she heard who she thought was Nick out in the hallway.

“We spoke for only a minute. He was in a rush to catch a flight.”

“That little fuck,” Nick murmured to himself from within the bathroom. He stuck his head out into the hall and saw no one. And returning to the mirror to comb his hair, asked, “What time was that?”

“I’m not sure,” Mary told him. “Maybe around six. I was out waiting for a girlfriend of mine. Do you know who he was with?”

“Who’s that?”

Nick quit the bathroom and headed down the hallway to the master bedroom. The bedroom was further away from the kitchen than was the bathroom. He was hardly able to hear Mary’s response.

“That detective from the news!”

“Who?” he asked, straining to hear her.

Nick gathered an arm full of clothes—women’s articles that Mary had left scattered on the bedroom floor—and discarded them in a hamper in the closet.

“Who is it he was with?” he reiterated.

Nick lit up a cigar and sat down on the edge of the bed to slide on his shoes.

“That detective in all the papers. The one who made those statements about that woman, the one who shot Frank,” Mary informed him loudly.

Nick looked up slowly from tying his shoes and gazed at the open bedroom door. He had a harrowed expression on his face. A warm

breeze escaped through the pair of large sliding glass doors that connected the bedroom to an outdoor patio. The curtains of the sliding doors were drawn and moved slightly with the wind. Nick shuddered, stood, stepped to the curtains, and pulling them aside revealed that the sliding door was open an inch or so.

Mary changed the coffee filter, all the while listening for Nick. She heard nothing.

“Nick?”

She disposed of the filter.

“Nick?”

Mary approached the entrance to the hall and paused in the doorway. The quiet was unnerving. She was about to call again when an abrupt muffled clap cut her off. Mary jumped, startled by the noise.

“What was that?” shouted Mary.

She began to make her way down the hall.

“Nick?” she called out.

Mary reached the bathroom and stopped at the sound of a commotion coming from the direction of the bedroom. Alarmed she ran outright.

“Nick? What’s happening?” she strived.

Mary’s arrival to the bedroom came with a shock. Nick lay sprawled out on the bed, a hole in his face. She let loose a scream standing frozen in place. At her feet lay a bloodied pillow that had a terrible burn at its center. The

sliding glass door was wide open and the curtains were torn aside. The room was choked with smoke.

49

New York lent something of a welcome relief with its favorable routine and its hectic bustle when compared to all the tiring meetings and empty promises of Los Angeles. Seated with Charlie at the long bar in Mack's, Detective Henry Beyle related the events prior to the bank robbery. Charlie cut in, "Why'd he head for the bank?"

"Damned if I know. He was an idiot!"

Their attention was brought back to the *New York Post*. On the cover, the color photo captured Betsy in a dramatic pose, her arms held out as if aiming a gun and her head turned to the side with her eyes shut. Below the picture a caption read: *It was all this woman could do to save herself.*

Charlie finished the last sip of his drink eyeing the cover. He held a breath and turned to Henry.

"I need you to help me with something," he huffed.

"Well, isn't it nice to know I'm always here for you?" Henry joked as he swirled the half-melted ice in his glass of whiskey.

"Seriously."

“Sure, Charlie. What is it?”

“You know that guy I had you check out for me?”

“Yeah, what about him?”

“Betsy’s having trouble with him.”

“Oh?” Henry said curiously.

“I mean, serious trouble.”

“What’s it about?”

“This guy’s got something on her...he wants money.”

“You mean he’s blackmailing you.”

“Listen—”

“Don’t,” Henry interrupted. He held his drink in the air examining the amber liquid in the artificial light, “What do you need, Charlie?”

“Well, he wants to meet with her, have her drop money off. He’s asking for a lot.”

“You haven’t even been in New York for a day,” Henry said, half to himself, his glass held poised to his mouth.

“He was in L.A. while we were there.”

Henry downed his drink in a single gulp and said, “Tell me where she’s meeting him and when, and tell her she has to show up with the money—alone.”

To show up with the money alone was not exactly Charlie’s idea of a good plan for Betsy. Regardless, he respectfully agreed with Beyle, whom he had come to in the first place for advice in matters which Charlie himself had no

experience.

Betsy had invested a lot of worry to the situation. She was uncomfortable about facing Jerry but felt obliged to clean up her own mess and stop using Charlie, a responsibility to which she only recently became partly aware. It would not take much to convince her otherwise.

Betsy hastily finished drying off a few dishes in Charlie's Manhattan apartment. She was of two minds as to what to do, repeating to herself that it was her mess. She straightened the counter while on the phone with Vince, placing cups and bowls away into a cabinet above the counter.

"All right, so tomorrow morning....Yeah, I'm sorry we can't pick you up from the airport tonight."

Charlie came through the front door.

"Oh, he's home right now."

Charlie entered the kitchen and mouthed to Betsy, "Who is it?"

Betsy whispered that it was Vince on the line. She said into the phone, "He's just walked in."

Charlie put his hand up and shook his head, indicating that he did not want to talk. Betsy gave a wink.

"He says hello....Uh huh...sure, I'll tell him. Have a safe flight."

She hung up the phone and greeted Charlie

with a warm hug.

“We need to talk, Bet,” he told her.

Before Charlie could begin, Betsy interrupted, “Vince is coming in tonight. He’ll be at the Hilton next to the airport.”

Charlie assumed a serious tone, “Listen, I think Henry’s got a plan.”

“What’d he say?”

“He’s going to have me do the drop.”

“Jerry said he wanted me to do it,” Betsy said, not wanting to hear this.

“Yeah, I know. But it doesn’t matter now. This is how Henry thinks it should go down. I mean, do you really want to do it, Bet?”

“Do we still need to bring the money?”

“Yeah, just in case.”

“I was hoping we could put it back. It makes me nervous having that much money around.”

Charlie nodded in agreement.

“I feel like maybe I need to take some ownership on this thing. I mean if we’re going to get Jerry off our backs—”

“I talked to Henry, Bet. He’s taken care of it. We don’t need to worry anymore.”

“Swear to me,” she made him vow, “that everything’s going to be all right.”

Charlie swept Betsy into his arms and looked deeply into her eyes, comforting her.

“This is about you, Bet. It’s always been about you.”

Betsy put her finger to Charlie's lips. He fell silent. She gazed up at him. Tears began to well in her eyes.

"Shhh...I need you, Charlie."

Tenderly they kissed.

50

Police lines were set up along a subway platform and an empty train halted deep within the dark recesses of a tunnel. There were a half dozen Port Authority officers positioned on the platform minding a small crowd of bystanders. The hour was yet noon, though the early lunch crowd was inconvenienced. The commuters gathered together and impatiently waited for the line to clear. An officer informed them they could expect a twenty-minute delay and offered an alternate bus route, to which several were keen. The remainder chose to stay the wait.

Down by the tracks Detectives Beyle and Styke had split up, searching around with flashlights. A glint attracted the attention of Dick. He moved further down the line and from within the tunnel bent over the rails, his flashlight trained on an object. Henry kept to the gutter off the rails themselves, the logic being that a passing train might have thrown the weapon.

"Henry!" Dick called out. "Over here!"

Henry walked over to see Dick's discovery. Neither man motioned for the weapon.

"All right, that's it," he said, satisfied.

"What now?" Dick questioned.

"Leave it to me."

"Where is all this leading?"

"Go on up and clear everyone out."

Dick gave his partner a diffident look.

"You're the boss."

Henry knelt down as Dick stepped out of the tunnel. Caught in a cavity between the trusses was the nickel-plated revolver that he had earlier confiscated from Jerry and had thrown into the tracks. Dick climbed up onto the platform and nonchalantly addressed the other officers.

"Okay, guys, let's break this up. There's nothing of interest here."

Henry picked up the weapon with a handkerchief and examined it closely. The revolver was not damaged. He concealed it in his jacket pocket, scrambled up to the platform, and summoned Dick.

"Finish up here. I'll be at the station."

51

In the cool of the evening, one of several taxicabs idled at a standstill on a jammed New York City street. Jerry sat anxiously in the back seat, fidgeting in place. The cab was stuck in a

lengthy line of traffic. The meter clicked, racking up another dime. Jerry impatiently craned his neck, trying to see up ahead. The traffic light had cycled thrice, and Jerry had had enough. The cabbie eyed his fare in the rearview mirror.

