
Bullitt

Robert L. Pike

B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

This Book Is for My Parents
And for Ruth and Harold

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Foreword

The shot is from the front of a cruising car with Steve McQueen at the wheel; through the rear window we see another car ease menacingly over the crest of one of San Francisco's switchback hills. McQueen's baby blue eyes harden as he glances in the mirror, and what many would argue is the greatest car chase in cinema history has begun.

As I write, it's years since I've seen *Bullitt*, but that chase is burnt into my memory; it's probably burnt into yours as well. But... what else was there? Robert Vaughan as a smooth villain, Jacqueline Bisset was in there somewhere ... The good guys must have won, they always did in those days, but how accurately did the story follow *Mute Witness*? It certainly moved the action from New York to the West Coast. It doesn't matter; one was a classic cop movie, the original a fine American cop thriller.

Robert L. Pike concentrates everything into seventy-two hours, no flashbacks, no digressions, no blank time lapses. Clancy is not a superman, just a hard-working, conscientious police lieutenant under pressure. What he doesn't understand worries him. Why should Johnny Rossi suddenly want to turn state evidence? How do so many people know things they shouldn't? When was the washing line empty? (That running joke provides the neat touch that returns everything to normal at the end.)

You can believe in Clancy and the people he deals with. He misses things because he's tired, he makes errors of judgement, he gets frustrated and impatient. But he's a professional who never lets go. Behind what looks like nothing more than a simple witness protection operation is a murder plot carefully and ruthlessly worked out, and Clancy has to crack it.

Pike (actually Robert L. Fish, who wrote the Schlock Holmes parodies) ingeniously combines the police procedural with elements of the classic mystery. Amid the action, all the clues are there if you can spot them, and Clancy's explanation at the end is as satisfying as a tough crossword clue when someone tells you the answer. It's good to see *Mute Witness* back in print.

Oh, and that car chase you remember from the film. How did it end? In a fireball at a gas station. People often forget that as well.

ROBERT RICHARDSON

Robert Richardson's first Augustus Maltravers mystery, *The Latimer Mercy*, won the Crime Writers Association's 1985 John Creasey Award for the best debut crime novel. His books have been sold in America, Japan, Germany, Italy, Hungary and Russia, and he was chairman of the CWA from 1993 to 1994.

Chapter One

Friday – 9:10 a.m.

Lieutenant Clancy of the 52nd Precinct dropped from his taxi in Foley Square and started slowly up the broad marble steps of the Criminal Courts Building. He was a slender man in his late forties, a bit above medium height, dressed in a drab blue suit, a cheap white shirt with blue striped tie inexpertly tied, and a dark blue hat that failed to conceal the streaks of gray that were beginning to mark his temple. The thin face beneath the shadow of the worn brim was drawn, lined with weariness; his dark eyes were expressionless.

He paused at the top of the steps, half-tempted to disregard the summons – the office he was about to visit held some rather unpleasant memories for him. And he was tired and he knew it. Six hours of sleep in the past forty-eight, cleaning up a complicated case that would appear in the afternoon paper as ‘routine’ – and a desk piled high with work awaiting him back at the precinct, plus the fact that his superior was sick and all work fell on him, plus assignment lists to be approved or changed, plus all the constant bickering and fighting and bloodshed that washed across his desk daily in search of a possible resolution ... He stared about the green square a moment, watching the pigeons scatter in the summer morning breeze and the warm sunlight, and then return to peck disinterestedly at the offerings of the children to whom the square was all they knew of the great-outdoors. He was suddenly aware of the pleasantness of the sunlight on his shoulders. This is no day to be here, he suddenly thought. This is no day to listen to Chalmers, no matter what he has to say. This is a day to get your fishing tackle together and go out into the country. Or a day to sleep. Ah, well, he thought, nobody forced you to become a policeman ... He sighed, shrugged his shoulders philosophically, and pushed his way through the heavy doors.

The elevator deposited him easily on the fourth floor of the quiet building and he walked slowly and wearily down the wide, empty corridors, past the alcoved drinking fountains and the pictures of former State Justices hung dustily and unevenly along the high, drab walls, toward the familiar office. He paused briefly outside the frosted glass door, listening to the ragged sound of typing filtering unevenly through. With a shrug he twisted the knob and entered the office.

The secretary seated at the typewriter just inside the door was a heavy-set, no-longer-young woman with dyed hair fluffed in an extreme hair-do and short painted fingernails. She stopped her work at his entrance, her thick fingers poised like fat worms over the typewriter keys as she surveyed the Lieutenant. Her small eyes were cold, but a smile spread slowly across her puffy face, bright and false.

‘Hello, Lieutenant.’ The tiny eyes took in the worn hat, the shiny suit; they dropped to the badly knotted necktie and remained there as she continued. ‘It’s been a long time since you visited us. How have you been?’

‘Fine,’ Clancy said woodenly.

‘I understand you’re at the 52nd Precinct now,’ the woman said. She put one pudgy hand to her dyed hair and pulled her eyes from the necktie to glance behind her, as if to pretend concealment of some inner smile of triumph. ‘I hope you like it there, Lieutenant.’

‘I like it fine,’ Clancy said evenly, and stared over her head to the massive inner door that led to the Assistant District Attorney’s sanctum. His eyes came back to the faintly gloating secretary. ‘Is Mr. Chalmers apt to be busy very long?’

‘I’ll tell him you’re here.’

She swung her heavy body about almost coyly, squeezing her large bust past the typewriter; he

finger found and pressed a button. There was a harsh rasping answer from the intercom, and then the tone clarified.

‘Yes?’

‘Lieutenant Clancy is here, Mr Chalmers.’

‘Clancy? Oh.’ There was a moment’s pause. ‘Well, tell him to wait.’

The words were clearly audible to the tired man in the faded blue suit. He twisted his hat in his hands, his thin face unrevealing, and turned toward the leather-upholstered sofa that served as a waiting bench against one wall. There was another squawk and the intercom suddenly spoke again.

‘Mrs Green.’ There was a moment’s hesitation, as if the author of the unseen voice wasn’t quite sure. ‘On second thought we might as well get it over with. Send the Lieutenant in.’

Clancy moved from the upholstered sofa with its promise of restful comfort, going to the inner door, conscious of the slightly sardonic smile on the fat face of the secretary. He pushed his way through and closed the door behind him, resisting with effort a desire to slam it. He took a deep breath and faced the man sitting relaxed behind the wide desk. Hold your temper, he advised himself coldly. You’re tired and in no condition to get angry. Don’t let the bastard get under your skin; don’t let him take advantage of your weariness. But don’t let him ride you, either.

‘You wanted to see me?’

The Assistant District Attorney nodded shortly. ‘Yes. Sit down.’

‘I’ll stand if you don’t mind,’ Clancy said. ‘What did you want to see me about?’

The gray eyebrows across from him quirked. ‘As you wish. I asked you to stop in because there’s a job to be done in your precinct and I wanted to brief you on it ...’

‘I take my instructions from Captain Wise,’ Clancy said quietly.

