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A BILL CRANE
MYSTERY

THE DEAD DON'T CARE

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The Dead Don't Care

A Bill Crane Mystery

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Chapter I

SUNSET SPLASHED gold paint on the windows of the white marble house, brought out apricots and pinks and salmons in the flowering azaleas. The Buick convertible turned left around the freshly scrubbed trunk of a royal palm, gravel crunching under its tires; then right around a fountain, and came to a halt below a marquee of iron and amber glass.

Thomas O'Malley, awe on his long, dark face, ran gray eyes over the massive front of the house, allowed his breath to pass his lips in a half whistle of admiration.

"Not bad," he said.

His companion shut off the convertible's engine. His name was William Crane and he was looking at the brass knocker on the great ebony door with perplexity. "Are you supposed to pound that thing?" he demanded. A partially recovered black eye, his left, gave him a humorously reckless appearance.

"Why not?" O'Malley asked. "We got invitations."

"All right." Crane slid off the leather seat onto the gravel. He mounted the three crescent-shaped steps, was about to raise the knocker when a noise from the drive made him turn his head.

Two pink flamingos slowly approached the roadster from the fountain. They walked with rheumatoid dignity; moving their stiltlike legs deliberately, carrying their heads at an inquiring angle. Their eyes were like highly polished waistcoat buttons.

"For the love of Mike!" said Crane.

"I'm glad you see 'em too," O'Malley said from the convertible. "For a minute I thought I had the horrors again. What in hell are they?"

The flamingos halted ten feet from him. They looked, with their patrician beaks, their polite inquiring heads, their bright unblinking eyes, like two elderly savants. They looked as though they were wondering what in hell O'Malley was.

"They're kind of birds," said Crane vaguely, turning back to the knocker.

O'Malley, apprehensive of the flamingos, slid under the Buick's wheel and followed Crane. As he neared the ebony door it opened, disclosing a dour man with black hair and unfriendly lips. Years of repression had made a mask of his face. He was the butler.

"Mr O'Malley?" he asked. "And Mr Crane?"

He wore patent leather shoes, dark trousers, a dubonnet-red cummerbund and a white drill coat tailored like a mess jacket.

"Mr Crane," Crane said, "... and Mr O'Malley."

"Beg your pardon, sir." The man left the ebony door open, came out on the first crescent-shaped step. "Mr Essex is expecting you. Shall I bring in your luggage?"

Crane gave him the convertible's keys. "In the rumble."

He started to follow the butler down the steps, but O'Malley's elbow nudged his ribs. "Take a gander at the window above the door."

Casually Crane's eyes roved over the grounds, the house. He saw the arched back of the fountain, the green expanse of lawn, the dusk-subdued azaleas, the palms, the white wall of the house, the window above the door....

His eyes went on to the roadster, to the butler tugging at the rumble seat, but his mind retained a photographic impression of the window. A man was seated in the recess, his face shadowed by a hat.

pulled over his eyes. He was peering down at them. He looked sinister.

~~The butler had the rumble seat open. He put one foot on the chromium bumper and reached down for the large pigskin suitcase. His drill jacket slid up his back, disclosing a small blue pistol, possibly a 25-caliber Colt, tucked away under his cummerbund.~~

For a divided second Crane's and O'Malley's eyes met.

One hand on the knob of the door to Crane's bedroom, the butler said, "I shall try to locate Mr. Essex, sir."

"Thank you," said Crane.

The butler's eyes were small and black and unblinking. He stared into the room until the door, apparently closing of its own volition, swung shut with a thud.

O'Malley was seated on the arm of an easy chair. "Nice-looking guy," he observed.

"Like a wildcat." Crane flung open the french window on the side of the room opposite the door and stepped out onto a Spanish balcony. "Hello! The ocean!"

Below him was a very large patio, luxuriant with small palms, clumps of tropical flowers, gaily colored umbrellas and metal tables and chairs painted a brilliant orange. At the open end of the patio was a white swimming pool and in back of that was a magnificent beach of ash-blond sand. Rolling from the Atlantic, moving ponderously, cast themselves on the beach, making silver lines in the dusk.

Moving to the french window, O'Malley dispassionately regarded the scene. "What's the setup here?" he asked. Speaking made the cigarette dangling from his lips glow angrily.

Crane shrugged his shoulders. He was enchanted by the perfection of the view, by the serenity of the verdant patio, by the languid beat of the surf, by the soft warm wind on his face; a wind heavy with the perfume of flowers. He could almost taste the wind.

"Well, we should worry," said O'Malley, "as long as the food is good."

Crane lighted a cigarette and contentedly filled his lungs with smoke. The food would be good, and the liquor. And the beds. He was very tired after the long drive from Charleston and he thought with pleasure of the double bed in his room. He always slept well with the noise of the sea in his ears. It was pleasant, too, to be sent from rain-swept New York into the languorous perfection of Miami in March, or rather the perfection of Key Largo, fifty miles south of Miami.

Moreover, he approved of what he had seen of the Essex house, of the Essex estate. He always preferred to pursue his occupation as a detective in luxurious surroundings among rich, congenial people. One of the troubles with crime was its prevalence among criminals.

O'Malley said, "I could do with a bottle of beer."

Crane leaned one elbow on the balcony rail. "Ring up Old Lynx Eyes and tell him to fetch you one," he suggested. He peered out at the ocean, navy blue now that the sun had set.

"Good idea," said O'Malley.

Left alone, Crane wondered what had happened to the young Essexes. It couldn't have been very serious or he'd have read about it in the newspapers. They were always in the newspapers. The boy, Penn, twenty-five years old, had a penchant for fast automobiles, chorus girls and breach-of-promissory suits, in the order named. The girl, Camelia, twenty-three years old, had most recently been forcibly taken from a Grace liner as she was about to elope to Peru with a gentleman styling himself Count Paul di Gregario, of the Holy Roman Empire. The removal had been accomplished by attorneys for the Union Trust Company, trustee of the Essex fortune and guardian of the Essex children, which had discovered there was no longer a Holy Roman Empire and therefore Di Gregario was no count. He was also, it developed, already married.

Crane hoped that O'Malley would be thoughtful enough to order two bottles of beer. He decided to go in and make certain of the second bottle. He flipped his cigarette into the air, paused to watch the arc of the descending coal. His eyes caught sight of the figure of a man on another balcony over the left wing of the house, at right angles to his balcony. He felt the hairs rise on the back of his neck and resisted an impulse to dive through the french window to his room. The man might have been a statue, so motionless did he hold himself. There was the same sinister intentness, the same poise, the same down-pulled hat that had characterized the man in the front window, but Crane did not think this was the same man. This man seemed smaller, but he looked very unpleasant.

Once inside his room, Crane wiped his forehead with a linen handkerchief. "Whew!" he said. He opened the closet door and looked inside, then peered under the bed.

O'Malley watched him from the bathroom door. "Lost something?"

"I thought maybe they had a guy tucked in here too." Crane told him of the man on the balcony and added, "The house is full of 'em."

"Maybe the Seminoles have risen," suggested O'Malley.