“There’s been an accident, mac.”

“How backed up is it?” Jerry asked growing increasingly uneasy.

“Don’t know. Maybe a few blocks. It’s all this construction that’s goin’ on. You from around here?”

Jerry disregarded the cabbie lost in his own thoughts.

“I can’t believe I’m gonna be late,” he grumbled aloud to himself.

“Gonna turn this whole area around,” the cabbie went on, “A whole new financial district. These old buildings, gonna tear ‘em all down.”

Through the glass Jerry spotted a subway entrance at a congested corner. Luckless with the street jam, he chose to chance the subways and eagerly pointed the entrance out to the cabbie.

“Drop me off at the corner. I’ll take the subway.”

“Sure, mac.”

The cabbie edged to the curb. There was a lot of street traffic and the masses of pedestrians clogged the sidewalks. Jerry exited

the taxi and pushed his way down the crowded steps of the subway entrance. As he did so, Betsy and Charlie speedily walked past up on the sidewalk.

“How do we know he’s not following us?” Betsy asked Charlie.

“It doesn’t matter.”

Charlie spotted the taxi up ahead.

“Here. Let me get this cab.”

Charlie sprinted ahead, carrying a large briefcase. He grabbed the cab just before it pulled away. Betsy caught up and the two scrambled inside. Charlie ordered the cabbie to take them to the corner of Liberty and Greenwich.

“I’m going to be a little late,” Charlie informed Betsy, “but, who cares....Let him sweat.”

“Where should we meet?”

“After dropping me off, have the driver take you to the Waldorf-Astoria. Stay at the bar and try to relax. I shouldn’t be long.”

“But what happens when he sees it’s you and not me?”

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll call the hotel as soon as we’re through.”

Consternation was written all over Betsy’s face.

“Worst case,” he reasoned with her, “he gets the money. He’s not going to care that I’m

bringing it, all right? Just trust me.”

An opening was provided in the turn lane. The cabbie took it and avoided the jammed intersection. He observed them as he maneuvered through the stop-and-go traffic. A good deal of headway was made. During one stop, he turned around in his seat to address Betsy.

“Hey, ain’t you Betsy Burkes?”

“Yeah,” she sharply replied, not wanting to deal with being recognized at the moment. “Yeah, I am.”

“I’ve seen you on television. You’re a brave little lady!”

“Thank you.”

Charlie noticed that the light had changed and, seeing Betsy’s discomfort, cut in pointing up ahead.

“The light’s green.”

The cabbie moved the taxi along.

“Looks like we’re gettin’ through,” the cabbie informed them. “Thinning out a bit.”

“Good. Where we’re going isn’t far up ahead. Here, this is fine. You can just drop me off here.”

The taxi pulled to the curb. Charlie kissed Betsy and exited with the briefcase. He alighted onto the busy sidewalk and ducking his head back into the cab took Betsy’s hand in his.

“Trust me, baby.”

“Be careful,” she said with a look mindful of all he was doing for her.

“I’ll take care of us, Bet.” He softly pressed her hand and whispered, “I love you.”

Charlie kissed Betsy one last time, stepped out onto the sidewalk away from the taxi, and disappeared forever into the thick of pedestrians.

52

The spot chosen for their meeting was aptly set. Desolate and isolated, a more suitable location could not be had. That Betsy had insisted on this particular spot made Jerry uneasy. Impatient and suspicious of the scene before him, he waited. He stood alone, a lonely speck at the furthest end of a dimly lit alley. All around him the long, narrow space was littered with building material, machinery and equipment. In his anxiousness he felt cramped, almost trapped, watchful of the throngs of pedestrians pass by on the crowded sidewalk far up ahead. The elongated shadow of the milling crowd played along the ground, dizzily cast into the alley per the bright lights of the city street.

Rising up from where Jerry stood at the foot of an expansive construction site, the skeleton of a skyscraper climbed dozens of stories up,

looming over the alleyway. Behind Jerry and beyond the chain-link fence at the alley's dead end was a service elevator designated to transport construction workers to the top of the site. Jerry set himself to pacing back and forth, grumbling to himself. A sudden clanking from within the site silenced him. He spun around.

"Who's there?"

A chain link fence separated the dark alley from the construction site. Outright, he approached.

"Anyone there?"

The gate in the fence had no lock. Jerry lifted the latch and pushed the gate, clanking it open a foot or so. He hesitated and peered through the mesh of the fence, as if he were able see what was ahead. The construction site was pitch black.

"Is there anyone there?" Jerry called out less timidity into the darkness.

Slow, uncertain footsteps advanced behind him in the alleyway. Jerry whirled around to find Charlie walking unwarily down the blind alley towards him, a large briefcase at his side. Charlie took a dozen cautionary steps into the alley and glanced around blindly. Emerging from the darkness, Jerry confronted him.

"What's going on?"

"Jerry, is that you?"

Jerry got in Charlie's face. "Where the hell is

Betsy?"

"I've got the money," Charlie said defensively and in avoidance of the question. "It's right here."

"I thought I was clear," Jerry spat angrily, "Betsy brings the money," and pulled a pistol from his jacket.

Charlie took a step back.

"Hold on a second!"

"Put the case on the ground."

Charlie put the briefcase down and looked about, no doubt wondering where Henry was or how he found himself in such a bad situation so quickly.

"Listen...what happens from here?" he bargained, trying to buy some time.

"Shut your mouth. Get your arms up."

Jerry frisked Charlie with his free hand, still holding the gun on him. He finished patting Charlie down and gave him a stiff push to keep him back.

Charlie questioned, "So, what happens now?"

Jerry crouched down to open the case examining the contents.

"Just stand back and shut up," Jerry growled as he spun the case around to face him. "All the money better be here."

Jerry fumbled with the latches; he switched the pistol from his right hand to his left. Charlie, looking for Henry, noticed the switch

Jerry had made. Resolving to take matters into his own hands, he made a desperate move.

Jerry had opened the lid of the case with his left hand, which now held the gun. The money distracted Jerry. Charlie leapt forward, kicking at Jerry's hand. Jerry shrieked as the pistol flung across the asphalt. Charlie lunged at him. The two men grappled all the while falling deeper into the alley. Charlie overpowered Jerry, backing him up against the machinery and leaning his full weight into him.

"Give it up," Charlie barked.

Jerry responded with a knee to the crotch. Charlie reeled in pain and shock. The tides turned in Jerry's favor. Jerry regained his balance, poised to strike.

"No you don't..."

Henry came up from behind and smashed Jerry over the head with a bar, knocking him out cold. Charlie mustered the strength to rise to his feet.

"Jesus Christ," he choked, "you've killed him!"

Henry knelt down to check Jerry's pulse. He also rifled through his pockets.

"He's alive," Henry declared as he stood.

A glaze came over the detective's usually clear and alert eyes. He avoided eye contact, walking past Charlie to collect the briefcase. On his way, he picked up the pistol from the

ground, put it in the case, and closed it.

“Where were you?” Charlie sharply asked, growing angry with the situation.

In a clear tone Henry responded, “You weren’t supposed to be here, Charlie.”

Henry refused to look at Charlie. The tie between them was severed. Charlie could feel it. He stood by watching as Henry produced a pair of latex gloves from his coat pocket and placed them on.

“What are you doing?” Charlie inquired.

Henry rose up, holding the case of money. He looked Charlie directly in the eyes.

“You’ve done this to yourself.”

Charlie backed away from Henry, retreating deeper into the alley toward the chain-link fence.

“What are you talking about?”

Digging deep into his coat pocket, Henry pulled out the handkerchief containing the nickel-plated revolver he recovered from the subway tracks.

“It didn’t have to be this way,” Henry hummed.

He unveiled the weapon, tucking the handkerchief away.

“What are you going to do with that?”

With resolve, Henry aimed the revolver at Charlie.

“Henry?!”

“Sorry, Charlie.”

“Sorry? I don’t get it.”

Jerry, who was lying between them, moaned as he came to.

“What is this?” Charlie asked.

“Run, Charlie,” Henry commanded.

“What?!” cried Charlie in disbelief.

“Run for your life.”

Charlie backed further away, dumbfounded. The darkness closed in on him. He shuddered. Henry took a threatening step toward him, standing over top of Jerry.

