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The Thin Man

DASHIELL HAMMETT

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THE
THIN
MAN



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TO
LILLIAN

I was leaning against the bar in a speakeasy on Fifty-second Street, waiting for Nora to finish her Christmas shopping, when a girl got up from the table where she had been sitting with three other people and came over to me. She was small and blonde, and whether you looked at her face or at her body in powder-blue sports clothes, the result was satisfactory. “Aren’t you Nick Charles?” she asked.

I said: “Yes.”

She held out her hand. “I’m Dorothy Wynant. You don’t remember me, but you ought to remember my father, Clyde Wynant. You—”

“Sure,” I said, “and I remember you now, but you were only a kid of eleven or twelve then, weren’t you?”

“Yes, that was eight years ago. Listen: remember those stories you told me? Were they true?”

“Probably not. How is your father?”

She laughed. “I was going to ask you. Mamma divorced him, you know, and we never heard from him—except when he gets in the newspapers now and then with some of his carrying on. Don’t you ever see him?”

My glass was empty. I asked her what she would have to drink, she said Scotch and soda. I ordered two of them and said: “No, I’ve been living in San Francisco.”

She said slowly: “I’d like to see him. Mamma would raise hell if she found it out, but I’d like to see him.”

“Well?”

“He’s not where we used to live, on Riverside Drive, and he’s not in the phone book or city directory.”

“Try his lawyer,” I suggested.

Her face brightened. “Who is he?”

“It used to be a fellow named Mac-something-or-other—Macaulay, that’s it, Herbert Macaulay. He was in the Singer Building.”

“Lend me a nickel,” she said, and went out to the telephone. She came back smiling. “I found him. He’s just round the corner on Fifth Avenue.”

“Your father?”

“The lawyer. He says my father’s out of town. I’m going round to see him.” She raised her glass to me. “Family reunions. Look, why don’t—”

Asta jumped up and punched me in the belly with her front feet. Nora, at the other end of the leash, said: “She’s had a swell afternoon—knocked over a table of toys at Lord & Taylor’s, scared a fat woman silly by licking her leg in Saks’s, and’s been patted by three policemen.”

I made introductions. “My wife, Dorothy Wynant. Her father was once a client of mine.”

when she was only so high. A good guy, but screwy.”

“I was fascinated by him,” Dorothy said, meaning me, “a real live detective, and used to follow him around making him tell me about his experiences. He told me awful lies, but I believed every word.”

I said: “You look tired, Nora.”

“I am. Let’s sit down.”

Dorothy Wynant said she had to go back to her table. She shook hands with Nora; we must drop in for cocktails, they were living at the Courtland, her mother’s name was Jorgensen now. We would be glad to and she must come see us some time, we were at the Normandy and would be in New York for another week or two. Dorothy patted the dog’s head and left us.

We found a table. Nora said: “She’s pretty.”

“If you like them like that.”

She grinned at me. “You got types?”

“Only you, darling—lanky brunettes with wicked jaws.”

“And how about the red-head you wandered off with at the Quinns’ last night?”

“That’s silly,” I said. “She just wanted to show me some French etchings.”



The next day Herbert Macaulay telephoned me. “Hello, I didn’t know you were back in town till Dorothy Wynant told me. How about lunch?”

“What time is it?”

“Half past eleven. Did I wake you up?”

“Yes,” I said, “but that’s all right. Suppose you come up here for lunch: I’ve got a hangover and don’t feel like running around much.... O.K., say one o’clock.” I had a drink with Nora who was going out to have her hair washed, then another after a shower, and was feeling better by the time the telephone rang again. A female voice asked: “Is Mr. Macaulay there?”

“Not yet.”

“Sorry to trouble you, but would you mind asking him to call his office as soon as he gets there? It’s important.” I promised to do that.

Macaulay arrived about ten minutes later. He was a big curly-haired, rosy-cheeked, rather good-looking chap of about my age—forty-one—though he looked younger. He was supposed to be a pretty good lawyer. I had worked on several jobs for him when I was living in New York and we had always got along nicely. Now we shook hands and patted each other on the backs, and he asked me how the world was treating me, and I said, “Fine,” and asked him and he said, “Fine,” and I told him to call his office.

He came away from the telephone frowning. “Wynant’s back in town,” he said, “and wants me to meet him.”

I turned around with the drinks I had poured. “Well, the lunch can—”

“Let him wait,” he said, and took one of the glasses from me.

“Still as screwy as ever?”

“That’s no joke,” Macaulay said solemnly. “You heard they had him in a sanatorium for nearly a year back in ’29?”

“No.”

He nodded. He sat down, put his glass on a table beside his chair, and leaned towards me a little. “What’s Mimi up to, Charles?”

“Mimi? Oh, the wife—the ex-wife. I don’t know. Does she have to be up to something?”

“She usually is,” he said dryly, and then very slowly, “and I thought you’d know.”

So that was it. I said: “Listen, Mac, I haven’t been a detective for six years, since 1927.” He stared at me. “On the level,” I assured him, “a year after I got married, my wife’s father died and left her a lumber mill and a narrow-gauge railroad and some other things and I quit the Agency to look after them. Anyway I wouldn’t be working for Mimi Wynant, or Jorgensen, or whatever her name is—she never liked me and I never liked her.”

“Oh, I didn’t think you—” Macaulay broke off with a vague gesture and picked up his glass. When he took it away from his mouth, he said: “I was just wondering. Here Mimi phones me

three days ago—Tuesday—trying to find Wynant; then yesterday Dorothy phones, saying you told her to, and comes around, and—I thought you were still sleuthing, so I was wondering what it was all about.”

“Didn’t they tell you?”

“Sure—they wanted to see him for old times’ sake. That means a lot.”