Crane was about to say, "Nuts," when there was a knock on the door. Instead he said, "Maybe it's the beer"; then, louder, "Come in."

A hollow-chested young man in a white linen suit came into the room. He had a thin face, blond hair and a pointed chin. He didn't look well. He looked very much like his newspaper pictures.

He smiled at them, said, "I'm Penn Essex." Carefully he closed and bolted the door. "I'm certainly glad to see you," he said.

Crane introduced O'Malley and himself, then asked, "What's the trouble? Colonel Black didn't have time to tell us." He sat down on a bedspread the color of guava jelly, rested an arm on the carved headpiece.

Essex sat in the larger of the two easy chairs. His face was mostly eyes. He began, "It started ... then abruptly turned toward Crane, anger in his voice. "I suppose I'm a fool to be in a funk over this; it's so damn silly. But I am. And you'll laugh..."

"No, we won't," said Crane. "Start at the beginning."

"Well, anyway, you know about these things ... whether they're real or not." He paused and they could hear the deep noise of the surf. "It's notes."

"Notes?"

"Here." Essex uncoiled from his chair, thrust three sheets of paper in Crane's hand. "Read them." He turned to O'Malley, leaning against the hall door, and said, "Probably somebody's idea of a practical joke." His voice didn't sound convincing.

Crane examined the first note. It was crudely printed in red ink on a diagonally torn sheet of white paper. It read:

MISTER ESSEX—

You come clean or else ... Follow instructions when they come ... Dont try to escape because I am watching every move you make ...

THE EYE

"Well, well, well," said Crane in a pleased tone of voice. He laid the note face down on the bed and picked up the second between his thumb and forefinger.

It read:

MISTER ESSEX—

~~Hire more guards if you like ... They will do you no good ... Your instructions are to give me fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) in unmarked bills ... Keep them handy ...~~

THE EYE

This sheet of paper had also been torn diagonally from a larger piece. Crane picked up the first piece and placed the two together. They matched. The ink on both, too, was red. The paper seemed to be of excellent texture and Crane held first one note, then the other to the light, but there was no watermark.

Essex was pacing back and forth in front of O'Malley. His feet were noisy on the absinthe-green tile floor, silent on the red-and-black-and-white Mexican saddle rug. His eyes kept coming back to Crane.

The third sheet was torn like the others and the ink was red. Crane held it to his nose and drew a long, slow breath. There was no odor. He read:

ESSEX—

The time nears when you must pay your debt ... You have a choice ... fifty thousand dollars in small unmarked bills ... or your life! Instructions follow ... Don't try to escape ...

THE EYE

Crane blinked his eyes, laid the sheet on the bed and said, "The fellow's getting familiar; he didn't call you mister in the last note."

"Familiar?" Essex' eyes were wide. "You don't know how familiar he is."

"What do you mean?"

"The way he gets the notes to me." Abruptly Essex halted, one foot ahead of the other, in the middle of a step. "I find one in my wallet, another——"

"Wait." Rays from the indirect lamp in the corner shadowed Crane's eyes, made both of them appear to have been blacked. "Better tell us in chronological order. When did you get the first note?"

Essex returned to his chair, sat with elbows on knees, chin on fists. "The first note came just a month ago, on the twenty-seventh of February. It was the damndest thing.... I had some rooms at the Waldorf in New York and I woke up in the morning with something scratching my chin. It was the note, pinned to the pillow." He smiled at Crane. "I never came out of a hang-over so quickly in my whole life."

Crane, who was also troubled with hang-overs, felt a bond of sympathy between them. He smiled too, and asked, "Any idea how it got there?"

Essex shook his head.

"Anybody staying with you?"

After a pause so slight that Crane could not be sure it was a pause, Essex replied, "Nobody but Buster Brown, my man."

"Your valet?"

"Not exactly a valet. Sort of a combination valet and bodyguard. He used to be a top-flight welterweight."

From the door O'Malley spoke. "Buster Brown?"

"Yes. That was his ring name. His real name's Chester."

"I saw him fight Tony Capezzio in Pittsburgh," said O'Malley. "He hung his Sunday punch on the wop in the fourth round."

“Did you come home alone that night, Mr Essex?” inquired Crane.

“Yes. I went to a party and I guess I got a little tight, but I certainly would have known if anybody came home with me.”

O’Malley said, “He would’ve been a great fighter if he hadn’t had such big feet. He was always falling over them.” He nodded reminiscently. “He carried dynamite in both hands.”

“He still does,” said Essex.

Crane asked, “And you don’t think he could have put the note on your pillow?”

“He could have, all right, but I don’t think he did. Especially in view of the others.”

“Yes, you better tell us about the others.”

“Well, the next note (the one about the fifty thousand dollars) came the day after I got down here. That was ten days ago. I found it in my wallet.”

“So?”

Essex’ grin failed to conceal his anxiety. “I can’t even imagine how it got there. The Eye must be handy at magic. I put five hundred dollars in the wallet and drove up to Miami for a fling at the Blue Castle; that’s Roland Tortoni’s place, y’know.” Crane bobbed his head and Essex continued, “The note wasn’t there when I put the five hundred in the wallet, but when I opened it to buy some chips for the roulette game it fell out. I can tell you it gave me a start.”

“I can see how it might,” said Crane.

“And a funny thing was that two of the five one-hundred-dollar bills had disappeared.”

O’Malley said, “That wouldn’t be funny to me.” He was resting one arm on the doorknob; his silver-streaked head against the upper panel. His gray-blue eyes rested on Crane’s brown eyes. “dip?”

“Might be.” Crane explained to Essex, “Mr O’Malley suggests someone might have picked your pocket, removed the two hundred dollars, inserted the note and then replaced the wallet.”

“That’s barely possible,” agreed Essex, “but it seems to me a very risky way for The Eye to get the note to me.”

Crane asked, “Where was Brown that evening?”

“Somewhere between New York and Miami, driving the Bugatti down. That’s why I’ve eliminated him.”

Crane frowned. “And the third note?”

“It came four days ago, in the morni——”

With a liquid movement O’Malley unlocked the door, turned the knob, flung the door open. A man in a white monkey coat regarded them with a startled expression on his face. He carried a tray on which there were two glasses, four bottles of Heineken’s imported Holland beer. He had black hair, big brown eyes, a small round face.

“I believe you desired beer ...?”

“Bring it in,” said Crane.

The man put the tray on the small table beside the bed, fumbled in his pocket.

“Never mind,” said Crane. “We’ll open them.” He shook his head in response to the question in O’Malley’s eyes.

O’Malley stepped out of the doorway, let the servant depart and closed and bolted the door. “I think the guy was doing some listening,” he said.

Essex’ face was pale. “I hope not; I’d hate to have everybody know about the notes or that you are detectives.” He brushed by Crane’s knees, picked up the french phone by the bed, spun the dial once. “Craig,” he said, “how long ago did you send Carlos up to Mr Crane’s room with the beer?”

The phone spluttered.

“Thanks.” Essex turned to Crane. “Five minutes.”

O’Malley said, “Let’s get the guy and find out what his idea is.”