“How can this be happening?” Charlie tried to assess the situation.

Abjectly, Henry scoffed and shook his head. With caution, Charlie continued walking backwards pining for a way out, stumbled, and fell over. Henry broke out in laughter. Charlie quickly got to his feet and hollered as he ran for the open gate in the fence that led to the service elevator.

“Murder! Murder!”

The echo of Henry’s laughter carried throughout the empty construction site.

Betsy sat tight in the back of the cab. A few blocks passed before she had a change of heart and ordered the cabbie to turn around. It took a long while to backtrack through the heavy

traffic to get to the street corner where they had dropped Charlie off.

“Sorry, Miss Burkes,” the cabbie apologized, “it won’t be much further after this light.”

“I think I might walk,” Betsy stated as she fidgeted impatiently.

“It’s too far to walk,” he said, not wanting to lose another fare. “Just sit tight. It’ll just be a few minutes longer.”

Henry was committed. Denounced by Charlie, though not quick to pursue him, he placed the briefcase down, grabbed the half-conscious Jerry by the collar, and dragged him to a dark corner.

“I am too charitable!” he mumbled aloud to himself, roughly dumping Jerry on the ground.

He took the empty revolver and thrust it into Jerry’s hand. Squeezing Jerry’s finger onto the trigger, he pressed it hard enough to advance the chamber and release the hammer with a sharp metallic click.

“And soon I’ll be even more murderous,” he murmured while he paused to load the revolver, hovering menacingly over an unconscious Jerry.

Charlie slid the elevator safety screen shut. There was a sign, prominently displayed, which indicated that the elevator would not operate unless the safety screen was in the closed position. Throwing a switch, he rode the

elevator several stories up. A chilling wind whistled through the chain-links as Charlie was hurtled upwards. An unchecked panic dragged heavily at his legs pulling him down as the massive unfinished beams passed, climbing in increasingly successive rhythm with the elevator's feverish acceleration.

Light-headed, Charlie almost passed out. He leaned dizzily upon the controls, which forced the elevator to an abrupt, screeching stop. After taking a moment to catch his breath, he got off making sure to leave the screen open. He was able to see down to the alley through the framework of the partially constructed skyscraper. His knees grew weak; there was nothing between Charlie and a deadly fall.

The air around him became increasingly heavy and foreboding. Charlie moved away from the opening, blindly staggering deep into the construction site. He glanced frantically for something with which to defend himself. As he fumbled and groped in the darkness, he inadvertently knocked over a pile of lead pipes that rolled and crashed to the floor. Frantic, he grabbed a bat-sized one and searched for a way out.

Henry stalked silently in the darkness of a nearby stairwell when he heard the crash. After pausing to listen, he called out to Charlie.

“You’ve killed yourself, Charlie.”

Charlie heard Henry, who sounded far off. He froze and listened through the stillness.

“Rest assured though, you’ve saved her life,” Henry continued as he climbed. “She’s who I meant this for.” He arrived at the next floor. “I didn’t want it this way, Charlie....Charlie?”

Charlie was hidden, crouched down.

“You won’t get away with this,” Charlie yelled.

“It’s an easy thing, Charlie.” Henry kept climbing, a little faster, listening carefully. “It’s your gun and I’m gonna shoot you with it...”

At the foot of the construction site Jerry came to, shook his head out, and picked himself up. As he became reoriented to his situation, he stumbled through the alley. He soon heard Henry’s menacing shouts from above.

“...and the last person to be seen with it was Jerry.”

Jerry dragged himself through the open gate and cautiously entered the construction site.

Henry crept through the blackness, the briefcase at his side and the nickel-plated revolver brandished menacingly.

“I’m sure Betsy’ll attest to that,” Henry said loudly, “and Jerry’s gonna take the fall.”

Charlie pulled himself together. In an attempt to take control of the situation, he stood from his hiding spot and crept toward the sound of Henry’s voice, lead pipe in hand.

“Like I said, it’s an easy thing.”

54

The taxicab pulled over to the curb to drop Betsy off on the corner where she had left Charlie. Before Betsy had a chance to reach for her purse, the cabbie turned around in his seat and said to her with an easy smile, “Don’t worry about it, Miss Betsy Burkes. It’s on me.”

Distracted, Betsy tipped the cabbie and took off, thanking him. The cabbie looked at the note she handed him and realized that she had left him a ten dollar bill.

“Hey, I can’t accept this. This is more than your fare!” he yelled after her as she rushed down the sidewalk barging her way past the throng of pedestrians. She had not heard; he let it go.

Charlie was moving deliberately and slowly, with the open side of the skyscraper dangerously close. A deadly fall of several stories and the maw it aroused drew him in. He stood at the very edge; the beauty of the multitude of colored lights from far below was to distraction.

“All of this is for what?” he mechanically droned in a loud, stiffened voice as he stepped away from the opening.

Charlie’s eyes slowly adjusted to the dark. He was able to see beyond the greyness and

reacted to what appeared to be a slight movement just ahead. Cautiously, he came around a tight corner, meeting Henry face to face.

Charlie's back was to the open drop. He froze. Henry was waiting for him, not at all surprised, with the revolver ready. The briefcase had been deliberately placed on the floor beside him.

From the sidewalk below, Betsy heard the distinct crack of a gunshot.

Before Charlie had time to react, Henry fired a single shot to his gut. Stunned, Charlie stood motionless in dumbfounded shock. He glared down at his chest, then at Henry who stared back emotionlessly, smoking gun in hand. Stumbling back toward the ledge, Charlie lost his balance and began to fall. Henry stretched out and grabbed him securely by his collar. Charlie held Henry's wrists, teetering dangerously over the ledge.

"A man has only so much to give," Henry hissed through his teeth, "and I guess you've given it."

He let go of Charlie's collar. Charlie hung on desperately to Henry's wrists. Calmly, Henry wrestled Charlie's hands off—one, then the other. Charlie plummeted to his death.

Panicked, Betsy bolted into the dark alley just in time to witness a figure fall from the great

heights of the construction site. She ran to him as the body hit the ground. Betsy screamed out upon realizing that it was Charlie. And collapsing over his body, she sobbed hysterically.

Henry peered over the ledge and watched as Betsy cried over Charlie's lifeless body. The maw bade him to jump; his eyes widened and bulged deliriously. There was a momentary temptation to do it. His shoes ground against the cement flooring as he shifted them closer to the edge. The pavement in the alley below was a pitch ocean, a bleak sea from which Jerry emerged, darting out from where he was hidden in the shadows, a witness to everything. Stepping away from the ledge, Henry vanished into the blackness.

Betsy shrieked as Jerry burst out from within the construction site and into the alleyway. She got a good look at him as their eyes connected. He seemed desperate and crazed; his eyes betrayed his guilt. Already Jerry had been implicated in the crime. Now it seemed there could be no doubt. He immediately knew her thoughts and hesitated in protest.

"I—He—" Jerry shook his head.

Betsy was blind with rage.

"Goddamn you!" she managed to blurt.

Betsy clumsily rose as Jerry made to run past her. She jumped at him, getting a loose grip.

“Goddamn you....No!” she screamed hysterically in a shrill voice.

Jerry broke her grip pushing her to the ground as he fled from the alley. Helplessly she crawled over to Charlie’s broken body, weeping.

55

Late in the night Betsy was seated beside Henry’s desk at the precinct. The large room was mostly empty, only a few officers went about their duties. Dick approached the desk and handed Betsy a steaming, hot cup of black coffee.

“Here you are, Miss Burkes. I’ve just spoken with Detective Beyle. He’s on his way.”

Forlorn, Betsy nodded and sipped at her coffee. She sucked in air with each draught she took, careful not to scald her mouth. Dick slid a chair out from a nearby desk and pulled it over to talk to her. The four legs skidded irritatingly across the linoleum floor.

“I’m sorry to hear about Mr. Langley.”

He assumed the seat and bent forward, looking at her pitifully. Betsy was unresponsive. She just stared blankly into her coffee, sipping noisily.

“All right,” Dick muttered to himself.

After too long of an uncomfortable pause, a familiar voice startled Betsy out of her daze.

Henry stood over her. He cleared his throat with a grunt as he addressed her.

“Betsy? Betsy Burkes?”