‘He’s home sick in bed, as you well know. But you’ll get confirmation on this from the proper source. And actually, they aren’t really instructions.’ The pale blue eyes studied the desk and then selected an ornate letter opener. The neatly groomed hands picked it up, playing with it idly. ‘This is a bit different. We have an important witness staying in your area that we want guarded day and night. The pale eyes rose; the letter opener was discarded as having served its purpose. ‘This witness has offered to testify before the State Crime Commission next Tuesday morning.’ There was a slight cough. ‘His testimony could be extremely important. We want him alive when the Commission meets.’

Clancy knew what was coming. Despite his resolution the anger began to gather in his dark eyes. ‘Go on.’

‘That’s all. Just that. We don’t want him killed.’ The neatly-manicured hands waved negligently. The quiet voice remained bland; almost indifferent. ‘We don’t want him killed by anyone. And that includes trigger-happy policemen ...’

Clancy leaned over the wide desk; the knuckles gripping his worn hat whitened. Despite his resolution his temper began to slip beyond his control. ‘Look, Chalmers – are you calling me trigger-happy?’

‘I? Calling you ...?’ The white hands spread apart in amazement at the charge. ‘You misunderstand me, Lieutenant. Completely. All I was doing ...’

‘I know what you were doing.’ The dark eyes stared into the pale blue ones intently. ‘You were giving me the needle. The business.’ He took a deep breath and straightened up. ‘Sure, I killed one of your witnesses, once. He was insane; he came at me with a loaded gun and I shot him. And you saw it that I lost a promotion and got a transfer to the 52nd out of it.’ The thin fingers relaxed on the crumpled hat; he forced his anger behind him, dropping his voice.

~~‘Look, Chalmers. If you want a witness guarded and don’t like the way we do it, move him to some other jurisdiction. But don’t –’ He stopped, aware of the uselessness of discussion.~~

‘Please, Lieutenant. Don’t get excited.’ The pale eyes facing Clancy held the slightest touch of satisfaction at the other’s reaction. ‘As I was saying, I was merely explaining the importance of the man’s safety. As a matter of fact we offered him protective custody in a downtown hotel – one of the better hotels – but our witness refused. He wants to stay in a small hotel uptown; he feels there is less movement in a place like that and therefore less chance that he might be spotted. Of course we can force the man to do something he doesn’t want to do. However, he did agree to have plain-clothes protection where he is staying – he asked for it, as a matter of fact.’

Clancy opened his mouth to retort and then clamped it shut. He laid his hat on the corner of the desk, reached into his pocket and brought out his notebook, took a pen from another and clicked it open.

‘All right,’ he said evenly, wearily. ‘What’s his name and where is he hiding out?’

The well-dressed figure across from him continued to lean back comfortably. There was a faint smile of combined anticipation and triumph on the thin lips.

‘His name is Rossi,’ Chalmers said softly. ‘Johnny Rossi.’

Clancy’s head came up with a jerk. ‘Johnny Rossi? From the West Coast? He’s here in New York?’

‘That’s right, Lieutenant.’

‘And he’s going to spill to the New York Crime Commission?’

‘That’s right. Next Tuesday.’

Clancy frowned. His fingers unconsciously twiddled the pen. ‘Why?’

The pale eyes came up. ‘Why what?’

‘Why would he talk? And even if he did, why to the New York Crime Commission? Why not to the police out on the West Coast? Or to the proper Federal authorities?’

For the first time a faint shadow crossed the urbane face. ‘To tell you the truth, I don’t know.’ The doubt was forced from the quiet voice; it hardened. ‘In any event, we’ll get those answers when we have him up before the Commission. As to why he chose New York, it really doesn’t make any difference. His testimony will stand just as well no matter where it is given.’ He shrugged, calm once again. ‘Maybe he feels safer in New York. Or possibly he knows that I’ll see to it that he gets a fair hearing ...’

Clancy snorted. The pale eyes across from him hardened once again.

‘Do you have any comments?’

‘Yeah,’ Clancy said evenly. ‘It stinks.’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘I said it stinks.’

The dapper figure behind the large desk pushed himself erect in his chair. ‘Now see here, Lieutenant. You weren’t called here for your opinions. You were called here –’

‘You just asked me if I had any comments,’ Clancy said. ‘Well, here’s some more. This Johnny Rossi is a guy who’s guilty of every crime in the book; together with his brother Pete he runs the West Coast. Every racket out there reports to him – protection, gambling, prostitution; everything. But nobody can touch him. Then, when something slips in his little world, we’re supposed to protect him. That’s a joke.’

‘It may be a joke, Lieutenant, but that’s the story. Your job isn’t to pass moral judgment on this man; your job at the moment is simply to protect him. Whether you like him or not.’

‘And here’s one last comment,’ Clancy said. ‘So far nobody has been able to put him behind bars.’

or in the gas chamber out there, where he belongs; but if he talks I don't see how he can keep from incriminating himself. Unless when he talks he doesn't say anything. Or unless there's been a prettily smelly deal made ...'

There was a sharp gasp from the man across the desk. He opened his mouth to say something and then closed it again. There was a moment's silence while the two men stared into each other's eyes. When Chalmers finally spoke his voice was low and hard.

'We won't discuss this any further, Lieutenant. If you think I'd miss the opportunity to cross-examine Johnny Rossi before the Crime Commission ...'

Clancy met the hard stare unwaveringly. Sure you wouldn't miss the opportunity, his eyes seemed to say. With all those reporters, and all those photographers? You don't really care to question whether Rossi is going to testify, do you? He lifted his notebook again, flipping it open.

'All right, Chalmers,' he said quietly. 'What name is he using, and where is he hiding out?'

The other contemplated the standing man for several moments before answering. 'He's at the Farnsworth Hotel, in Room 456. He's registered under the name of James Randall.' His eyes sought the wall-clock that shared the opposite wall with a modern painting consisting mainly of sickly-looking blobs. 'Or at least he will be at ten o'clock this morning.'

Clancy marked it down, stared at his own notes for a second, and then slipped the notebook easily into his jacket pocket. He clipped the pen back into place.

'All right. We'll keep an eye on him.'

'And do it quietly.' The pale eyes, still holding anger at the implied accusation of Clancy's remarks, bored into the other's. 'Nobody knows about this.'

'We'll do it quietly.' Clancy fitted his hat squarely on his head. His dark eyes were completely expressionless. 'And we'll deliver him on time. And in one piece.'

He turned to the door. The Assistant District Attorney's voice was ice behind him.

'Deliver him alive,' Chalmers said.

Clancy bit back the first words that rose to his lips.

'Yeah,' he finally said, and pulled the heavy door closed behind him. He tramped in silent fury across the large outer office; the busty secretary leaned over her typewriter, pressing against it and smiling; her teeth were large and white.

'Good-by, Lieutenant.'

Those teeth, Clancy thought with savage disgust as he pushed his way through the door to the corridor. Like you and your smile and your boss Mr Chalmers. And probably your chest. White and bright, and false ...

Friday – 10:15 a.m.