“We’d better wait,” said Crane. “We don’t want to tip our hand yet.” He took one of the dark green bottles, tossed it to O’Malley. “You’ve got an opener, haven’t you, Tom?”

O’Malley opened the bottle, exchanged it for an unopened one. Essex said he didn’t believe he cared for any beer. O’Malley drank his beer from the bottle, Crane from a glass. It tasted fine. It was smoother, less carbonated than American beer.

After a second drink Crane asked, “And the third note?”

“That one really scared me. I ...”

“I don’t blame you for being scared,” said Crane in a sympathetic tone. “Fifty thousand or your life ...”

“That wasn’t what did it. I’ve received lots of nasty letters.” He moved nervously in his chair. “But never one like this.” He made a feeble attempt to laugh. “It was in my hand when I woke up—in my hand!”

“Gosh!” Crane’s brown eyes were wide. “How do you figure it got there?”

“I suppose somebody came in through my window—the door to the bedroom was locked—and put it there.” He ran fingers through his dull blond hair. “That’s what I don’t like: the idea of somebody prowling around my room.”

Crane said, “It’s curious that two of the notes should have come to you in bed. You’re sure you weren’t”—he coughed delicately to show he meant no offense—“ahem—sleeping with someone?”

Surprisingly Essex smiled. His face became younger; he looked, with his white skin, like an unhealthy boy. “You’ve been reading about me in the newspapers,” he said. “I assure you they exaggerate; I often sleep alone.” He detected an expression of doubt on Crane’s face, added, “There would be no time to lie, anyway, with possibly my life at stake.”

“Or fifty thousand dollars.”

“Much more likely my life. I haven’t an idea where I’d get fifty thousand dollars.”

In the following silence the leisurely beat of the surf, like the delayed tempo of a tango, came to them. Out at sea some birds called hoarsely. The air was oppressive.

Essex said, “I’m not joking. Dad left everything tied up in a trust for me and Camelia. We get an allowance, but mine goes a lot faster than it comes.”

“And you couldn’t get extra money if it meant your life?” asked Crane.

“Oh sure, if the trustees thought my life was *really* in danger. But they wouldn’t be apt to pay fifty thousand dollars to anybody who threatened me.”

“Would you pay it on the strength of these notes if you had it?”

“Hell, no.” Essex’ pointed jaw was set stubbornly. “I’m worried, but I’m not that scared.”

“How much is your allowance?”

“Camelia and I each get two thousand a month.”

“That’s not so much,” said Crane calmly, “when you consider the upkeep of this place and the Long Island estate.”

“Oh no. All that’s paid by the trust company. Even the food and the servants. The allowance is for our personal use.”

O’Malley, still leaning against the door, let his breath run through his teeth. “A fellow could struggle along on that.”

“Not this fellow.” Essex’ expression was petulant. “I keep just one jump ahead of the bill collector”

It's terribly annoying. Yet the trust company won't listen to any hints that my allowance should be increased." His voice was bitter. "You'd think it was their money the way they hoard it."

Crane was looking at the third note. He read, "The time nears when you must pay your debt." He glanced at Essex. "Do you owe somebody?"

Essex' voice didn't sound convincing. "No. No, I don't. Only a few small debts ... clothes and hotel bills and liquor bills. I don't suppose any of them run over a couple of thousand."

"You don't know what the note means by 'your debt'?"

"No. Unless, of course, the fellow thinks that because I have inherited money I owe a debt to society. There are some people who think like that, you know."

"So I've heard." Crane put one of the unopened beer bottles between his knees, jerked off the top with the metal opener. "Have you any enemies?"

"I suppose there're lots of people who don't like me, but I'm sure none of them is gunning for me."

"No people with shotguns?" demanded Crane.

Essex' head jerked upward. "What do you mean? What have you heard?"

Crane deliberately poured the pale beer into his glass, allowing it to foam. "What am I supposed to have heard?"

"Nothing." Essex fastened angry eyes on the beer. "Nothing. The trouble is there's always so much gossip about me. It gets under my skin. I thought maybe you'd heard some of it."

"No," said Crane.

O'Malley said, "Open a bottle for me too."

As Crane tugged on the cap Essex said, "I think somebody's trying to scare me into paying him fifty thousand dollars. Probably some racketeer. If he knew me he'd know I couldn't get my hands on an amount of such sum."

"I don't know that 'somebody' would have much chance to stick notes in your hand while you're asleep," said Crane.

"That's so. Unless he had an accomplice in the house. Do you think ...?"

"I don't know." Crane took a long drink of the beer. "Is that the whole story?"

Essex nodded.

"No more notes?"

"No."

"No attacks made on you?"

Essex' face expressed mild alarm. "No."

"And you're sure you can't think of a reason for the notes?"

They could hear the ocean again.

"Yes."

"Well, what do you want us to do?"

"Oh, I suppose the usual thing." He relaxed in his chair, allowing his chin to sag toward his chest. "It wasn't so much my idea bringing you down here as it was old Hastings'." He caught the inquiry in Crane's eyes. "He's president of Union Trust and an old friend of dad. He was worried about my safety, thought the fellow might be a crank."

"We're not bodyguards," said Crane; "we're detectives."

"I don't expect you to guard me; I've provided for that. You're to see about The Eye ... collar him if you can."

Crane complacently drank his beer. "I wouldn't worry much about anybody who signs himself The Eye."

“He sounds like he’s been reading bad detective stories,” O’Malley said.

~~In three jerky motions, arms raising his body, legs taking the weight over, arms shoving him into~~
balancing position, Essex came out of his chair. “I can take care of myself.” His face was angry. “You get The Eye, whoever he is.”

As he neared the door Crane asked him: “What are we supposed to be? Friends of yours?”

“Yes. Only Camelia and the trust company representative know you are detectives.”

Crane asked, “Is that the fellow who sent us a wire telling us to be here yesterday or we’d be fired?”

“Yes. Major Eastcomb. He’s still furious over your telegram in answer.”

“I only said ‘Nuts,’” Crane said innocently.

“Well, you *are* a day late.” Essex opened the door with his left hand. “I’ll tell everybody I met you both in New York and invited you down here. Anyway, Camelia’s giving a sort of house party. Is that all right.”

Crane let the last of the beer slide down his throat. “I accept the invitation with pleasure.”

O’Malley said, “Me too.”

Chapter II

"THIS LOOKS NICE," Crane said, padding across the beach after O'Malley.

They waded through the green and silver breakers, digging their feet in the sand against each impact, and swam in the darker water beyond. The water was luke-cold; the morning sun was warm. Where it was deep there was no surf and the waves came in like great wrinkles in a bedspread, gently lifting them on rounded bulges, then lowering them into hollows.

"It's swell," O'Malley said.

In either direction, as far as they could see, ran a wide beach the color of camembert cheese. Oases of palms, leaning away from the ocean, made bright green breaks in the shore line, but inland the color was dull; gray-green where mangrove jungles covered swamps, brown where the tundra of the Everglades began.