She glared angrily up at him.

“Where were you?” her voice broke. “Why weren’t you there?”

Henry stepped around his desk, and sat across from her, motioning for Dick to leave.

“Miss Burkes,” he said calmly. “Betsy, right now we need to discuss your safety.”

“My safety?” she seethed. “What about Charlie? What about Charlie’s safety?” She started to sob. “You were supposed to protect him.”

“Look, Betsy,” Henry implored, “I’m sorry about Mr. Langley.” He shook his head and continued, “I can’t tell you how much I regret not being there to help him.” Henry leaned in toward Betsy, looking her in the eyes. “But he changed our plan. He wasn’t where he was supposed to be.” Henry added mocking tenderness, “I think he was trying to protect you.”

“He told me it was your idea that he go,” Betsy firmly responded.

Henry shook his head a single emphatic time.

Betsy stared down at her coffee and thought aloud, “It was like Charlie to protect me.”

Henry chimed in, “Yes, it was....About your safety, Miss Burkes...I’m having surveillance

put on you...for your protection.”

In his misdirection Henry had managed to partially regain Betsy’s trust. Seeing that she was responsive to talk of her own wellbeing, he continued along that line of logic.

“We know a lot about this Jerry character. Charlie told me about your problems with him. If Jerry gets in touch with you, I need you to call me immediately.” He handed her his business card and continued. “Don’t believe anything he says. He’ll do anything. He knows we’re onto him. We have the gun he used.”

Henry read the stress and anger that came over Betsy’s face.

“But you’ll be safe, Betsy,” he reassured her. “He’s probably on the run. Trust me, he’ll want to get as far away from the heat as possible.”

Betsy sat up and tried to collect herself.

“What should I do?”

“For now, stay somewhere safe. Where do you think you’ll be?”

“At Charlie’s apartment, then, I suppose,” she cheerlessly answered.

“That’s good. You’ll be fine there. Go on, then. I’ll have Detective Styke drive you.”

Henry waved Dick over.

“I’m sorry, Miss Burkes. I wish there was more that I could do.”

Betsy sighed as she stood to leave. She reluctantly offered her hand to Henry, which he

took.

"Thank you, detective. I'm sorry I burst out....I'm just so confused."

"I understand. Try to get some rest."

She turned to leave.

"Oh, Miss Burkes," he stopped her, "I almost forgot. If you're going to leave town, we'll need to hear about it."

"You think I'll be safer here?"

"That's correct," Henry informed her, leaning back in his chair. "If you do decide to leave, though, we won't be able to protect you."

56

Jerry could barely endure the ride on the crowded subway train. The sweat on his forehead was profuse and his breathing, heavy. Several of the nearby passengers were bothered by his demeanor and glanced away, intimidated by his odd behavior. After only a couple of stops a pair of transit authority cops happened to step on. Without hesitation Jerry exited out onto the platform and walked straight to a public restroom.

Weak-kneed, he leaned over the sink and twisted the knob to run the water. He placed his hands under the faucet and splashed his face. Nervous, shaken, and angry, Jerry gazed at himself in the mirror. The ill pallor of his face was frightful. Dry-mouthed, he cupped his

hands to gather the cool water. He brought the water to his lips; a man entered the restroom causing him to start. The man entered a stall.

At realizing it was nothing, Jerry asked himself, "What now?" And responded in kind, repeating to himself from under his breath, "First, keep calm. Just keep calm,"

He stared hard at himself for an extended amount of time, as if his reflection could answer him.

"Where can I go?"

He narrowed his eyes and nodded his head.

"That's it."

To keep a step ahead would require more calm detachment than Jerry was allotted. He could bank on the predictability of Betsy's next actions. Her most probable decision would be to return to her Hoboken apartment.

Per Henry's orders Dick drove Betsy to Charlie's apartment. Distraught from the evening's trauma, she sat quietly beside him, staring out the passenger window. The colored neon lights of the city seemed to play ghoulishly across the glass.

"Don't worry," Dick half-heartedly reassured her. "You'll be safe."

They soon passed through a residential neighborhood. Off to the side the darkened trees and open space of Central Park rode along with them lackadaisically. Dick steered

the car up to the front of Charlie's apartment building.

As Betsy stepped out he said, "We'll keep a close eye on you. Don't worry about anything."

Betsy came through the front door, set her things down carelessly on the kitchen counter, and walked directly to the bathroom. Once inside she switched on the row of harsh lights that ran above the mirror of the marble counter. She closed the bathroom door softly behind her.

Alone, dejected, and stilted in silence, Betsy started the shower. While she waiting for the water to heat up she got undressed. After a minute, she slowly wiped the steam from the mirror, and standing naked, stared emptily at herself. She was visibly upset and was having a difficult time dealing with Charlie's death. Betsy stepped into the shower and put her face into the warm, constant stream of steaming water. Trembling, she rested her forearm against the cool tile and sank her head down low, breaking down into a fit of uncontrollable sobs.

Dick had parked the black sedan outside of Charlie's town house apartment. Patiently, he sat at the wheel. Less than an hour had passed when a taxicab stopped outside the building.

The detective anticipated Betsy's next move, turning over the engine to the sedan.

"So where're ya takin' us?" he spoke aloud.

It was not long before he spotted Betsy stepping out the front entrance and climbing into the cab waiting for her at the curb. He promptly tailed the taxi as it pulled away.

Betsy emerged from the cab, which had just brought her to her old Hoboken apartment building. She took to the front entrance staircase and paused. A moment of doubt washed over her. She hesitated before withdrawing her keys from her purse. The prospect of returning to her old life was daunting and distressed her. She swept the door open, passed through the lobby, and entered her trashed apartment. For an extensive period Betsy stood inert at the threshold. She glanced around, turned on the light, stepped inside, closed the door behind her, kicked over some garbage, cleared off the sofa, and plopped herself down.

Across the street, Dick pulled the black sedan to the curb. He watched intently as the taxi drove away, leaving Betsy behind. After observing her enter her apartment building he promptly shut off the car and exited. He crossed the empty street to a late night diner and made a call at a coin-operated pay phone.

"Yeah, it's Dick....She's moved....No, I think

it's the other apartment....All right, I will."

He disconnected the phone, left the diner, and reentered his automobile. He cracked open his window and settled in for a long wait.

Hoboken was a quiet neighborhood when it turned dark. Nothing much happened there late at night. As nonchalant as could be, Jerry wandered past a row of apartment buildings. In a quick movement he turned sharply at the stairs leading up to Betsy's old apartment. He slipped a pocketknife out of his coat pocket, not noticing the black sedan parked across the street with Dick inside, watching. Jerry picked the lock and jimmyed his way in, giving the door a forceful blow with his shoulder.

Dick hustled back to the diner and made another call.

"Dick again. He's here....Yup, he's just gone up....Sit tight? Fine, better make it fast."

Jerry stood in the hall outside of Betsy's door. The floor creaked under his weight. From his jacket pocket he removed his knife and began to jimmy the lock.

Betsy lay dead asleep on her sofa. A rattle at the front door woke her. She sprang up from the sofa and quickly bounded over to the door, grabbing a leg off of a smashed table on the way. Only one person, and one person alone, could be at her door. She stood poised beside the door as it creaked open, the wooden leg

held high. Jerry slipped in, and as he entered he was greeted by a smack on the head from an irate Betsy.

“Goddamn you to hell!” she shouted furiously.

Jerry collapsed, falling to his hands and knees. Betsy came down on him with another blow from the table leg; Jerry curled into the fetal position. The rage she felt toward him increased with each blow. Betsy broke down sobbing as she delivered repeated strikes, each one growing weaker than the last. Jerry rolled over recovering from the initial attack, kicked the door closed, grabbed Betsy’s arm, and pulled her down to him. The movement was quick and decisive. He cupped her mouth with his hand. Betsy fought hard against Jerry’s hold.

“Shh...shh....Damn it,” he cursed. “Shut up!”

Betsy ceased to struggle.

“I didn’t kill him. Henry killed him.”

Betsy began to struggle again. Jerry held her hard, weakening her. He restrained her in a quasi-headlock until she finally relaxed.

“Henry killed him, I swear to God. He killed him and he’s pinning it on me.”

Betsy sat perfectly still, listening.

“I’m gonna let go of your mouth. Don’t make any noise.”