Detectives Kaproski and Stanton sat listening to their instructions in the dingy room in the 52nd Precinct that served Lieutenant Clancy as an office. The difference between this office and that of the Assistant District Attorney in the Criminal Courts Building was impressive; here worn and stained linoleum rippled unevenly over the warped floor rather than the rich, deep carpeting that Clancy had experienced an hour before. A small battered desk that had served Clancy's predecessor, as well as several before him, took the place of the broad polished mahogany desk that graced Mr Chalmers' office. The tiny room had bare walls and hard wooden chairs; together with the scratched and battered filing cabinets they crowded the little office. And the view gave, not on the East River with its magnificent bridges and colorful, jaunty boats cutting white check-marks across the blue surface, but on a clothesline bent across a narrow air-shaft and sagging dispiritedly under a load of limp underwe-

and patched overalls.

Clancy swung back from his contemplation of the window scene.

‘That’s the story,’ he said quietly. ‘In the room with him, twelve hours each, on and off.’ His fingers picked up a pencil and he began to twiddle it. ‘It’s only until next Tuesday.’

‘Sounds peachy,’ Stanton said. ‘Where’s the Farnsworth?’

‘Over on 93rd, near the river. A small residential hotel. Probably like all of them over there.’

‘I never heard of it,’ Stanton said.

‘I wouldn’t be surprised that’s why he picked it out,’ Clancy said. He stared at Stanton quietly. ‘Do you suppose there’s any possibility he picked it out for the reason that nobody ever heard of it?’

‘Maybe,’ Stanton said, and grinned.

‘Johnny Rossi,’ Kaposki said musingly. He teetered his chair back against one of the filing cabinets and slowly eased his weight back. ‘That’s something, ain’t it? That’s really something. We got to be watchdogs for a no-good hood like that.’

‘Yeah, it’s something.’ Clancy said. If he felt any reaction at hearing his own sentiments repeated he did not show it. ‘Anyway, that’s the job. Whether we like it or not.’

‘I’ll tell you somebody ain’t going to like it,’ Kaposki said sagely. ‘That’s his big brother Pet. And the mob the two work for.’

‘Lots of people aren’t going to like it,’ Clancy said philosophically. ‘On the other hand, lots of people are.’

‘Well,’ Kaposki said thoughtfully, ‘when and if he spills – which I still ain’t convinced he’s going to do – the coppers out on the coast ought to be busy a year just picking up the pieces.’

‘As long as they aren’t his pieces until after he tells his story,’ Clancy said, ‘I couldn’t care less.’

‘You know,’ Stanton said in a puzzled tone, ‘I don’t get it. Johnny Rossi ...’

‘Don’t get what?’ Kaposki asked, turning his head carefully so as not to disturb his equilibrium. ‘Why he’s blowing the whistle?’

‘Not that. Though I’m damned if I get that either. What I don’t get,’ Stanton said, ‘is that you think a hood like that could arrange bodyguards for himself from here to South Chigary. What’s he need us for?’

‘Bodyguards in that outfit work for the Syndicate like everyone else,’ Clancy said flatly. ‘They’re day-workers, with all the loyalty of an alligator. One whisper that he was going to peep and his bodyguards would be the first to cut him down.’

‘Yeah, but ...’

‘I know.’ Clancy sighed and ran his hand through his hair. ‘The whole deal is screwy. Well, that’s not our worry. Our job is simply to see that he’s healthy enough to go up before the Criminal Commission next Tuesday. Under his own power.’

‘One thing,’ Kaposki said with a reflective smile, ‘at least I’ll get a chance to see how the other half lives. I’ll bet we have *pâté de foie gras* and champagne for breakfast.’

Stanton eyed him and snorted. ‘You’ve got a hope! At a fleabag like the Farnsworth.’

‘They live good, these big-time hoods,’ Kaposki insisted. ‘You’ll see.’

‘Yeah,’ Clancy said dryly. ‘The same as the poor people. Goose liver on rye and a bottle of dog red. Only at uptown prices.’ He pushed himself to his feet, looking at his watch. ‘Well, let’s go. He ought to be registered in by now. Stanton, you first – you’ve got a short day. I’ll go over with you,’ Kaposki, eight tonight.’

Kaposki nodded genially, nearly losing his balance. Stanton stood up, towering over the slender Lieutenant. The two men took their hats, nodded to the third, and left the office, turning down

narrow corridor that led to the police garage at the rear of the precinct. Clancy walked around an old sedan, kicking at the tires, and then crawled in behind the wheel; Stanton bent precariously to slide at his side. He slammed the door; they swung about on the oily concrete of the dim garage, pulling through the narrow alley that led to the street, and entered the city's traffic.

Stanton leaned back comfortably against the worn upholstery, pulled out a cigarette, lit it, and flipped the match out of the window. 'This Rossi ...' he began.

'Randall,' Clancy said shortly. 'From now on until next Tuesday, he's Randall. We might as well get started right.' He glanced over at the tall detective at his side. 'What about him?'

Stanton stared at the end of his cigarette. 'I was just going to say, I hope he plays gin rummy.'

'Gin rummy?'

'Yeah.' Stanton shrugged. 'After all, twelve hours together every day. We have to do something.'

Clancy was forced to smile.

'Why don't you just pass the time by watching him? That's the assignment.'

'Sure, but I mean ...'

'Look,' Clancy said, 'I don't mind your losing a week's pay, but once that's gone, I don't want you betting your gun.' His voice suddenly sobered. 'Much as I hate this hood's guts, our job is to keep him alive, and if word that he plans to squeal ever gets out, the chances are good you'll be needing your gun.'

'Lose?' Stanton was hurt. 'Who, me? In gin rummy? Please, Lieutenant!'

'It's a funny thing,' Clancy said reflectively, swinging the steering wheel. 'I've met a lot of people in my life, but I've never met a bad gin rummy player. All I ever seem to meet are the champs.' His eyes came up with a crinkled grin. 'The only thing I'd like to remind you of is that characters like the Rossi – Randall, I mean – wouldn't be above cheating. Not if they were only playing for matches.'

Stanton smiled. 'Lieutenant, I can see you never played cards with any of the boys around the precinct. If there is any manner, form, type, kind, or way of cheating that I'm not wise to, I'd like to know.'

'I'm sure,' Clancy said, and grinned.

They pulled around a corner into the traffic of Broadway, cut around a bread-truck almost angled parked to the curb, and drew up before a block of shabby buildings. Cartons full of rubbish lined the curb, awaiting the street-cleaning trucks. Clancy passed them, pulled in to the curb, turned off the ignition and set the hand brake. He prepared to descend. Stanton's eyebrows raised.

'Here?' he asked, puzzled, 'I thought you said this Farnsworth was down by the river?'

'It is,' Clancy said shortly. 'And we walk. And we go in the service entrance. Come on.'

They crossed the side street, walking quietly in the shadow of the tall apartments there. The Hotel Farnsworth was in the second block, a typical uptown residential hotel, set almost flush with the sidewalk; eight stories of dark brick and dusty windows with a few steps leading to swinging glass doors. Shades were half-drawn over the first-floor windows, like heavy-lidded eyes. A chipped enamel sign tucked in the corner of one window announced the services of a dentist. The two men passed the entrance without hesitation and turned into the driveway at the far side of the hotel. They walked the length of the narrow canyon, pulled open a door set in the side of the building at the rear, and stepped inside.

'Well, it isn't the Ritz-Carlton,' Stanton said, staring about. He pressed the button of the service elevator. 'On the other hand, I've been in worse-looking places. Including the 52nd Precinct.'