O'Malley dog-paddled toward Crane. "What do you think about this business?" he asked. "Some of the servants trying to knock off a piece of dough?"

"I don't know." The sun warmed Crane's face. "I don't think our employer's telling all he knows."

"He's scared, though. Damned scared."

"Threatening letters scare most people."

"I wouldn't know." O'Malley sank under the water, then emerged vertically, like a Japanese bobbing toy. "I never got any threatening letters," he said. "They just come and take a swing when they're mad at me. They don't bother to write."

Crane said, "You must have very informal friends."

O'Malley made a noise with sea water and his cupped hand, then said, "That Eye wouldn't scare me."

"Nor me," said Crane, turning toward shore. "He sounds like a guy in a melodrama. He sounds phony."

They half swam, half coasted in on foam-smearred waves until their feet touched the sand bottom. The undertow pulled at their ankles, making a sucking noise and picking up milky clouds of fine sand. On their chests and shoulders the sun had already evaporated some of the moisture.

As they reached the strand of damp, brown, firmly packed sand at the water's edge a flamingo ran around the left-hand corner of the house and came toward them. Behind the bird was a blonde in a tight white Lastex bathing suit, running like a boy. Her legs were slim and brown and her hair, cut in short curls, was bleached the shade of pine shavings.

"Head him off," the girl called, still running. "Send him back this way."

Crane obligingly ran toward the patio, but the flamingo suddenly cut loose with a burst of speed, lifting its feet off the ground with quick thrusts of his wings, passed him by a good three feet and vanished around the other side of the house.

"Oh, too bad," cried the girl, coming to a halt. She turned to face a tall young man in blue work trunks who had just rounded the first corner. "No use, Tony," she called to him. "Abelard went right through tackle for a touchdown."

Crane examined her while she waited for Tony to come up. She was a small girl, not much over five feet tall, but she was not as young as he had first thought. At least she was well developed. Her hips were curved and her breasts were rounded under the white suit. Under her arms, in the V between her

breasts, on the circles of her thighs where the suit had been pulled up by running, her skin was perfectly white, contrasting with the golden tan of her legs and arms.

O'Malley, coming to a halt beside Crane, said in his ear, "I'm beginning to be glad I came."

The girl and her companion came toward them. "Thanks for the gallant effort," she said to Crane, her teeth white behind red lips. Her eyes matched the sky.

"I'm just as glad I was too late," said Crane. "I've never tackled a flamingo."

She said, "Nobody ever has. We've been trying for years."

Her companion had short-cut black hair. He was very tall and thin, and his long face was quite handsome. Crane did not think he liked him, but he realized that this was possibly due to the fact he did not care for the name Tony. The name always suggested a smooth guy to him; a sort of cocktail-hour gigolo.

The girl said, "I'm Camelia Essex. You're Penn's friends, aren't you?"

"I'm William Crane," said Crane, "and this is Thomas O'Malley."

"And this is Tony Lamphier."

The young man's expression was glassy. "H'lo," he said. He looked over their heads, suddenly thrust out a hand at O'Malley and shook hands with him. "Enjoyed your party very much, sir," he declared. Abruptly he started for the ocean.

Miss Essex laughed, uttering a sort of flutelike giggle which made Crane regard her closely. "He's a little drunkie," she said.

"So early in the morning?" asked Crane in astonishment.

"Oh no. We're just rounding out the evening."

There were little wrinkles around Miss Essex' mouth and temples and her blue eyes were unnaturally bright. Crane realized she was also a little drunkie. This fact didn't impair her appeal.

"You must have had some evening," he said.

"Oh yes. We went to Tortoni's." Her eyes turned from Tony Lamphier, struggling with the breakers, to Crane. "You're the detectives, aren't you?"

"Yes."

Her face serious, she looked up into O'Malley's eyes. "You can help Penn, can't you? I'm really frightened."

"Sure," said O'Malley. "Don't worry at all."

She put her hand on Crane's arm. Her fingers were hot. "This may be the only chance I'll have to speak to you alone." Her words were hurried. "Penn's lost a lot of money gambling ... twenty-five thousand dollars ... Tortoni holds his I O Us and has been trying to collect. He's dangerous."

"Cam! Oh, Caaam!" Tony Lamphier was shouting from a point fifty yards out at sea. "Come and see the sharks."

"Coming, dear." She tightened her fingers on Crane's arm. "Penn doesn't know I know about it, but I thought you ought to be told. He doesn't intend to pay the debt, says Tortoni's wheel is crooked." She took her hand from Crane's arm.

"Wait a second," said Crane. "How did you find out about this?"

"I overheard Tortoni threatening Penn in New York...."

From the ocean came a petulant shout. "Caaaaam!"

"You mustn't tell Penn how you found this out." Crane nodded his head and she ran toward the surf. "Here I come, Tony." Breast deep in water, she faced the shore for an instant. "See you this afternoon."

Crane shouted, "It's a date," and watched her dive through a comber and swim vigorously toward

Lamphier.

“Well, that gives us something to think about,” said O’Malley.

“In what way?”

O’Malley glared at him in mock disgust. “You have a low mind.”

“Perhaps I have, thank God,” said Crane.

They went up to their rooms and turned on the water in the green tiled shower. The connecting bathroom was a large one, gay with chromium, bright tile and highly colored tropical fish painted on the walls, and Crane shaved while O’Malley took his shower. Thick sunlight, reflecting from the branch of a coconut palm, cast a greenish-yellow scar along his jawbone.

“How’s your black eye?” asked O’Malley, turning off the shower and seizing a green-trimmed bath towel. “Better?”

Crane cocked his head, said, “It’s beautiful. Sort of Kelly green, like mildewed pork.” His razor made a sandpaper noise against his chin. “We better go out tonight and see if this Tortoni’s wheel is really crooked.”

“What will we use for money?”

Crane doused warm water on his face. “Maybe we could write I O Us.” He buried his face in the towel, spoke with a muffled voice. “But we don’t have to. We got dough.” Marching into his room, he returned with a pigskin wallet. “The colonel gave us a grand for expenses. Look!” His right hand drew out the contents of the wallet. “Well, for God’s sake!” he said.

Amid the lettuce-green hundred-dollar bills was a folded sheet of paper. He opened it, noted the red ink, read aloud,

MESSRS FLATFEET—

You got till 12 noon today to get out of here ... This is no joke ... Get out or the gators back in the swamps will be fatter ... You get the idea ...

THE EYE

Crane’s voice died away. The wind in the dry palm leaves sounded as though someone were trying to fold a newspaper. Water in the shower fell in an ever-slowng tempo: drip-drip ... drip-drip ... drip-drip ... drip-drip ... drip.

O’Malley said, “The Eye’s some little letter writer.”

“I’ll bet he’s the guy who wrote ‘Nellie, The Beautiful Cloak Model,’” Crane said.

He went into his room and compared the new note with those he had received from Essex. The ink was the same shade of red and the angle at which the sheet had been torn was identical. He proudly waved the sheet under O’Malley’s nose. “A genuine Eye,” he said. “An authentic, genuine Eye. Mr. O’Malley, we are fortunate indeed to possess such an example of this craftsman’s art.”