He slowly released his grip over her mouth.

She sat silently.

"I didn't kill anyone, I swear. Ask your agent, Vince Shawn. He knows more about this than you think."

"What the hell are you talking about?" she spat.

"Talk to Vince....He knows about Henry."

"You're a goddamned liar! I saw you, Jerry. I saw you there."

58

Outside—from nowhere—Henry strode up to the driver's side of Dick's car. Dick unrolled the remainder of the window in order to talk to his partner.

"They still up there?" Henry asked.

"I think so.....Should we go up?"

"What for?"

"He might be killin' her."

"Maybe."

Their attention was diverted from the apartment to a patrol car, which slowly cruised past, stopped up ahead, spun around, and returned to their position. It maneuvered its way up to the sedan, and the cop inside unrolled his window to address the two men loitering outside the apartment building.

"Good evening, officer," Henry greeted him.

"You guys notice anything goin' on around here?"

“Nope. Is there a problem?”

“We received a call about a disturbance.”

Henry took out his gold shield and presented it to the cop.

“Well, don’t worry about it. We’re looking after things here.”

“Okay, detective,” the cop agreed. “If you’ve got things under control—”

“That’s right. You can move along now,” Henry waved the patrol car on.

In her abandoned Hoboken apartment, Jerry desperately tried to convince Betsy. A stir in the adjacent apartments tipped them off to the fact that the ruckus had attracted the attention of the neighbors. Jerry made his point, speaking plainly and with directness. The words he spoke rang with the truth.

“Think about it...think about what you saw. Henry’s got the money. He knows about everything, Betsy. He’s been playing you from the very beginning. He was in Los Angeles.”

“I can’t believe anything you say, Jerry.”

Jerry rose to leave.

“I’m walking away from this, Betsy.”

Betsy stayed rooted to the floor, watchful of Jerry. He walked away as he had claimed, exited the hall and headed down the stairs. Conscious that she was in danger he paused. He had a hand on the railing and squeezed it tightly, all the time looking back over his

shoulder thinking of Betsy. Slowly, he forced himself to turn away and continue down the staircase, abandoning her.

Jerry retreated from the apartment building and immediately noticed Henry standing by the black sedan, which was parked ominously across the street. Henry watched Jerry exit the building.

He leaned in to Dick and said, "Stay here. Keep an eye on the broad."

Panicked at sighting the detectives, Jerry wasted no time in attempting an escape. He took off down the sidewalk as Henry gave his orders to Dick. At once Henry sprinted straight after him in pursuit. They were in a dogged chase, quickly running a few blocks. Jerry knocked over trashcans and a bicycle, doing anything in an attempt to throw off Henry. He led the detective to a public park where he easily hopped the surrounding fence. In the space of a city block the wooded park provided Jerry with the refuge he needed. Henry closely followed as Jerry disappeared into the blackness.

Tired from the initial chase, Henry found that it was a struggle to clamber to the top the heavy wrought-iron fence and hurl himself over. He fell to the opposite side with a thud. Slow in getting to his feet, he took out his pistol and crept forward cautiously. The park was

dead still. He was out of breath, trying hard to listen for Jerry.

“There’s nowhere to run,” he shouted out. “You’re on your own, Jerry. Give it up!”

Henry made his way deeper into the park. Blackness abounded. He felt he was close and quieted his approach. His eyes adjusted to the dark, he discerned a subtle movement up ahead. His instinct was correct. There was a sound for certain. He snuck around to some brush and strained to identify an obscure figure approaching.

Henry readied his gun. He slowly inhaled, stifled his breath and took aim. From out of the darkness a deer emerged. The deer’s ears twitched, and its head jerked sharply toward the detective. In the silence Henry and the deer stood frozen. Suddenly, there was a rustle from behind Henry. The deer darted away and Henry spun around, just in time to see Jerry lunging at him. There was a scuffle. The two men struggled in the dark. A single shot escaped, ringing out into the night.

Betsy picked up the telephone. In her hand she grasped Henry’s business card. For a moment she seriously considered dialing. She held the receiver up to her ear with her shoulder and depressed the disconnect button with her free

hand. Better for having thought twice, Betsy threw the business card down. Instead she dialed the operator for information.

“The Airport Hotel...at Idewild Field.”

She hit a series of numbers.

“Yes, Vince Shawn, please,...No I don't have the room number. All right, I'll hold....Vince! It's Betsy. We need to talk.”

The gunshot in the park was too far from Betsy's apartment to be heard. For Detective Henry Beyle, things were moving fast and about to get even faster. Wrongdoing, as in all things criminal, culminates at a frenetic pace. He had some explaining to do. The thought of the paperwork he was going to have to file took the satisfaction out of shooting Jerry. Everything lined up perfectly. The prints on the revolver, Jerry showing up at Betsy's apartment—it could not have worked out better. The only snag was his police actions outside of his jurisdiction. Hoboken was in New Jersey and the local cops were not at all happy to clean up after a New York City detective. A number of squad cars had gathered at the main gate of the park's entrance. An assembly of police officers stood together near the iron fence as an ambulance arrived.

Henry was speaking with the officers when a call came over the cruiser's handset. A patrolman answered and beckoned for the

detective. Henry's attention was gotten and he excused himself to take the call.

"Yeah?"

"What—he was—where—you?" came over the cruiser's radio handset.

"What? Come again," he spoke intermittently in response to the static-filled queries of his partner. "What's that? I couldn't make that out."

"I said, What's going on? Did—catch up to him?"

"Uh-huh...everything's taken care of. What's up?"

"She's moving."

"Well, stay on her."

While Henry spoke, a police officer neared, whom Henry noticed. Annoyed, he told Dick over the handset, "Hold on." Henry scrutinized the imprudent officer and scolded, "I'm talking here."

"Sorry, detective. You're needed at the entrance."

Henry suddenly became impossibly bossy.

"Well, back off! I'll be there in a minute."

He radioed back to Dick and informed, "I'm gonna be tied up here for a while. Just stay on her till morning....Just do what I tell you!"

In her own aimless way Betsy moved fast as well, acting on impulse. Though she had no plan, she was desperate to find a way out and

hoped to discover the truth. Vince answered a knock at the door of his hotel room. It was Betsy, and though disinclined to believe Jerry's accusations about Vince, she was prepared for the worst. She stood, her eyes red though she was no longer crying.

"Betsy, I'm so sorry about Charlie. If there is anything I can do..."

Betsy motioned past him and swiftly entered the room. Vince closed the door quietly behind them. The airport tower and main terminals of Idewild Field were seen from the room's window. The TWA terminal, in particular, with its deco design stood out against the skyline. Betsy seemed stiff, somehow indifferent.

"There is," she answered in a steady voice. "I need you to tell me everything you know about a New York City detective." Searching his face Betsy caught Vince's wandering gaze. It was a bluff though she acted convincingly. "His name is Henry Beyle."

The name elicited no reaction. As she spoke, Vince came around her and graciously guided her into his room. He sat her on the bed.

"Sit down, Betsy."

Vince walked over to the mini-bar.

"Let me get you a drink. How's bourbon?"

"That'd be great."

Vince prepared her drink; subtly he attempted to avoid her question.

“So, are you okay?” Vince asked. “Do you have a place to stay?”

He handed her the drink. His dismissive attitude flagged guilt and she pressed him further.

“I spoke to Jerry, Vince. He mentioned you.”

Vince promptly shook his head, acting like Betsy was making no sense.

“What are you saying?” he questioned her awkwardly.

“He said you know Detective Beyle.”

Betsy’s eyes were steady, her resolve firm. Vince conceded.

“I wouldn’t say I know the guy.”

“Come on, Vince,” Betsy implored, badly needing whatever information he might have. “What do you know? This is important.”

“Betsy,” he responded earnestly, “you should seriously stay as far away from detective Beyle as you possibly can.”

“What are you saying, Vince?!”

“What exactly did Jerry tell you?” he half-laughed nervously, feeling cornered.

“He said Henry was in L.A. while we were out there.”

“Did he tell you that Henry killed someone out there?”

“Christ!”

“No?”

“No,” Betsy told him, confounded. “He said

that Henry killed Charlie.”

“I wouldn’t doubt it, Betsy.”

“God, Charlie trusted him.”