Clancy did not answer. There was a rattle and a clank; Stanton tugged at the door and it opened. They entered the small elevator and rose amidst a symphony of threatening groans from the cables.

flanked in the tiny car by towel-baskets and brooms and empty cartons; an over-all odor of something resembling the men's room at Grand Central rose with them. The fourth floor was deserted when they gratefully emerged; they closed the elevator door behind them and walked down the worn carpeted hall. One turn in the narrow corridor and they faced Room 456. Clancy tapped.

There was a hesitant shuffling sound from behind the door. A throat was audibly cleared. 'Who's there?'

'The name is Clancy ...'

There was the sound of a chain sliding back; the door edged open and an eye surveyed them cautiously. The door swung open; the man in the opening glanced quickly up and down the deserted hallway and then stepped aside to allow the two detectives to enter. He closed the door behind them, fumbled a bit as he tried to slip the chain into place once again, and then finally managed it. He turned a bit nervously to face the two men; his hand wiped itself against his thigh and was then stretched out in greeting.

'Hi, Lieutenant. Mr Chalmers said you'd be here.'

Clancy pointedly ignored the outstretched hand, measuring the famous figure with cold eyes. He saw a stocky, well-built man in his late thirties, with black curly hair, a high smooth forehead; a pencil mustache covered the sensual full upper lip. Large, almost liquid eyes peered at him from beneath eyebrows that had obviously been recently trimmed. He was wearing a loud, expensive dressing gown over light brown Italian silk trousers and a white silk shirt, open at the throat. Not quite the same picture as the mug-shots in the police folder down at Centre Street – the advantages of money and good grooming since the early days, Clancy thought. The large eyes began to narrow at the continued snub; the outstretched hand fell.

'Say ...'

Clancy turned away without speaking, studying the room. His eyes passed rapidly over the two beds with their standard tan unpatterned bedspreads and lumpy pillows, took in the threadbare and stained carpeting, the skimpy desk and chair, the discouraged easy-chair set in the corner with its obvious broken springs, and the ever-present water-color depicting a bowl of wilted flowers which hung crookedly on the wall. He stepped to the window, lifted the shade, and peered downwards.

'Where's the fire-escape?'

The stocky man hesitated and then shrugged. 'I wouldn't know. I just checked in. It's probably down the end of the hall, or maybe they don't even have one. It's a small hotel, and ...'

'Yeah. Well, it's just as well. As long as it doesn't pass your windows.' Clancy looked about once more, walked to the bathroom, opened the door, and checked the interior. He swung the plastic shower-curtain to one side, glanced at the tiny window, noting it was latched, looked back of the door he had opened, and then came out, closing the door behind him. He walked to the closet, opened the door, clicked on the light, and then raised his eyebrows at its emptiness.

'Traveling light, eh?'

The other didn't answer. Clancy turned off the light and closed the door. He took one last look about the room.

'Well, I guess that's it, Randall.' He eyed the other with ill-concealed contempt. 'This is Detective Stanton. He'll stay with you from eight in the morning until eight at night. There will be a replacement named Kaposki who will stay with you the rest of the time.'

'I've got a good cover for your man,' the stocky man said. His voice seemed to indicate a willingness to assume a part of the responsibility. 'If anybody asks, I can say he's my cousin from the coast ...'

'Very bright,' Clancy said with disgust. 'That certainly ought to fool your brother. And the rest of'

that west-coast mob that have known you all your life.' He shook his head. 'Look, Randall; don't complicate simple things. Nobody is going to find you. And if they do, leave everything to Stanton here. That's what he's here for.'

The broad smooth forehead wrinkled. 'Look, Lieutenant...'

'And don't leave the room,' Clancy added coldly. 'For any reason whatsoever.'

'Don't leave the room?'

Clancy looked over at Stanton. The large detective nodded. 'He won't leave the room, Lieutenant. He cleared his throat. 'What do you do for food in this joint?'

Randall's frown deepened at this interruption. He swung around impatiently. 'The bellboy goes down to some restaurant over on Broadway. You can get anything you want.' He turned back to Clancy. 'Look, Lieutenant...'

Clancy stared at him. 'Well?'

The stocky man searched for words. 'This deal is worth dough. I don't see where anything can go wrong ...' He hesitated as if in admission that he could easily see where many things could go wrong. He wet his lips. 'Well, anyway, there's dough in this. And I'm no hog.'

He looked at Clancy significantly.

'Save your money,' Clancy said dryly. 'Buy cemetery lots. I hear they're a good investment.'

The stocky man clenched his jaw. 'You don't understand...'

'All right,' Clancy said. 'Make me understand.'

The stocky man turned away and then swung back. He opened his mouth to speak and then closed it.

Clancy eyed him coldly. 'Understand one thing, Randall. I'm not interested in why you're going to spill. Or how there's dough in it. I couldn't care less. That's Chalmers' problem. My job is to keep you alive until the Commission meets next Tuesday. If you have to talk, talk to Stanton here. He has to listen to you; I don't.'

Stanton had been staring about the room. 'Say, Rossi – I mean Randall – do you have any cards?'

'Cards?'

'Yeah. Playing cards. You know, to play gin rummy.'

'No. I don't play cards.'

'You don't play gin rummy?' Stanton was incredulous.

'No.' He swung away impatiently, returning his attention to Clancy, but the slim Lieutenant had already crossed the room and was sliding back the chain-bolt on the door.

'Lieutenant...'

'Let's get some up from room-service,' Stanton said. 'They must have some. I'll teach you.'

'What?'

'I said I'd teach you how to play gin rummy,' Stanton said patiently. 'It's simple.'

But the stocky man wasn't paying any attention. He crossed the room, grasping Clancy by the arm. Clancy shook his arm free but the man in the dressing gown grasped it again.

'Lieutenant...'

'What now?'

'Do you think – well, I know nothing can go wrong, but... You said I can't leave the room ... The boss goes for your men, too, doesn't it? They'll be here with me all the time?'

Clancy's hand was on the knob. 'One or the other will be with you all the time, so relax.' He suddenly frowned, his eyes narrowing. 'I was told that nobody knows where you are, or what name'

you're using. You don't seem to be so sure, yourself.'

'Oh, that's not it,' Randall said hastily. 'It's just ...'

He closed his mouth, almost as if he had already said too much. Clancy waited patiently, staring into the worried liquid eyes steadily for several seconds. Then he opened the door.

'Learn gin rummy,' he said quietly. 'It'll take your mind off your troubles.' He started to close the door after him and then added, 'Anyway, until Tuesday ...'

Chapter Two

Saturday – 2:40 a.m.

The shrill insistent ringing of the telephone finally wormed its way through Clancy's heavy sleep dragging him reluctantly back from a wonderful dream world where there was no crime and therefore – beautiful thought – no police department. He lay there a moment, trying to awaken, and then rolled over, groping for the bed-lamp. His fingers found it and flicked it on; the ringing continued stridently. His blurred eyes found the clock on the night-stand and he could have wept with frustration. Less than three hours since he'd finally managed to get to bed and already some miserable bastard was calling to disturb him! His hand went out, picking up the telephone, jamming it against one ear.

'Yes? Hello?'

'Hello, Lieutenant? This is Kaproski ...'