O’Malley pulled a ribbed silk underwear top over his head, thrust one lean leg then the other into a pair of Nile-green shorts. “We better scram downstairs and get some breakfast,” he said. “He gives us only three hours to go.”

“The master’s autograph,” said Crane, still examining the note with admiration.

“I wonder what we should eat.” O’Malley, a frown making wrinkles on the skin between his eyes, buttoned his shirt. “Eggs? Bacon? Pancakes? Cereal? What do you think an alligator would like?”

“I don’t think an alligator cares.” Crane put all four notes in his wallet, took a white linen suit from the closet. “Just as long as we eat a big breakfast.”

When they finished dressing Crane looked at his wrist watch. It was ten minutes past nine. H

thought, but he could not remember when he had been up so early, excepting, of course, the times he had stayed up all night.

"I suppose we ought to look up Essex," O'Malley said. "The Eye may be about to throw him to the alligators too."

"The Eye's a phony," Crane said.

There was a faint noise of laughter outside and they went out on the balcony in time to see Camel Essex and Tony Lamphier cross the patio and enter the house. The girl's pretty face was gay and she half walked, half skipped, her left hand in the young man's right. He walked rapidly, but unsteadily, although he was still drunk.

"She doesn't seem to be a hell of a lot worried about her brother," said O'Malley.

"No, she doesn't," Crane said. "Let's have breakfast."

They went down the curved marble stairs with the wrought-iron balustrade into a tile-floored hall. A servingman in white came toward them. "Good morning," he said. "If you like, breakfast will be served in the patio."

A stocky red-faced man in gray flannel slacks and a black-and-white checked sport coat was reading the *Miami Herald* at a round table by the side of the swimming pool. His hair was flecked with gray and there was a white line on his neck at the point where his collar halted; he was eating liver and bacon.

He didn't bother to get up. "The energetic detectives?" he said. His voice was hoarse and vigorous and his accent might have come from England or from Boston's Back Bay.

"Major Eastcomb ...?" Crane inquired.

The man nodded. "Time you got here." His face was brick red, sullen. "Past time."

"I'm sorry about that wire," Crane said. "I didn't know who you were."

"You might have been more civil."

O'Malley spoke to the approaching servingman. "Scrambled eggs."

"The same," said Crane, "and a scotch and soda."

"Make it two," O'Malley said.

The major grunted. Crane leaned confidentially toward him. "We drink because our lives are at forfeit."

The major blinked bloodshot eyes at Crane. "You got one of those damned notes?"

"The Eye gives us until noon to get out of here."

O'Malley was drinking iced tomato juice. "Or else we are trun to the alligators."

Major Eastcomb demanded, "How did the fellow know you were detectives?"

The servingman appeared with a bottle of whisky, a silver bowl of ice cubes, a siphon and three glasses. Crane raised his shoulders toward his ears, shook his head. The servingman started to pour whisky into the glasses, but Major Eastcomb took the bottle from him.

"I'll manage, Pedro."

He mixed a drink in one glass, set the bottle on the table.

The detectives stared at him in surprise. "In a way," he said, "you are under my orders. Any payments to your agency must have my approval."

O'Malley looked at him blankly. "What about our drinks?" he asked.

Crane said, "I don't believe we want any liquor."

"That's better," said the major. "You men are on a job, not a drinking bout." Crane saw that his eyes, in addition to being flecked with blood, were very small. "I've heard stories of your alcohol tendencies." Crane thought the small eyes made him look like a pig.

"That's the way we work," O'Malley objected. "We always combine pleasure with business."

“While you’re working for the Essex estate you’ll stick to business.”

“O.K.” Crane looked away from the whisky bottle. “No pleasure.”

The major’s eyes gleamed in triumph. “Now I’ll tell you about young Essex....”

While the whisky diminished in his glass he recounted the more important episodes in Essex’ life—the Ruby Carstairs breach-of-promise suit (“Devilish fortunate to settle for ten thousand”); his deportation from Japan for booing the mikado; the Lido Club row in which a Broadway columnist was blinded by a thrown bottle; his arrest for doing one hundred and three miles an hour on the Boston Pike; his expulsions from Groton, St Paul’s, Phillips Exeter, Valley Ranch.

Deftly the servingman laid silver and linen on the table, took the ice-surrounded glasses of tomato juice from Crane and O’Malley, departed.

“There’s more ... a wild lad if ever ...” The major tossed the remainder of his drink down his throat. “But you’ve an idea. Only pertinent thing is his debts. Yes, his debts. Especially a bloody big one to Tortoni, the gambler.”

Crane’s eyebrows lifted. “So?”

“Don’t know how much it is,” confided the major. “Penn denies it altogether. But Tortoni tried to collect from me in New York. Cheeky beggar! Had him shown out of the office.”

“You think Tortoni’s behind the notes?”

The major attempted to quote from the second note. “‘The time has come to pay your debt....’”

“‘The walrus said,’” Crane said.

“How’s that?”

“Skip it,” Crane said. “Would the estate pay if his life was actually in danger?”

“Absolutely.” The major’s face looked angry. “But not simply because some fellow has written a few notes.” He glared at Crane as though he was contemplating homicide. “Supposin’ I ask you a question. What do you propose to do?”

Crane said, “Keep our pants on.”

They sat in silence while the servingman put plates before them, ladled out eggs and bacon from a silver-covered platter, passed thin slices of dry toast, poured coffee, helped them to cream and sugar. The eggs were as Crane liked them, very soft, and the coffee was marvelous, at once bitter and sweet.

When the man had gone O’Malley asked the major: “You got any ideas for us?”

The major ignored him. “I understand your office’s keeping tab on that fake count of Camelia’s,” he said to Crane.

“Count Paul di Gregario? Yes, I guess they are.”

“Waste of time. They’re washed up.”

“Maybe,” said Crane.

The major glared at him.

Craig, the butler, entered the patio from a door in the left wing of the house, half circled the steel supports of the swimming pool’s diving board, walked up to Major Eastcomb. “Good morning, sir,” he said, ignoring Crane and O’Malley.

The major grunted, “Morning.”

Usually, Crane thought, butlers looked pompous, ponderous. Craig looked alert and nasty. Under heavy talcum his beard glistened, blue-black, and his eyebrows met over his nose. His eyes were ready. “I have the accounts ready for you, Major,” he said.

“I’ll be along in five minutes.”

“Very good, sir.” The butler turned from the table, his small eyes passing over Crane and O’Malley without a change in their expression. Crane said, “Craig.” The butler abruptly halted. “Will you have

my car brought around? Mr O'Malley and I are going into Miami."

The butler's eyes gleamed. "Shall I pack your bags, sir?"

The major was absolutely motionless. Crane demanded, "What makes you think I want my bags packed?"

"I thought possibly you were leaving."

"Craig"—Crane leaned across the table toward the butler—"when we decide to leave you shall be the first to know it."

The butler left them. The major grunted, said, "No one, except Penn and me, knows that you are detectives. I suggest an improvement in your manners." He grunted again. "A trifle more dignity would aid the deception. You're supposed to be gentlemen, y'know."