“I’m so sorry.”

Staring disdainfully at Vince, Betsy had a difficult time believing he could be sorry about anything.

“Why didn’t you say something? If you knew about him, why wouldn’t you do something?”

“Hold on,” Vince retorted delicately. “I never did anything thinking you would get hurt.”

“Vince,” and rearing back, Betsy rebuked venomously, “That’s just it. You didn’t do anything!”

“That’s not fair,” Vince chided in his defense. “What I happen to find out about you is your business, not mine. I don’t know anything about it.” Vince stepped away from Betsy. He lowered his eyes and shook his head as he thought the situation over. It was a mute point. “I never thought this could have happened,” he said sincerely.

“Why should I believe you?”

She looked at Vince, desperate to discover a way to relieve her grief and concern.

“You’ve got to. He won’t let up....I’ll help you get out of here...to where he won’t find you.”

“How? There’s not enough time.”

“It’s not too late. We could have you on a flight by morning.”

“This is insane!”

“It’s easy. I’ve got it all thought out. We could have you go someplace where there aren’t any extradition laws. All we’ve got to do is get you there. We’ll have you sign the contract I brought with me and have the money deposited into your account.”

“How soon can you have that done?”

“Tomorrow,” he reassured her. “Stay here for tonight. I’ll make some calls while you get cleaned up. It shouldn’t be difficult.”

“I don’t know, Vince. I need time to think it over.”

“Think, by all means. Would you like me to call for room service? You hungry?”

Outside, Dick climbed into his car balancing a pack of cigarettes on top of a cup of coffee held under his chin. He resumed his seat behind the wheel, pulled back the tab on the plastic lid, and took a sip, scalding his mouth. It was going to be a long night.

Betsy slept in the hotel bed. Vince rested in an armchair beside her.

From inside the parked sedan, Dick waited. He was across from the Airport Hotel, taking the last swig of his cold coffee, bottoms up. He lit up a cigarette and sat back, relaxed.

It was not long before Dick was fighting off sleep. He turned on the radio and hastily flipped through the stations until he found one

he liked. As he listened to the music, he nodded off and on again. It was a fight he was sure to lose. Yawning deeply, he unrolled his window and even went so far as to lean over and unroll the passenger side window in order to get a cross-breeze of fresh air. After a short time, he succumbed to sleep.

Alone in the precinct, Henry was seated at his desk in the large, dark room lit only by a single desk lamp. There was an open folder and several papers on the desk, a typewriter, half a pack of cigarettes, and a bottle of Whisky, which Henry emptied into a shot glass. He downed it, grabbed one of the cigarettes, lit it, and sat back staring at the heavy grey smoke.

60

The morning sky was clear. An orange glow dimmed the crisp air as the early sun rose. Dick opened his eyes, waking up to the brilliantly colored westward sky shining through his front windshield. The intense glare of the sun shot through the rearview mirror. He adjusted the mirror downward to relieve his eyes from the sun's harsh reflection when he was startled. Henry, whom Dick had not noticed squatting beside the door all along, parked himself, his arms crossed on the window ledge with an unlit cigarette in his mouth.

"You're not sleepin' on the job, are you,

Dick?" Henry asked as he fidgeted with his lighter.

"Nope. What time is it?"

Having lit up Henry replied, "Before seven."

Henry stuck the cigarette into Dick's mouth.

"Nice morning, huh?"

Dick took a drag.

"Yeah, thanks. I've got their room number."

"Let's get up there, then. Pull the trunk."

Promptly, Henry walked around to the back of the sedan and threw open the trunk. Dick got out, putting the car keys in his coat pocket. He lethargically worked his way to the back of the car where Henry was reaching deep into the trunk. After a few seconds Henry stood upright and produced a shotgun. He loaded it with half a dozen slugs making sure to keep it low and out of sight and racked it once, loudly.

"Do you think they might give us trouble?"

Dick asked uncomfortably.

"Better safe than dead....Give me your coat."

Dick peeled off his coat and handed it over. Henry wrapped the shotgun snugly inside it, concealing the weapon. He slammed closed the trunk and the two men crossed the street toward the hotel. Not wanting to attract unwonted attention, Henry held the wrapped shotgun under his arm.

"I gotta take a leak," Dick informed Henry, once in the lobby.

“Save it. I’m going up. If they come down, don’t do anything. Got it?”

“Yeah, I got it.”

Henry pressed the call button for an elevator, leaving Dick to wait in the lobby.

Betsy and Vince had just gotten into one of the elevators on their floor. Vince had a small duffel bag slung over his shoulder and was talking excitedly with Betsy as he shuffled through an envelope full of various papers. Inside were Betsy’s ticket, her passport, bank documents, and a travel itinerary.

“Keep these with you at all times. This is everything you’ll need to get safely into Brazil. I can’t tell you the trouble I had to go through to get this all together in time for your flight. I’ve written down your hotel information....Here’s your ticket information, passport, and your account numbers.”

Betsy gladly took the envelope and hurriedly stuffed it into her purse.

“I appreciate it, Vince. You know I do.”

“Do exactly as we discussed.”

“When I get there,” she double-checked, “I’ll call stateside and switch over all of my accounts, right?”

“As soon as you arrive. You’ll be stopping over in Mexico City first.” Vince switched the bag to his other shoulder as he continued. “Call me when you’re on the ground. By then I

should be able to let you know how things are going on this end.”

Dick fidgeted uncomfortably in place, periodically shifting his weight from one foot to the other. Henry had long since gone up. A man stepped from the public washroom. The gentleman paused at a water fountain. Dick could not stand it any longer and abandoned his post. He hurriedly darted over to the restroom to relieve himself as fast as he could.

It just so happened that as Dick entered the restroom, Betsy and Vince arrived in the lobby, exiting the elevator. Through the large lobby windows Vince spotted an airport shuttle van parked outside at the curb.

“There’s the shuttle. It hasn’t left yet,” Vince announced thankfully as he pointed ahead.

Vince hurried Betsy through the hotel lobby, leading her by the arm to the shuttle van.

61

Dick could not finish urinating fast enough. A night spent cramped in his car was catching up to him. He agitatedly shook himself when he finished and quickly zipped up rushing out to the lobby.

Outside the Airport Hotel, Betsy and Vince approached the parked airport shuttle van. At the back, the bus driver busily piled baggage into the luggage compartment. The van was

quickly filling. Vince handed the small duffel bag to Betsy and waited to the side as she went over to speak with the driver.

Dick glanced outside as he stood around waiting for something to happen. He saw Vince through the window on the sidewalk near the shuttle van. Vince removed a pack of cigarettes from his coat pocket. He turned to the window to light one. The two men made eye contact, but neither one recognized the other. Dick politely turned away just as Betsy returned, joining Vince. She immediately spotted Dick inside at the window of the lobby pacing back and forth.

“Holy shit!”

She grabbed hold of Vince and made straight for the entrance of the van.

“What?!” Vince cried in utter dismay.

“That guy in there...he’s Henry’s partner!”

Vince looked up at Dick whose back was turned.

“Come on then, goddamn it!” he cursed as he chucked his cigarette into the gutter. “Let’s get on the shuttle before he spots us.”

As the couple swiftly clambered into the shuttle, Dick strolled unknowingly out onto the sidewalk. The driver at the back of the van tore a tag that he had just written on from his clipboard and attached it to the strap of Betsy’s duffel bag. Dick absentmindedly watched as

the driver picked up the duffel bag and packed it into the luggage compartment. From his inner jacket pocket Dick removed an empty pack of cigarettes. He crumpled it in his fist taking a double take at the bag. The tag had written on it in large letters: BETSY BURKES.

Vince and Betsy rapidly worked their way to the back of the crowded van. They kept a low profile, watching through the windows as Dick conversed with the bus driver.

“Here, sit down,” Vince said upon finding Betsy an empty seat. “I’ll keep an eye out.”

Vince held onto a handrail as he stood over Betsy. Anxiously she faced him, watching him watch Dick.

“What’s going on, Vince?”

Vince did not look at her. His eyes were on Dick.

“He’s coming on.”

Quickly, he glanced down to the floor and then to Betsy.

“Stay put.”