Premonition swept the man in bed. He sat up, swinging his feet over the side, cringing a bit at the dampness of the bare floor. His hand clutched the receiver tighter; he shook his head violently, trying to clear the remnants of sleep from his brain. The whisper of traffic came up softly from the deserted street below.

'What's the trouble?'

'I don't know.' The large detective calling from the hotel room sounded more puzzled than worried. 'He's sick, I guess. Rossi, I mean. He's moaning and groaning and hanging onto his belly like he was afraid somebody was going to try to take it away from him.'

'When did that start?'

'Just a little while ago. He was all right before.'

'Does he have a fever?'

'Naw. He doesn't seem to. From the racket he's making you'd think he ought to be hotter than a Mexican phone-booth, but he ain't. I felt him; he feels O.K.'

'What did he eat?'

'It couldn't be that, Lieutenant. We both ate the same thing. As a matter of fact he wasn't too hungry and I finished up what he left over. And I'm all right.'

Clancy was tempted to ask if it had been *pâté de foie gras* but didn't. The thought, however, inspired another. 'Did he have anything to drink?'

'He sent down for a bottle, but all he had was one shot...' There was an embarrassed pause, and then Kaproski continued bravely, '... it couldn't have been that, either, Lieutenant.'

Clancy disregarded the implied confession. He clutched the telephone, thinking. Kaproski cleared his throat, breaking into the silence.

'Lieutenant, he wanted to go out and see a doctor ...'

'At almost three o'clock in the morning?' Clancy stared at the telephone in disbelief.

'That's right, but I shut him up and called you instead.'

'Well, I should hope so!' Clancy snorted. 'He must be crazy. Can he hear you?'

'Yeah. He's sitting up in bed looking at me like he'd like to run a shiv through me.'

'Well, keep him quiet.' Clancy thought a moment. Nursemaid to a hood; some fun! He sighed.

'Well, I'll have to get hold of a doctor we can trust and get over there, I suppose.'

'Thanks, Lieutenant.'

'And don't let him get any more stupid ideas about leaving.'

‘Right.’

‘Or calling anybody,’ Clancy added. ‘If he does, sit on him, sick or not. I’ll try and get a doctor and get over there inside of half an hour. Keep him quiet in the meantime.’

‘Right.’

The phone clicked. Clancy frowned, trying to remember Doc Freeman’s telephone number. His brain was foggy; he forced himself to concentrate and then nodded to himself, his face clearing. He reached over, dialing. The ringing at the other end finally stopped; a receiver was lifted but no voice came on the line. Clancy waited a moment and then cleared his throat and spoke.

‘Hello? Doc, are you there?’

There was a prodigious yawn from the telephone. ‘I’m here. Who did you think answered the telephone? So who are you and what do you want? And why? At this hour?’

‘Doc, this is Lieutenant Clancy. You know, from the 52nd ...’

‘Yeah, I know. I wish I didn’t.’ There was a heartfelt sigh, followed by another gasping, shuddering yawn. ‘Well, what’s the matter? You called me to talk, didn’t you? So talk.’

‘Doc, wake up, will you? Put on your pants. I’ll pick you up at your place in fifteen minutes.’

‘Clancy, do you know what time it is? You’re a nuisance. A pest. Pick me up? First tell me why. There was another deep yawn ending in a wild fit of coughing. ‘I got to stop smoking. Cigarettes are killing me. Well, who’s dead and how was he killed?’

‘He’s alive, Doc ...’

‘Alive?’ There was a moment’s shocked pause. ‘Clancy, let me go to sleep, will you? I’m a pathologist.’ There was a pause. ‘Call me when he’s dead.’

‘Doc! Wake up! I need a doctor. There’s a – oh, hell! I’ll tell you about it when I see you!’

He slammed the phone down, jumped from bed, and hurriedly began dressing. As always, his clothes were tossed in a heap on a chair in the corner; the thought occurred to him as he slipped into them that his method made dressing rapid, even though it did the clothes themselves no good. He shrugged; neatness was for businessmen. Moments later he had locked his apartment and was dropping down the elevator to the street. He rubbed his neck to ease the tension there, conscious of the soft bed he had left behind, and conscious also of the weariness that seemed soaked into him. Someday, he promised himself, I’m going to ask for a transfer to Records and work from eight to five with an even hour for lunch ...

His car was parked in a lot a block down the street; he walked to it swiftly, got in, and shot down the empty streets of past-midnight uptown New York. Ten minutes later he was drawing up before Doc Freeman’s apartment building. To his complete surprise, the short, stocky doctor was waiting. He climbed heavily into the car beside Clancy, placed his medical bag carefully between his feet, and reached into a pocket for a cigarette as the Lieutenant slammed the car into gear and raced away from the curb. He lit his cigarette, flicked the match out of the window and turned, his small sharp eyes surveying the other.

‘All right, Clancy. What’s the story?’

Clancy swerved around a corner, picking up speed. A water-truck ahead was sprinkling the street. Clancy cut around it, his tires sucking thirstily at the wet pavement. He glanced up from the racing asphalt a second, turning to his companion.

‘Doc, there’s a sick man I want you to take a look at.’

‘Who?’

Clancy hesitated a moment. ‘Can you keep it quiet?’

‘Me? God, no.’ Doc Freeman sucked at his cigarette, and tossed it out the window. ‘The next stiff

do an autopsy on will have the whole story. Who is it?’

‘Rossi. Johnny Rossi.’

Doc Freeman whistled. ‘Are we talking about the same Johnny Rossi? The west-coast hood? He in New York?’

‘That’s right.’

‘And we’re keeping *momsers* like that alive, now?’

Clancy turned into Broadway with squealing tires. At that hour of the early morning an occasional truck rumbling down the divided street was the only movement. Light puddled on the empty asphalt from the corner lampposts, throwing banded reflections in wavering lines across the hood of the car. The muffled clatter of the subway came to them softly from a corner grillwork, dying away immediately to leave them in silence. Clancy shifted gears and stepped on the gas.

‘It’s a long story, Doc. He claims he’s here to spill to the New York State Crime Commission next Tuesday, and our job is to keep him alive until then. Don’t ask me why he’s going to spill, or who he’s going to spill, because I don’t know. Anyway, he’s hiding out at the Farnsworth Hotel up here under an assumed name. Kaproski was with him when he took sick, and he called me and I didn’t know who else to call except you. We don’t want some outside doctor looking at him; nobody is even supposed to know he’s in town. So —’

He turned from Broadway into 93rd Street, slowing down as he approached West End. The traffic light was in his favor; he gunned the motor, so intent on making the light that it was not until he had passed the corner that he noticed the commotion. With a muffled curse he jammed on his brakes, swerving violently into the curb, and jumped from the car. Lights blazed from the lobby of the small hotel; despite the hour and the neighborhood a group of people stood about the sidewalk talking excitedly. An ambulance was angled in sharply before the hotel, its motor still running, its headlights illuminating the scene; two attendants in white were hastily sliding a stretcher into the rear. A white-faced Kaproski stood at their sides, clenching and unclenching his fists.

Even as Clancy came trotting up, one of the attendants jumped inside with the stretcher and reached out, grasping the door and pulling it shut behind him; his partner sprinted forward, climbing into the driver’s seat. Clancy passed Kaproski without speaking, running to the front of the ambulance. He thrust his face toward the driver.