O'Malley scowled, allowed a damp piece of toast to halt midway between the coffee cup and his mouth. Crane said, "And we thought our disguise was perfect!"

"Another thing." Rising, the major grasped the bottle of whisky, tucked it under his arm. "I want to warn you again about drinking. I won't tolerate it. Remember." He went toward the same door that the butler had used.

Crane lifted the silver cover on the platter, but there weren't any more eggs. He sighed.

Making a circle of his thumb and forefinger, O'Malley held it to his left eye, monocle-fashion. "Pleasant beggar!" he observed.

"I know a better word to describe him," Crane said. "It begins with *b* too."

Chapter III

MIAMI'S sidewalks dazzlingly reflected sunlight on south and west sides of streets, bore crowds deliberate, shirt-sleeved tourists on shady north and east sides. The convertible passed a yellow building with a sign, FIVE COURSE DINNER—25¢, and swung into a parking lot. "Back after lunch," Crane told the Negro attendant.

They walked over to Flagler Street, elbowing their way through the crowds, and turned right toward the bay. Two blondes in halters and white shorts, sauntering arm in arm, smiled at O'Malley, but Crane said, "Hey! None of that." He looked over his shoulder. "Besides, we can do better."

They passed a stand selling orange juice, a stand selling pineapple juice, a drugstore, a clothing store bearing a banner marked, END OF SEASON SALE—FIFTY OFF, a stand selling a mixture of coconut milk and pineapple juice. A policeman warned them not to jaywalk. From a loud-speaker over a leather goods store came a sticky Wayne King waltz. They both began to sweat.

"The town's lousy with dames," observed O'Malley.

"Probably recruiting for Gertie, over on the Bay Front," said Crane.

They turned into a bookstore and Crane asked the elderly lady clerk for a Bartlett's Familiar Quotations.

Behind tortoise-shell glasses her eyes seemed about to shed tears. "The only one we have secondhand." Her face was thin.

"That's all right. How much?"

He gave her two dollar bills and a fifty-cent piece, said, "You needn't wrap it," and handed the heavy book to O'Malley. "That's for you."

"What do I want with it?" asked O'Malley, surprised.

Crane was looking from one side of the street to the other, up and down side streets as they walked. "I'll tell you soon as I find some beer."

A block to the left they found the New York Bar. It was cool inside and there was a lovely odor of scotch whisky, limes, Cuban rum and beer in the air. They sank into leather chairs on opposite sides of a black composition table.

"Two Bass ale," Crane told the waiter.

O'Malley pretended astonishment. "What'll the major say?"

"Wait!" Crane called to the waiter. "Cancel the order. Two triple scotch and sodas instead."

"Make 'em *double* triple scotches," said O'Malley.

His expression dazed, the waiter hurried away to consult with the bartender.

Crane felt all right about disregarding the major's orders. He belonged to the pleasure school of crime detection, anyway. He never found that a little relaxation hindered him in his work. His best ideas came while he was relaxed. However, it was hard to make a client see this. Clients were often stupid. That's why they had to hire detectives.

"Give me a jit," he said to O'Malley. "I'll make that phone call we came in for."

When he returned he was smiling. "Doc Williams and Eddie Burns are in town."

O'Malley looked up from his half-finished drink. "So that phony plate of spaghetti did get her after all?"

"Yeah, the count's over at the Roney Plaza. Burns is with him on the beach and Doc's coming right

over.” Crane raised his glass above his head. “Here’s to the major.”

They drank and ordered another, and O’Malley said, “What about this book?”

“Oh yeah,” said Crane. “That’s culture. That’s what you need, a little culture.”

“What is it, a book on etiquette?”

“No. Look. You look all right; you dress all right; most of the time you act all right.”

“Hell, I act all right all the time.”

“O.K., you act all right all the time. But sometimes you don’t say the right thing.” Crane took a long drink. “That’s good. A good bar. But here’s how the book’ll help you.”

“How?”

“You’re a strong, silent guy at the Essex’ house, see? Most of the time you don’t say anything but yes and no and thank you. But every once in a while, to show you got culture, you spout one of the quotations in this book; whatever’ll fit the occasion.”

“You mean I gotta learn everything in this whole book?”

“No. Just a half-dozen or so quotations. Look up the ones on women and liquor and love; those’ll fit in easiest.”

O’Malley thumbed through the book. He halted somewhere in the center. “You mean like this?” He read:

*“I’d be a butterfly born in a bower,
Where roses and lilies and violets meet.”*

Crane said, “Why, Mister O’Malley!”

“Well, Goddam it,” said O’Malley. “That’s in here.”

“You have to use judgment,” said Crane. “Or some big strong man will elope with you.”

Ice clinked against the bottom of O’Malley’s glass as he set it down. “O.K. I’ll drip culture all over the place. Now what about another drink?”

“I think we ought to have a sandwich.”

“What! No drink? No toast to the major?”

“Oh sure. But I think we ought to have a sandwich. Waiter, two double triple scotches and two roast beef sandwiches.”

“Two triple roast beef sandwiches,” said O’Malley.

“That reminds me,” said Crane. “The word ‘trun.’ You do not use ‘trun.’”

“No.”

“No. You do not use ‘trun.’ We are not going to be ‘trun’ to the alligators.”

“You’re tellin’ me?”

“If you have to use ‘trun’, use it this way: he fell like a trun of bicks.”

“You mean a trun of bricks.”

“Or a one trun tuck.”

“You seem to be confused,” said O’Malley. “Perhaps a sip of this harmless beverage ...?”

Doc Williams found them very gay. “I might have known it,” he said sadly; “I might have known it.” He was a dapper man with a waxed mustache and pouches under his eyes. His black eyes were bright; there was a streak of perfectly white hair over his left temple; he was wearing a green gabardine suit with a sport back, a tan silk shirt, a maroon necktie. Chorus girls always thought he looked “distinguished.”

Crane said, “Have a drink. Have one of our new drinks.”

“Well, I hardly ...”

“Waiter, a double triple scotch.”

“Kay-riste!” Williams shuddered. “Where’d you get that drink?” He peered at the beverage list. “Scotch and soda, fifty cents. Doubled is a dollar. Tripled——” His voice went up the scale. “My God! That’s three dollars a drink.”

“It’s economy in the long run,” explained Crane. “You don’t drink as many as you do of the cheap kind.”

Eyes raised to the cream-colored ceiling, Williams said, “Why can’t I work just once with sensible men?”

“We are sensible men,” said O’Malley. “And besides, we got culture.” He added: “Learning is even in the freshness of its youth, even for the old.”

Williams shoved back his chair, stood up. “I think I musta made a mistake,” he mumbled.

They prevailed upon him to sit down again, to try his drink. “Tell us about the count,” urged Crane. “How did he get down here?”

“On a plane.” Williams said he had picked up the count as soon as the Union Trust had given Colonel Black the Essex case. “The colonel’s got an idea Di Gregario’s back of those notes.” Crane nodded and he went on, “Last night he takes the Florida plane at Newark and Eddie and I go along. Eddie goes right to the Roney from the plane, gets a room and meets with a lot of other dagos. They are plannin’ something, but Eddie and me can’t get near enough to hear. Now he and Eddie are sunning on the beach.”