There was nowhere to run. Dick boarded the crowded shuttle van accompanied by the driver. Vince considered the emergency exit, a latch in the roof, and recognized that it was not an option. The detective positioned himself at the very front, scanned the passengers, and soon spotted Betsy. He remained where he was, watching her. The bus driver assumed his

position behind the wheel, announced over the intercom that they were departing, started the van and pulled away from the Airport Hotel.

“What should we do?” Betsy asked Vince out of genuine concern, looking for some sort of consolation.

She set her eyes on the emergency exit. Vince shook his head.

“Don’t even think of it.”

“What then?” Betsy whispered, staring at her feet.

“We’ll get off at the first terminal and lose him in the airport.”

Betsy glanced over at Dick. Vince sidestepped and blocked her view.

“Stop looking at him. It’s best if we don’t incite him.”

62

Henry stepped out of the empty hotel room and into the hallway. He hastily wrapped the shotgun in Dick’s overcoat. The doorknob hung limp and the wood frame around the bolt was splintered from where he had busted into the room. Before he had the chance to close the door, a maid approached with her rolling supply cart. She saw the door and the partially concealed shotgun and cried out. Henry produced his badge.

“It’s okay....Enough of that. I’m a police

officer. Did you notice when these people left?" he interrogated gesturing toward the room. "A man and a woman."

"Oh, my...yes. Just a few moments ago. They took the elevator down."

Annoyed with himself and frustrated at his bad luck, Henry barged past the cleaning woman and rushed down to the lobby. There he found his partner to be missing. The departure of the hotel courtesy van attracted his glance, at the front stood Dick. Henry rifled through the pockets of the coat wrapped around the shotgun. He pulled out a set of car keys.

After a brief drive, the shuttle pulled to the curb of the crowded airport terminal. The driver announced the stop over the loud, crackly intercom.

"Main Terminal. Please retrieve your luggage at the rear of the van."

The majority of the people rose to leave. In the mix, Betsy and Vince passed Dick, who had politely stepped aside in order for the other passengers to get by. The driver squeezed past Dick. There was a brief instance where the detective had not taken notice of the couple's departure. Vince wasted no time and grasped Betsy by the hand. They headed directly for the main entrance of the terminal. The detective sighted the pair, clambered out of the shuttle, and tailed behind them. Vince guided Betsy

toward the entranceway, "Forget about the bag," he told her. "Let's get going."

Their sudden leave of the courtesy van prompted the conscientious driver to shout after them.

"Excuse me, Miss...Oh, Miss!...You forgot your bag!"

Betsy did not even look back. The bus driver shrugged his shoulders and returned to the van. When he went to the back to help his other passengers with their baggage, a security guard approached him.

"What's the problem?"

The bus driver opened the luggage compartment and began unloading the appropriate bags.

"I don't know. Some woman left her bag."

"She's just left?"

"Yup, this is hers right here."

The bus driver lifted Betsy's bag from the compartment and plopped it down. As the two men talked with Betsy's duffel bag at their feet, Henry squealed up in the black sedan, jerking it to an abrupt halt. He had spotted the parked van and hurried out of the car. The security guard noted that Henry was illegally parked.

"Hey, buddy! You can't park there," the guard upbraided curtly. "That space is reserved for unloading buses and taxis only."

Henry flashed his badge. As he was about to

respond, the large printing of Betsy's name on the duffel bag's tag caught his eye. The gold badge was enough to back the security guard off.

"Sorry sir, I didn't know," the man conceded.

"What's this?" Henry inquired.

"Some woman left it behind."

The detective crouched down and flipped the tag over, revealing Betsy's flight information.

Betsy and Vince rushed past the crowds of people at the check-in lines. The hustle and bustle of the airport provided a good mix allowing plenty of opportunities for the couple to shake Dick off their tale. As they ascended an escalator, Vince looked over his shoulder and spotted the detective following closely.

"You should be able to get your boarding pass at your gate."

Betsy also noticed Dick close behind them.

"He's right behind us!"

"Try not to attract attention....If he wanted to take us in, he would have done it already."

They stepped off the escalator. A busy terminal entrance stood before them. Airport personnel were assisting the line of passengers through the baggage check area. A causeway to the right connected the various terminals together.

"What should we do?" Betsy asked in an attempt to stem her panic.

“You’ll need to get to your terminal immediately. I’ll try to distract him.”

“How?”

Thinking fast, Vince escorted Betsy to the right. They proceeded down the causeway, bypassing the first terminal entrance.

“Don’t worry about it. Come on.”

The causeway was a long, tight corridor crowded with people waiting at coffee carts and newspaper stands. The building was a marvel. All the many conveniences of modern travel were made available. There was no place like it in the world.

“You’ll be home free once you’re past the entrance,” he continued. “He won’t get through to your gate if I can help it.”

“What are you planning on doing?”

“You needn’t worry.”

The couple raced past the second terminal entrance, hand in hand. They snaked their way through the crowd with Dick still close on their heels.

“Your flight should be in the midst of boarding. Get on as soon as you’re able.”

“What about you?”

They progressed through the causeway, the last terminal entrance not far ahead.

“They’ve got nothing on me. Just get yourself on that plane,” Vince told her.

Impulsively he checked over his shoulder.

Dick hung only a few paces back. Vince looked forward and spotted a cart loaded with baggage, fast approaching with little room to pass. He simultaneously noticed that along the wall on the right hand side was a restroom. Its door was open and a sign was posted indicating that the room was being cleaned. As the cart passed them to the left, Vince made a split second decision.

“Don’t look back!”

Vince turned around to confront Dick.

“What?” Betsy asked in confusion.

Vince firmly swatted Betsy onward, giving her no choice.

“Just keep going!”

“Vince?!”

She resumed her race to the terminal, reluctantly leaving Vince behind.

Dick watched Vince spin around. He might have tried to dodge him, but could not. The cart barreled past and it made it impossible for Dick to step aside. It was a decisive move on his adversary’s part. Dick had no choice but to face Vince.

“What the hell are you doing?” Dick demanded.

Vince was on top of him in an instant.

“This way....You son of a bitch!” Vince grunted through clenched teeth.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“Just you’ll see!”

Vince grappled with Dick and pulled him off to the side, into the open restroom.

“Get your...Goddamn hands...off of me!” Dick managed to sputter.

Vince wrangled the detective through the open door; both men slipped upon the recently mopped tile floor. Sprawling out into the restroom, the two men struggled to keep on their feet. They wrestled each other, yanking at one another's jackets, pulling them up, and trying to get them over the other's head. Dick strained to get his pistol from its holster. Vince was too slow to stop him. Dick jerked the pistol free and in the same motion bashed Vince in the face with it. Vince reeled back, blood streaming from a broken nose as he fell, teary-eyed into a row of urinals.

Dick precariously steadied himself and moved toward Vince. He found it almost impossible to get any footing. This gave Vince time to catch his breath. In an uncontrollable rage, Vince launched himself against an unstable Dick, catching him unprepared and throwing him back, head over heels. Vince followed after him, shoving Dick's face with his hand all the way down to the solid tile floor. For an instant, both men hung horizontally in mid air. Dick hit hard, head first, and let out a short, hollow gasp.

Betsy arrived at her terminal entrance without further occurrence. She stood in the seemingly impossible length of a queue. Several uniformed men and women were positioned at the baggage counter to assist wayfarers with their luggage. Of these airport personnel only one was working for security, and only he was in possession of a firearm.

The seconds ticked away. Betsy waited her turn. She glanced anxiously about knowing full well that she might at any moment be detained; it was imperative that she catch her flight. A scan of the crowd and she spotted Henry fast approaching. It appeared that he was not as of yet aware of her presence in line. Absent of thought, Betsy rashly stepped out of queue and attempted to cut to the front of the line. A baggage checker yelled out to her from behind the counter.

“Miss!...Excuse me, Miss!...You can’t go through! You’ll need to wait your turn!”

Betsy's hapless indiscretion brought much attention to her, including that of Henry's. Defeated, she resumed her position back in line. Henry stepped forward and grabbed her by the arm.

“Come with me.”

“No! I won’t,” she said loudly. “Leave me

alone!”

Henry hauled Betsy apart from the crowd. Their struggle attracted the airport security guard’s attention. He crossed over and approached them.

“What’s all this about?”

“I don’t know this man!” Betsy shouted as she fought hard against Henry. “Tell him to leave me alone!”