‘What...?’

The driver was already shifting gears anxiously. ‘Look, mister; no time for talk now if we want to save this guy’s life ...’

His voice trailed off; the ambulance was already in motion. Clancy was forced to jump aside. He watched it careen away and then turned to find Kaproski at his side.

‘All right, Kaproski.’ Lieutenant Clancy’s eyes were black with suppressed fury; his voice was edged. ‘I thought I told you to wait until I found a doctor and got over here. Since when don’t you pay any attention to what I tell you?’

Kaproski’s voice was high. ‘You don’t understand, Lieutenant ...’

‘You’re damned right I don’t understand! All I understand is that you didn’t obey your orders. And why aren’t you in that ambulance with him? You weren’t supposed to let him get out of your sight! You were supposed to be guarding him!’

Kaproski swallowed nervously. ‘Jeez, Lieutenant, let me talk, will you? I had to wait for you. I had to tell you what happened.’

‘All right,’ Clancy said harshly, his eyes boring mercilessly into Kaproski’s. ‘Tell me. But make it quick.’

Kaproski looked unhappy. ‘Well, about five-six minutes after I got through talking to you, the Rossi character really starts moaning and grabbing his belly, so I figured I’d better get hold of a bellhop with some ice cubes. You know, to put on his gut just in case. So I calls downstairs. Well, when somebody comes knocking on the door a couple of minutes later, naturally I thought it was the bellhop ...’ He stared down at his shoes, his voice trailing off.

‘And?’

Kaproski scuffed his large shoe against the curb. His face was red. ‘Well, I didn’t check. I guess I wasn’t thinking. I just unlatched the chain ...’

Clancy exploded. ‘Damn it, talk! Do I have to drag it out of you? What happened?’

Kaproski took a deep breath. ‘And some hood with a kind of scarf over his face shoved a shotgun through the door and blasted. He slammed the door and by the time I got it open and got out the hallway was empty. I figured it was better to go back and see how Rossi was doing instead of taking off after this character with the gun, so I did, and – well, Rossi caught himself a big dose of the blast. I knew you were already on your way; no sense in calling you ...’

‘So?’

‘So I called the Uptown Private Hospital – they’re only over here at West End and 98th. They’re the closest. And the smallest. I figured you wouldn’t want him in a big hospital where he could maybe be spotted by somebody.’ His voice stiffened a bit in self-defense. ‘Jeez, Lieutenant, you didn’t see him. I couldn’t wait. He was a mess. He was bleeding like a stuck pig.’

‘So you left him without a guard just to wait for me. And right after somebody just got through taking a crack at him!’ Clancy’s face was black with anger. He swung around, brusquely pushing his way through the glass doors of the hotel lobby with Kaproski at his heels.

‘Well, Jeez, Lieutenant; nobody was supposed to know he was here ...’

‘Only somebody did know!’

He stamped up to the small desk in the lobby; the night clerk, a young boy with pimpled face and uniform much too big for him, hurried over from the windows where he had been watching the excitement in the street. Clancy picked up the desk phone with a jerk, waving the youth toward the pay board in the corner.

‘Let’s have a line.’

The clerk sat down hurriedly, fumbling with cords. Clancy dialed and then waited, his jaw clenched.

‘Hello? Fifty-second Precinct ...’

‘Sergeant? This is Lieutenant Clancy. Are any of the boys around? What? None of them? Well, I’ll pick a patrolman, then; one who’s wide-awake. Who? Barnett? Well, all right. Get him over to the Uptown Private Hospital on the double. No; I’ll meet him in the lobby. I’ll tell him when I see him. We’ll fill in the blotter in the morning. That’s right. And tell him not to drag his feet. I’ll be waiting.’

He hung up, turned from the desk, and then turned back. His eyes were cold on the young desk clerk listening from his corner with open mouth. ‘You. This is police business. Anything you heard here tonight, keep to yourself. Don’t talk to anybody. Do you understand?’

The desk clerk nodded wordlessly, his eyes big.

‘Good.’ Clancy turned and walked out of the hotel, Kaproski tagging along. Doc Freeman was still waiting at the curb, his bag in hand. His eyebrows raised as Clancy came down the two steps to the street level and started toward his car.

‘Where are you heading for, Clancy?’

‘The hospital, of course.’

‘Do you want me to come along?’

Clancy paused, considering. ‘I don’t think so, Doc. They’ll take care of him over there.’ His eyes came up. ‘You go back to sleep. I’m sorry I woke you up for nothing.’

Kaproski edged forward, clearing his throat nervously. ‘How about me, Lieutenant?’

Clancy stared at the big detective, biting back the first bitter retort that rose to his lips. What was done, was done; he forced his mind to the problem that existed. ‘How good a look did you get at the character with the gun?’

‘Almost nothing.’ Kaproski shook his head. ‘A blur – an impression, like. I’d say a dark suit with a white scarf thing around his face. I don’t even know if he was tall or short; he could have been be over. It all happened too fast.’

‘Yeah. Well, you seal that room and then do a general check on the place. I don’t think you’ll find anything, but maybe the punk ducked the gun someplace in the hotel.’ His voice was bitter. ‘The chances are he’s probably tucked in bed by now, or down at the corner having a beer.’ His eyes came up, hard. ‘I’ll see you at the precinct tomorrow morning. This morning. Early. At seven.’

‘I’ll be there.’ Kaproski hesitated. ‘Jeez, Lieutenant, I’m sorry about this.’

‘You should be.’ He climbed into his car, slid the key into the ignition. ‘Come on, Doc. I’ll drop you at a cab-stand.’

They pulled away from the curb. Doc Freeman glanced over at the frozen profile of Clancy hunched over the wheel. ‘You were pretty rough on Kaproski, Clancy.’

Clancy’s lip curled savagely. ‘Not as rough as Chalmers is going to be on me when he finds out about this.’

‘After all,’ Doc said reasonably, ‘Kap only did what most anyone else would have done. It was just one of those tough –’ He paused. ‘Did you say Chalmers?’

‘That’s what I said.’

‘Did he give you this watchdog job?’

‘Oh, I got it officially enough,’ Clancy said. ‘Sam Wise called me – he’s home sick in bed – but Chalmers is the one who arranged it.’

‘Oh.’ Like everyone else on the police force, Doc Freeman was familiar with the history of Clancy’s transfer to the 52nd. ‘That’s too bad. Chalmers isn’t the most reasonable person in the world. He’ll do everything in his power to make you look bad over this.’

Clancy stared at the road before him. ‘I look bad enough without his help.’ He glanced up, a faint smile crossing his lips. ‘Don’t let it worry you, Doc. The worst they can do is bust me, and right now Desk Sergeant’s job looks pretty good. At least I’d get to sleep nights.’

Doc Freeman reached into a pocket and came up with a cigarette; he leaned over to press the cigarette-lighter on the instrument panel. Clancy dug out a pad of matches and handed them over.

‘That doesn’t work.’ He shook his head, his smile disappearing, his jaw tightening. ‘Christ! Some days nothing works!’

Doc Freeman lit his cigarette and looked at the hard face of the man driving the car.