“You don’t think the dagos are just friends of his?”

“They may be friends, but they’re up to something, y’bet. They’re like cats—that nervous. And most of ’em are packing rods.”

Crane shook his head sadly. “Do they know there’s a law against carrying weapons?”

“I’m not plannin’ on breaking the news to them.”

O’Malley said, “That gives us two guys to investigate: the count and Tortoni.”

Crane told Williams of their experiences, of The Eye and Major Eastcomb. “That’s why we’re drinking,” he explained. “We can’t let the major bluff us.”

Williams grinned. “Of course, you wouldn’t think of drinking otherwise?”

“Oh no,” said O’Malley. “Certainly not.”

“Who do you think’s dropping those notes around?” asked Williams.

“Must be somebody planted in the house,” said Crane.

“Any tough-looking mugs in the house?”

O’Malley said, “They’re all tough looking.”

“I know Tortoni,” said Williams. “He used to work for Luciano in the slave racket. Runs a joint called the Red Castle out on Long Island. Gambling and women.”

“A torpedo?”

“Naw. Yellow as a banana. He’s shifty, though.”

“Well, we’ll be seeing him for ourselves tonight,” said Crane. “We’re going to give his joint a little whirl.”

Williams said, “You better lay off these drinks or you’ll be in a whirl yourselves.”

Crane said, “Waiter, three more of the same.”

Crane shoved the convertible over the fifty-one miles to Key Largo in forty-seven minutes. There was no sign of the guards as they skidded up to the front door. Heat closed in on them; they were glad

to get inside the house.

On the curving stairs they met the servingman who had brought them the beer on the previous night. "Mr Essex has been inquiring about you, sir," he told Crane. "Everyone is having cocktails by the swimming pool."

They climbed the stairs and Crane went to the balcony and looked down at the patio. In the boxlike swimming pool the water was the color of lime pop; in the ocean it was royal blue. Under a gay red-and-yellow-and-green sunshade, in the place where breakfast had been served, was a long table covered by bottles, glasses, ice, hors d'œuvres. A servant in white was flourishing a cocktail shaker.

Crane said, "O'Malley! Babes!"

One of the women by the pool didn't count. She was past fifty and her figure had lost most of its shape. There were three others who did count, however. One of these Crane recognized as Camelot Essex. She was about to dive into the pool and her figure was supple under a French-blue brassière and-trunks suit. Another woman, English looking, athletic, slightly horsey in the better sense of the word, stood talking to Tony Lamphier and another man. Her hair was brown; her face was aristocratic; her legs were long and slender; her breasts were firm, her hips narrow under a silver-gray swim suit.

But the third woman held their eyes. Even from the balcony they could see the golden sheen of her tanned arms and legs. She was an egg-yolk blonde and O'Malley described her by saying, "Look out—Mae West!" She was talking with the major and Penn Essex. Her breasts pushed so strongly against her white silk suit that the dip in the fabric into her flat stomach was entirely without wrinkles. Her shoulders were rounded gracefully and her hips had a curve neither soft nor muscular.

O'Malley spoke in Crane's ear. "Am I glad I came! Where're our suits?"

Essex, when they entered the patio, saw they were given planters punches and took them around to the others. The woman with Tony Lamphier had nice teeth and her name was Eve Boucher and she was about thirty years old. She said, "How d'you do." The man with them was Gregory Boucher. Black hair grew in patches on his chest, on his arms, on the backs of his hands. His face, with a large curved nose, was French, almost Semitic; he looked cunning and unreliable. He was over forty and Crane wondered how Mrs Boucher had happened to marry him.

Sybil Langley was the name of the older woman. She was seated by herself in a cushioned deck chair and she held in her hand what looked to Crane like half a glass of straight whisky. Her face was white and tragic, long with huge violet eyes. "So glad," she said in a deep, glowing voice. She was wrapped in a purple beach robe.

When they left her Essex said, "She's a second cousin of ours—was a top-flight actress once."

Crane asked, "Peter Langley, out in Hollywood, her brother?"

Essex said, "Yes." He said, "Dawn, this is Mr Crane ... and Mr O'Malley." He turned to them and said, "Dawn Day."

Miss Day was even more appealing at close range. Her eyes, baby blue, passed over Crane's white body, lingeringly appraised O'Malley's beautifully muscled shoulders, his prize fighter's waist. "I'm pleased to meet you, Mr O'Malley," she said. "Real pleased." She sounded as though she meant it. "And you, too, Mr Crane."

Her voice made Crane think of Minsky's.

Major Eastcomb was scowling at the glasses in their hands. "Have a good time in Miami?" he asked.

Crane said, "I had a good time, but it was awfully hot." He added, "We hurried back."

Essex was interested. "What time did you make?"

"Forty-seven minutes."

“Not bad, but I’ve made it in an even forty in the Bugatti.”

Crane was genuinely surprised. “That’s better than seventy-five an hour average.” He didn’t believe Essex, but he didn’t say so. “You must have pushed her.”

“I had her up to a hundred and ten twice.”

Miss Day said, “You boys and your cars.” She smiled at Essex. “You won’t mind if Mr O’Malley gives me a swimming lesson? I just know he’s a wonderful swimmer.” She rolled her eyes up to Mr O’Malley. “Don’t you think it would be fun?”

O’Malley replied enthusiastically that he thought it would be fun. “Let’s go to the shallow end of the pool,” he said.

“Oh no.” Her tone was a caress. “Let’s try the ocean. It’s so much bigger.”

This was obviously true and she and O’Malley started for the beach. Crane gazed after them with envy. Miss Day’s back, a glistening brown to a point inches above the end of her spine, was perfect. He’d like to teach her to swim.

Major Eastcomb said, “What d’you find in Miami?”

Crane started to say, “A damned good bar,” but he thought better of it. Instead he said, “I ran across the trail of a friend of Miss Essex.”

“Who?”

“Count Paul di Gregario.”

Anger made the major’s face tomato red. “What’s that impostor doing here?”

“Probably up to no good,” said Essex.

Crane said, “I don’t know, but we have a couple of men watching him.”

Major Eastcomb’s teeth were clenched so tightly his jaw muscles showed white. “I’ll teach him to follow Camelia down here. Where’s he staying?”

“At the Roney Plaza.”

A noise somewhere between a squeal and scream carried to them from the ocean. O’Malley’s arm under her back, Miss Day was floating on the surface of the water, her kicking feet sending up a column of white spray. The surf had subsided; small waves licked the shore daintily, like kitten tongues after cream.

“I’ll teach him,” said the major.

Essex’ eyes were on the sea. He said, “What are you going to do about the note you got?”

“I told him,” said the major. “I warned him to keep away.”

“What can I do?” asked Crane. “Except wait. I *am* going around to see Roland Tortoni tonight.”

Essex’ pale, youthfully dissipated face was surprised.