Henry showed his badge to the man, a tightly grip kept on Betsy’s arm.

“This woman is breaking her parole. I’ll need to take her into custody.”

The badge was Henry’s standby. It worked every time. The security guard pulled Henry and Betsy aside. The group stood in a secluded corner underneath several screens displaying departure and arrival times.

“That’s a lie!” Betsy persisted. “I’ve never seen this man before in my life.”

The airport security guard shook his head.

“I’ve got to call my supervisor on this,” the guard warned. “Both of you stay put,” he told them as he turned away to make a call on his handset.

Vince loomed over Dick, staring down at him. He bent over to take a closer look, his feet firmly planted. Blood trickled from the

detective's ear. Vince gave him a stiff kick. Dick was dead.

"Jesus Christ!"

Vince removed the pistol from Dick's hand and concealed it in his coat pocket. As he rushed out of the restroom he slipped and slid and fell a half dozen times, working himself up into a comical panic.

Betsy attempted to break Henry's grasp. The security guard stood aside blindly as he called his supervisor. Betsy was feeling panicked and trapped. Again she struggled to shake Henry's firm grip.

"Get off of me!"

"Just calm down," he spat, retaining his hold. "You're not doing yourself any good."

Impulsively, she fought against Henry knowing him to be Charlie's killer.

"Get off, I said!"

Hatred emboldened her and she elbowed the detective and broke free. She strode forward.

"Not so fast," Henry grunted and reached out, catching her purse.

Betsy sprawled out and fell helplessly to the floor. Alarmed, the security guard turned to deal with the situation. A commotion stirred in the crowd.

"Here, now... Now what's going on?"

There was a scream and the crowd flew into a panic.

“What’s this?” the guard pivoted.

A shot rang out. The screen over Henry’s head exploded, followed immediately by another shot. The bullet caught the confused security guard in the back, toppling him to the ground. Henry shielded himself as the terminal erupted in mass-hysteria. Another missive shot passed. Looking up, Henry found himself cornered by a crazed, gun-toting Vince.

Betsy, lying between the two men, unwarily sprang to her feet, momentarily standing in the line of fire.

Vince stopped just short of shooting her and shrieked, “Get out of the goddamned way!”

Henry took advantage of the break Betsy had inadvertently provided him. Instantly he made a run for it in the only direction he could to get away from Vince—toward the baggage check at the terminal entrance. As Henry sought his escape, he knocked Betsy aggressively with his shoulder, shoving her forward into Vince’s arms.

“Get to your plane!” Vince exclaimed to Betsy.

He released her and sprinted after Henry, who had just charged through the baggage check and into the busy terminal. Vince chased Henry, gun brandished forward. Henry forced his way past the crowd forcefully shoving those who were in his way aside. He whipped out his

gun and aimed behind him, taking a shot at Vince. He missed. The people littering the terminal scattered and ducked. Vince returned fire, also missing.

Several flight attendants dove for cover at a boarding gate up ahead. Henry headed straight for the gate, climbing over the rows of flimsy bench-chairs in strides. Vince was close behind, and upon sighting Henry clambering toward the gate, stopped and took careful aim. In the instance he fired Henry's foot caught on one of the chairs in the middle of a hurdle and he tumbled to the floor, barely escaping Vince's bullet.

Henry, on all fours, scurried under the cover of the chairs to the gate entrance. Vince strained to get a clear shot. Making one last leap, Henry tumbled through the gate and into the connecting tunnel.

Missing his opportunity, Vince followed in close pursuit. Ahead of him he observed the detective race through the enclosed accordion tunnel. At full speed Henry attempted a couple of potluck shots over his shoulder. Each one missed, but with every attempt Vince flinched, ducking off to the side. This gave Henry the chance he needed to board the jumbo jet docked at the end of the connecting tunnel. He burst into the congested airplane, waving his gun at the flight attendants and passengers.

“Sit down!...Get back!” he hollered, “Get out of the fucking way!”

All hell broke loose. The passengers scrambled and scurried from Henry, who bullied his way to the tail end of the plane. The packed jetliner was writhing with panic by the time Vince entered. Wading through a wave of fleeing people, he spotted Henry further into the plane but could not get a clear shot through the riotous crowd. Several passengers pushing past Vince noticed his pistol and retreated frantically to the aisles on the opposite side of the plane, screaming.

Vince held his pistol out ahead of him as he dashed through the clearing, closing in on Henry. Henry reached the back of the plane and popped open the emergency exit. As the door fell open, Vince fired a shot catching Henry in the shoulder. The bullet spun the detective around, and threw him backwards through the opening.

Henry grasped for the door with his free hand just barely getting a hold of it. The force of the shot swung him dangerously out of the tail of the plane, dangling him some twenty or thirty feet above the tarmac. Henry glanced down, holding on for dear life. A baggage train passed beneath him. The same force with which the emergency door opened swung it closed bringing him back safely into the plane.

Henry secured his feet on the ledge and pulled himself back in. Vince barreled up blasting. Henry took it in the gut, grunting and falling back, but not before he fired a shot into Vince's chest, the force of which threw Vince like a human cannonball in between the rows of seats. Henry dropped his gun and gripped his abdomen in pain as he was flung back, out of the plane. For all he was worth he held on to the door with one hand, hanging out of the tail of the plane.

After a short struggle Henry fell, careening violently onto one of the aluminum cars of the passing baggage train below. The impact of his crushing fall exploded the contents of the car, spilling opened luggage onto the tarmac, clothes strewn everywhere.

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Seated safely on board her jetliner, Betsy tentatively watched from her window as the plane pulled away from the terminal and taxied out onto the tarmac. After rolling down the runway and securing a place at the end of a long line of passenger jets, her plane positioned itself and jerked to an abrupt stop. From where Betsy sat, the jet's engines and massive wing provided her with only a partial view of the distant airport. Anxiously, she strained to see what was happening when the

captain's voice came over the intercom.

He cleared his throat and addressed the passengers, "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I'll be your captain for today's flight. We regret to announce that our departure has been temporarily delayed. We ask that you please remain seated while the fasten seat belt signs are on. We appreciate your patience and apologize for any inconvenience. Thank you."

The reaction to the captain's message was predictable. Amongst the grumbling and rustling of the passengers, Betsy shifted apprehensively in her seat. She was expecting the worst, waiting for what she felt was inevitable. The gentleman seated beside her stopped a stewardess who had just stepped out from behind a curtain.

"Excuse me....How long will we be delayed?"

"Not long, sir," the stewardess answered.

"May I get you a drink?"

Betsy gazed back out the diminutive window leaning her head against the clear plastic barrier, sullenly staring out at the airport. The strobe lights of emergency vehicles could be discerned in the distance. The colors danced below the brightly lit terminal. A few moments later, the stewardess startled Betsy out of a trance.

"Would you like a drink, dear?" she leaned in

and smiled.

Betsy gathered herself and responded, "Yes...yes, please. Bourbon, thank you."

The gentleman seated beside Betsy attempted to chat with her, motioning with his liquor.

"Should help with the wait, no?"

Betsy smiled in avoidance.

"They're saying shots were fired at the airport," he continued.

Betsy nodded her head. The gentleman toasted his drink in the air before taking the last swig. After a few seconds of uncomfortable silence, the stewardess returned with Betsy's bourbon.

"Here you go, dear....Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No, thank you."

The stewardess smiled and turned to leave, but instead hesitated and readdressed Betsy.

"I'm sorry....You're Betsy Burkes, isn't that right?"

"Yes...I am," Betsy answered hesitantly.

"Well...I think what you did was really brave."

Before Betsy had time to respond, the captain made another announcement over the intercom.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we would like to thank you for your patience. We will now resume our scheduled flight. Please remain

seated for take-off.”

The stewardess beamed brightly at Betsy before she resumed her duties. She walked to the front of the first class compartment and picked up the intercom microphone.

“Good morning. On behalf of the flight crew, I would like to welcome you on board Flight 482 in service from New York International Airport to Mexico City Inter...”

Her voice trailed off. Slowly, Betsy turned away from the cabin, blocking everything out as she stared through her window. She watched as the passing runway shrank and became the airport, which in turn disappeared into the city, until finally the plane banked, losing the horizon to the sky, and with it, any sense of perspective.

THE END



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