‘Take it easy, Clancy. Relax. It was just one of those tough breaks. And Chalmers won’t be able to do anything – Kaproski will tell him what happened.’

Clancy’s jaw tightened. ‘I’m still the Lieutenant in this precinct,’ he said evenly, ‘and not Kaproski. I take my own responsibilities.’

‘Well, don’t worry about it until you have to.’ Doc Freeman took a deep drag on his cigarette and leaned back. ‘The way Kaproski talked, this Rossi isn’t dead yet. And from what I hear, the Rossi brothers are pretty tough monkeys.’

Clancy's knuckles whitened on the steering wheel.

~~'Yeah,' he said without expression, staring through the windshield. 'They're all tough monkey
Until they lose those precious ten pints ...'~~

Saturday – 3:45 a.m.

Uptown Private Hospital was a narrow converted apartment building standing twelve stories high on West End Avenue. Clancy parked as close to the hospital entrance as he could and walked back. The ambulance was not in sight, probably either parked in the rear area or out on another call. He shrugged and walked through the swinging glass doors into the small lobby.

The conversion from apartment-house standards included soft-tinted walls holding colorful modern prints, a desk, and several couches along one wall upholstered in brightly-printed cottons. A stack of recent magazines were geometrically piled on a low table set before the couches. The desk, covered with papers and charts, stood unattended behind a low polished wooden railing, flanked by a battery of shining file cabinets. Clancy glanced about the empty lobby, wondering how to attract some attention when the doors of a small self-operated elevator set in the rear wall slid silently open and a nurse stepped out. The doors closed quietly behind her.

'Miss ...'

She paused, a pretty young woman with steady gray eyes that studied her visitor calmly. 'Yes?'

Clancy walked forward, his crumpled hat in his hand. 'You have a gunshot wound case here from the Farnsworth Hotel. I wonder if you could tell me how his condition is?'

She walked over, seated herself neatly at the desk, and shuffled through some of the forms. 'Do you mean Mr Randall?'

'That's right.'

Her eyes came up. 'Are you a relative?'

Clancy hesitated. Then his hand delved into a pocket, bringing out his billfold. He flipped it open, pushing it in her direction. 'I'm Lieutenant Clancy, from the 52nd Precinct.'

'Oh.' She nodded in understanding. 'He's in surgery right now, Lieutenant. We won't know until Dr Willard is finished.'

'I see. Do you know how long –'

The sound of the doors behind him being pushed open caused Clancy to turn; a large patrolman was tramping across the patterned tile floor. Clancy nodded in satisfaction.

'Hello, Frank. I've got a job for you here.'

'Hello, Lieutenant. I know; the Sergeant told me. What do you want me to do?'

'There's a man upstairs in surgery right now. I want you to go up there and wait outside the operating room until they bring him out; then I want you to plonk yourself in front of his room and see to it that he stays in good health.'

The tall patrolman nodded. He placed a hand against his service revolver almost unconsciously. 'Get you, Lieutenant. You want me to plug him if he tries to escape?'

Clancy shook his head wearily, 'No. He's been plugged once too often already. And he isn't going to try to escape. You're there to see that nobody else plugs him.'

'Right, Lieutenant.' The hand dropped away from the service revolver; the patrolman turned to the nurse with a question in his eyes.

'Surgery's on the seventh floor,' she said quietly.

'Right.' He walked over to the elevator with a hint of a swagger, got in and pressed a button. The

doors closed soundlessly behind him. Clancy turned back to the girl.

‘Now, Miss ...’

The swinging glass doors to the lobby were shoved open once again; this time with a loud bang. Footsteps clattered across the tile floor; a hand grasped Clancy roughly by the arm. Assistant District Attorney Chalmers’ eyes were wild; he was seething.

‘Lieutenant, if anything happens to my witness ...’

Clancy tore his arm loose. And then he frowned; his eyes narrowed. ‘What are you doing here, Chalmers?’

‘What do you mean, what am I doing here? A witness of mine shot, and you ask –’

‘I mean, how did you hear about this? So soon?’

‘How did I – that’s something! That’s really something! Did you hope to keep it a secret, Lieutenant?’

Clancy clenched his jaw; the pretty nurse was watching this interchange with curiosity. ‘Chalmers, either you answer my question or I’m going to create a scandal by hitting an Assistant District Attorney! How did you hear about this shooting?’

The Assistant District Attorney’s mouth fell open in disbelief. ‘You’ll do what? Hit me?’

Clancy stepped forward; his taut fingers dug fiercely into the other’s arm. ‘Chalmers, I’m asking you for the last time – how did you hear about this shooting?’

Chalmers tugged backward, glancing down at his sleeve almost as if he were more concerned about possible damage to his suit than to his dignity. ‘The hotel manager telephoned me, of course. Now you see here, Lieutenant...’

‘The hotel manager, eh? That’s fine. Did you tell him who Randall really was? Well, did you?’

Chalmers paused in his tug-of-war to stare at Clancy incredulously. ‘Of course I didn’t!’

Clancy continued to grip the other’s arm for a moment, and then flung it down. ‘Somebody knew who he was and where he was. Well then, outside of your flashy secretary, who else could have known?’

Chalmers’ eyes hardened. ‘I’ll back my secretary up anytime...’ His face reddened as his words came back to him. ‘Now see here, Lieutenant. You won’t avoid your responsibility with an exhibition like this! Your job was to keep him safe. Nobody could have known who and where he was!’

Clancy nodded, completely unimpressed. ‘That’s fine. Pretty soon you’ll convince me he wasn’t even shot. Well, answer me. Who else could have known about this?’

Chalmers opened his mouth to retort and then changed his mind. He swung about to the young nurse, very much on his dignity. ‘Nurse, my name is Chalmers. I’m one of the Assistant District Attorneys of this county. I want to see the doctor handling this case.’

‘I’m afraid he’s still in surgery.’

‘How long until he’s through?’

The girl studied him calmly. ‘I’m sure I couldn’t say.’

Chalmers looked down at his wrist-watch. ‘Well, tell him I want to see him just as soon as he’s finished.’

The nurse continued to study him with cool gray eyes. Then she nodded, reached for the telephone and spoke into it quietly. In the silence of the small lobby the unintelligible rasping from the other end could be clearly heard. She set the telephone back in place.

‘The nurse in the surgery office says she was just in there and thinks they may be finished soon. She’ll advise the doctor. It shouldn’t be too long before he comes down.’

Chalmers nodded. ‘Good. Who is he, by the way?’

For the first time the young nurse seemed uncomfortable. ‘His name is Dr Willard. He’s –’ She brought herself back under control. ‘He’s an intern here.’

‘An intern? An *intern*?’ The angry eyes of the Assistant District Attorney swung to the slender man at his side. ‘Did you hear that, Clancy? Did you know that?’ He turned back to the nurse. ‘Why is an intern handling this? Why isn’t a doctor – a regular surgeon – handling it? Do you know who the patient is?’

The nurse returned his angry look, her pretty gray eyes growing stormy. ‘This isn’t a regular hospital, Mr Chalmers. This is a private hospital; more a nursing home, actually, than anything else. We don’t have the staff that a large hospital like Bellevue has; nor the facilities. But Dr Willard is an excellent doctor. He’ll do the best he can.’