Crane asked impatiently, “He *has* twenty-five thousand dollars worth of your I O Us, hasn’t he?”

“Yes, but I’m not going to pay him. He’s crooked ... his wheels are crooked. He can’t collect.”

“Hasn’t it occurred to you he might be using the notes to make you pay?”

Essex clenched his hands. “He wouldn’t dare.” He frowned. “Besides, we’re friends. He’s given up trying to collect.”

They could hear Miss Day’s laughter, high and piercing.

Crane said, “I never heard of anybody giving up twenty-five thousand dollars.”

Essex’ hand pressed Crane’s arm. “I’ll see you a little later.” He hadn’t heard what Crane said. He went off in the direction of O’Malley and Miss Day.

“Look here,” said Major Eastcomb fiercely; “this won’t do.”

“What won’t do?”

The major gestured toward Miss Day and the Atlantic Ocean. “You’re hired to work; not to sop up

liquor and go rutting after women.”

“Why not mention it to O’Malley?”

“I’ll do that.” The major flattened his eyebrows in a scowl. “But the important thing is to keep an eye on Essex. One of you should have stayed here.”

“You really think he’s in danger?”

“I wouldn’t have hired detectives if I didn’t.”

The major left him. Crane went over to the big table and had the servingman make him another planters punch. He ate five caviar canapés. He felt better. He still wanted to punch the major on the nose, but he now felt he could control this impulse. He took a drink and put his glass on the cement ridge of the swimming pool and dove in the lime-colored water. It was colder than he had expected. He was glad he had sent the major the nasty telegram.

At the other end of the pool he encountered Camelia Essex and Tony Lamphier. They seemed glad to see him.

She asked, “How was Miami?”

Crane said, “Miami was wonderful.”

She said, “Aren’t the tourists splendid?”

“I am a sailfish,” said Tony Lamphier, writhing about on the surface of the water. He seemed to be drunk too.

“Your friend sort of goes for Penn’s girl, doesn’t he?” she said.

“She wanted to learn to swim.”

“She always wants to learn to swim.”

“I am a fish,” stated Tony Lamphier.

Crane noticed a girl in black Chinese pajamas coming across the patio.

Camelia Essex said, “At least you drink like a fish, darling.”

“I can stop,” Lamphier said. “Any time you will.”

“Fishes can’t stop, Tony.”

“I can stop, darling.”

Even from a distance Crane could see that the girl was different from any he had ever before seen. She had black hair and a white face, and she walked with short, gliding steps, as though her feet were bound.

“Don’t stop, dear,” said Camelia Essex to Lamphier. “You’re so much more fun this way.”

“Who’s that girl?” asked Crane.

“What girl? Oh. That’s our mystery woman. She’s a dancer ... a friend of Penn. Her name’s Imago Paraguay.”

“She’s exotic,” said Tony Lamphier. “Don’t you think she’s exotic?”

“Would you like to meet her?” Camelia Essex asked Crane.

“Why not?” Crane said.

Miss Essex put her chin over the side of the pool and called, “Imago, this is Mr Crane.”

She had halted by Sybil Langley. Her figure, small, sharply breasted, slender as a lotus plant, was virginal. “How do you do,” she said in a soft flat voice.

“She’s exotic,” said Tony Lamphier. “Don’t you think so?”

Crane swam the length of the pool and climbed over the edge. He picked up his drink and went over to the table where the two women were now sitting. “May I get you something to drink, Miss Paraguay?” he asked.

“Tha-ank you.” Her voice was lazy. “A sherry, please.”

Miss Langley's violet eyes, large, heavily mascaraed, blank as a sleepwalker's, were fixed on him. "I think perhaps I will," she said. "My nerves ... I become so tired ... so terribly tired."

Crane took her glass. "What were you drinking?"

"Oh, nothing but scotch. I feel that to mix it impairs its medicinal value." She swayed a little to the left, as though she were going to topple from her chair, but caught herself. Her face did not change expression. "Just a little, Mr Crane. Do not fill the glass more than halfway...."

Crane poured half of a Haig & Haig pinch bottle in her glass. A dipsomaniac, he thought. What a lovely household! A drunken old actress, a prize fighter (where the hell did Brown keep himself anyway?), a super-sex strip queen right out of Minsky's, a dancer who looked more Chinese than South American, an exceptionally sinister butler, guards. He felt the disadvantages of being rich almost outweighed the advantages.

"Have you some sherry?" he asked the servingman.

The servingman poured a glass of sherry and Crane went back to the table. Miss Langley was sitting very close to the dancer. She accepted the glass of whisky, said, "Oh, you filled it so full."

"Would you like me to get a smaller glass?"

"Oh no. Don't bother. I shall drink what I can." She was being very brave. "I'm so tired." She put her hand on the dancer's arm. "So terribly tired." She smiled mistily at the dancer.

Uninvited, Crane sat down. He felt an extraordinary interest in Imago Paraguay. "The sherry is good, is it right?" he asked.

She smiled just a little. Her face was like an ivory temple mask, calm, bland, contemptuously and delicately dusted with rice powder, tinted under the eyes with blue, slashed with scarlet at the lips. The thin arch of her jet-black brows might have been made with a bamboo brush.

"Tha-ank you, yes," she said.

One hand clasped by Essex, the other by O'Malley, Miss Day ran by the swimming pool. She was laughing loudly. She called to Crane, "When are you going to give me a lesson?" Her big blue eyes said that nothing would give her such a thrill as a lesson from him. So tight was her white suit that her breasts hardly moved when she ran.

"Any time," said Crane.

The three went on to the servingman, ordered him to make bacardis. Without turning her face in his direction Imago Paraguay asked, "The tall man?"

"A friend of mine," said Crane. "His name's O'Malley."

He felt her oblique eyes upon him. "He is handsome." There was lazy malice in her tone. "No?"

"Oh yes," said Crane. "Very handsome."

"And the Miss Day, señor? She is beautiful?"

"Well," said Crane, "she has a certain appeal."

"I thi-ink so, also."

He glanced at her suspiciously, but her slant-browed face was serene. She might have been contemplating Krishna in a rose garden.

Miss Langley's hand was resting on the dancer's knee. "That woman," she said, looking at Miss Day's bare back. "To think ..." As if conscious of their eyes, Miss Day looked around at them, smiled warmly at Crane. He was aware of a sudden tension in Imago Paraguay's expression. Miss Langley dramatically put a hand on her forehead. "Oh, I feel unwell," she said throatily. "Imago, come for a walk beside the sea." She rose unsteadily.

For an instant Imago Paraguay's hand was in Crane's, her sloe eyes on his. He felt his nerves suddenly become tense. "Go-ood-by, señor," she said, her voice flat;

“Come, Imago,” said Miss Langley.

“I am co-oming.” Her Asiatic face was without expression.

They walked toward the sea and Miss Langley took the dancer’s hand and pressed it against his side. A thought entered Crane’s head; a possible explanation of the enmity between Miss Langley and Miss Day. He felt a sudden anger and abruptly drained his glass. He would have drained Miss Langley’s glass, too, only it was empty.

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