‘The best he can? An intern? An *intern*?’ Chalmers swung to Clancy. ‘Lieutenant, this is one more thing you’re going to have to answer for. If anything should happen to my witness ...’ He stamped over to one of the upholstered couches along the wall and practically flung himself into it. ‘I’m going to clear this up. I’m waiting right here until I can talk to that – that – that intern!’

Clancy stared at Chalmers coldly. Your witness, he thought; you don’t know why or what, but he’s your witness. Your stepping stone, you mean. He turned from the seated man, leaning on the railing beside the desk; the nurse seated there bent her head over papers, hiding tears. The wall-clock ticked on. Twice Chalmers reached for magazines and then retreated, as if determined not to be swayed from his purpose by diversionary attacks from entertaining sources. Silence fell over the room; Clancy almost fell asleep leaning on his own hand.

Finally the door to the self-service elevator slid back and a slim young doctor stepped wearily into the lobby. His surgical mask was still dangling about his neck. He reached up, stripping his cloth skullcap from his head; unruly blond hair tumbled free.

‘Cathy? You say somebody wanted to see me?’ His tone indicated clearly that he would much prefer to clean up and rest rather than engage in conversation at that hour.

Chalmers was on his feet in an instant. He hurried over, interposing himself between the young doctor and the paper-strewn desk. ‘Are you Dr Willard?’

‘That’s right.’

‘I’m Assistant District Attorney Chalmers, and this is Lieutenant Clancy of the 52nd Precinct. How’s that gunshot wound doing? The one that you’ve been working on?’

The doctor turned to the nurse with a veiled question in his eyes; she nodded slightly and then looked down at her desk, hiding her face. The young intern’s eyes came back to the two men facing him; his eyebrows raised slightly.

‘As well as could be expected. He caught a lot of shot in his chest and neck; some of it in his face.’

‘Is he going to live?’

The young doctor hesitated. ‘I hope so.’

‘You hope so?’ Chalmers snorted. ‘Well, let me tell you this, mister; he’d better live! You’d better see to it that he does! Do you know who that man is you’ve been operating on? He’s Johnny Rossi –’

Clancy caught his breath and then looked ceilingwards in disgust. Good God! This man ought to be used during newspaper strikes – he’d get the word around. Secrecy! The young doctor blanched.

‘Johnny Rossi? You mean the gangster?’

‘That’s right! And he happens to be a very important witness for me. He happens to be – oh hell! It’s got nothing to do with you. I want a decent doctor to look at him. And I want him transferred to a decent hospital ...’

The young intern’s face tightened at these insults. He swallowed, holding his temper. ‘He can’t be

moved yet. If you want another doctor to look at him, that's your privilege. But he can't be moved this moment; he's still under anesthesia.'

'Then I'll have someone here in the morning!' Chalmers turned around to face Clancy. 'And I wait a man at his door every minute until we can get him out of here.'

Clancy faced him quietly. 'There's a man with him now; one of my men. He'll stay right there.'

Chalmers jammed his hat viciously onto his head. 'Well, I suppose that's something, anyway. Even though it's a bit like locking the barn door after the horse has been stolen.'

Clancy started to retort and then kept quiet. Chalmers moved to the lobby doors, pausing with his hand on the glass. 'I'll see to it that a reliable doctor is here in the morning. I don't have to tell you people how important this is.' The pale eyes sought out the young intern. 'By the way, what's your full name?'

The young doctor whitened. 'William Willard.'

Chalmers nodded. 'I'll remember it. I'm holding you responsible for that man's life. I have a certain influence in this town, Doctor. Poor medical practice in this county can be fatal to more than the patient. Don't forget that!'

He pushed through the door, disappearing into the night. The intern turned to Clancy, his face flushed, his eyes blinking.

'Why does he talk to me like that? As if I shot the man, or something?'

Clancy straightened up, his face tired. 'Don't pay any attention to him, son. His bark is worse than his bite.' And that's a lot of bunk, and you know it, he added to himself.

'But he talks as if it were my fault! As if I were responsible! I did the best I could ...' His tone was bitter. 'Why did you send him to this hospital, anyway? Why didn't you send him to Bellevue, where he belonged?'

'Why?' Clancy smiled sourly. 'I could give you a thousand "whys." Why did the bastard come to New York in the first place?' He dug into a pocket, coming up with a cigarette. He started to light it and then paused; the match burned itself out as he stood there, frowning.

'Yeah,' he said softly. 'That's a very good "why." Why *did* the bastard come to New York in the first place?'

Chapter Three

Saturday – 7:05 a.m.

Clancy came down the steps of the 52nd Precinct followed by Kaproski. They got into the car, made a U-turn, and headed in the direction of the Uptown Private Hospital. Early-morning traffic slowed them down. For a city with the best public transportation in the world, Clancy thought morosely, it seemed like more people used automobiles every day. Or trucks. Or bicycles; or motorcycles. He couldn't imagine where they parked them – even with his police sticker he had trouble.

Kaproski glanced at the drawn face at his side. 'You don't look like you got much sleep, Lieutenant.'

'I didn't,' Clancy said shortly. 'It was almost four-thirty before I got out of the hospital. I came back here and tried to take a nap in my chair, but I can't sleep in a damn chair.'

'Yeah. Me neither.' Kaproski changed the subject, approaching the new one a bit warily. 'How's Rossi, Lieutenant?'

Clancy yawned. 'All right, I guess. At least nobody called me since I left the hospital.'

'You think he'll pull through?'

'He'd better. Anyway, that's what we're going to find out right now.' Clancy waited until a traffic light turned green and then patiently followed a large waddling truck through the crowded intersection. 'I just want to stop in and check at the hospital a minute. Then we're going over to the Farnsworth Hotel and put the manager through the wringer.'

He glanced over at the big detective beside him. 'Did you find anything last night?'

Kaproski shook his head. 'Not a thing. I sealed the room; then I went through all the linen closets and broom closets and out in the service areas and down in the basement; I even checked out all the junk they got in that stinky elevator out in back. Nothing.'

'How about the other guests?'

'Nobody new checked in within a week. Hell, half the hotel is empty; the other half, they been living there since the year one.'

'Did you see the manager?'

'Sure.' Kaproski seemed a bit uncomfortable. 'Lieutenant I don't think he had anything to do with it.'

'No?' Clancy glanced at him curiously. 'If Chalmers is telling the truth, the hotel manager is the only one who could have seen and recognized him. And I don't think Chalmers is lying. His trouble isn't stupidity – you don't get to his job in the D.A.'s office by being stupid – his trouble is ambition. And the manager is also the only one who could have known the room number. What makes you think he's clean?'

Kaproski stared out of the window. 'You got to see him in person to know what I mean.'

'Well,' Clancy said, 'we'll see him in a few minutes.'

He pulled up before the hospital, forced to double-park, and turned off the ignition. He stared at the solid row of cars parked on both sides of the street as far as eye could see.

'A NO PARKING sign sure seems to impress the people in these swank neighborhoods,' he said with disgust. 'You stay with the car; if somebody pulls out, you park it. I'll be back in a minute. I just want to check on Rossi and see how he's doing.'

'Sure, Lieutenant.' Kaproski slid over behind the wheel.

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