“You lawyers are a suspicious crew,” I said. “Maybe they did—that and money. But what the fuss about? Is he in hiding?”

Macaulay shrugged. “You know as much about it as I do. I haven’t seen him since October. He drank again. “How long are you going to be in town?”

“Till after New Year’s,” I told him and went to the telephone to ask room service for menus.



Nora and I went to the opening of *Honeymoon* at the Little Theatre that night and then to party given by some people named Freeman or Fielding or something. I felt pretty low when she called me the next morning. She gave me a newspaper and a cup of coffee and said, “Read that.”

I patiently read a paragraph or two, then put the paper down and took a sip of coffee. “Fun’s fun,” I said, “but right now I’d swap you all the interviews with Mayor-elect O’Brien ever printed—and throw in the Indian picture—for a slug of whis—”

“Not that, stupid.” She put a finger on the paper. “That.”

**INVENTOR’S SECRETARY
MURDERED IN APARTMENT**

JULIA WOLF’S BULLET-RIDDLED BODY FOUND;
POLICE SEEK HER EMPLOYER, CLYDE WYNANT

The bullet-riddled body of Julia Wolf, thirty-two-year-old confidential secretary to Clyde Miller Wynant, well-known inventor, was discovered late yesterday afternoon in the dead woman’s apartment at 411 East Fifty-fourth St. by Mrs. Christian Jorgensen, divorced wife of the inventor, who had gone there in an attempt to learn her former husband’s present address.

Mrs. Jorgensen, who returned Monday after a six-year stay in Europe, told police that she heard feeble groans when she rang the murdered woman’s doorbell, whereupon she notified an elevator boy, Mervin Holly, who called Walter Meany, apartment-house superintendent. Miss Wolf was lying on the bedroom floor with four .32-caliber bullet-wounds in her chest when they entered the apartment, and died without having recovered consciousness before police and medical aid arrived.

Herbert Macaulay, Wynant’s attorney, told the police that he had not seen the inventor since October. He stated that Wynant called him on the telephone yesterday and made an appointment, but failed to keep it; and disclaimed any knowledge of his client’s whereabouts. Miss Wolf, Macaulay stated, had been in the inventor’s employ for the past eight years. The attorney said he knew nothing about the dead woman’s family or private affairs and could throw no light on her murder.

The bullet-wounds could not have been self-inflicted, according to ...

The rest of it was the usual police department handout.

“Do you suppose he killed her?” Nora asked when I put the paper down again.

“Wynant? I wouldn’t be surprised. He’s batty as hell.”

“Did you know her?”

“Yes. How about a drop of something to cut the phlegm?”

“What was she like?”

“Not bad,” I said. “She wasn’t bad-looking and she had a lot of sense and a lot of nerve—and it took both to live with that guy.”

“She lived with him?”

“Yes. I want a drink, please. That is, it was like that when I knew them.”

“Why don’t you have some breakfast first? Was she in love with him or was it ju business?”

“I don’t know. It’s too early for breakfast.”

When Nora opened the door to go out, the dog came in and put her front feet on the be her face in my face. I rubbed her head and tried to remember something Wynant had on said to me, something about women and dogs. It was not the woman-spaniel-walnut-tree lin I could not remember what it was, but there seemed to be some point in trying to remembe Nora returned with two drinks and another question: “What’s he like?”

“Tall—over six feet—and one of the thinnest men I’ve ever seen. He must be about fif now, and his hair was almost white when I knew him. Usually needs a haircut, ragged brind mustache, bites his fingernails.” I pushed the dog away to reach for my drink.

“Sounds lovely. What were you doing with him?”

“A fellow who’d worked for him accused him of stealing some kind of invention from hir Rosewater was his name. He tried to shake Wynant down by threatening to shoot him, bom his house, kidnap his children, cut his wife’s throat—I don’t know what all—if he didn’t com across. We never caught him—must’ve scared him off. Anyway, the threats stopped an nothing happened.”

Nora stopped drinking to ask: “Did Wynant really steal it?”

“Tch, tch, tch,” I said. “This is Christmas Eve: try to think good of your fellow man.”



That afternoon I took Asta for a walk, explained to two people that she was a Schnauzer and not a cross between a Scottie and an Irish terrier, stopped at Jim's for a couple of drinks, ran into Larry Crowley, and brought him back to the Normandie with me. Nora was pouring cocktails for the Quinns, Margot Innes, a man whose name I did not catch, and Dorothy Wynant. Dorothy said she wanted to talk to me, so we carried our cocktails into the bedroom.

She came to the point right away. "Do you think my father killed her, Nick?"

"No," I said. "Why should I?"

"Well, the police have— Listen, she was his mistress, wasn't she?"

I nodded. "When I knew them."

She stared at her glass while saying, "He's my father. I never liked him. I never liked Mamma." She looked up at me. "I don't like Gilbert." Gilbert was her brother.

"Don't let that worry you. Lots of people don't like their relatives."

"Do you like them?"

"My relatives?"

"Mine." She scowled at me. "And stop talking to me as if I was still twelve."

"It's not that," I explained. "I'm getting tight."

"Well, do you?"

I shook my head. "You were all right, just a spoiled kid. I could get along without the rest of them."

"What's the matter with us?" she asked, not argumentatively, but as if she really wanted to know.

"Different things. Your—"

Harrison Quinn opened the door and said: "Come on over and play some Ping-Pong, Nick."

"In a little while."

"Bring Beautiful along." He leered at Dorothy and went away.

She said: "I don't suppose you know Jorgensen."

"I know a Nels Jorgensen."

"Some people have all the luck. This one's named Christian. He's a honey. That's Mamma— divorces a lunatic and marries a gigolo." Her eyes became wet. She caught her breath in a sob and asked: "What am I going to do, Nick?" Her voice was a frightened child's.

I put an arm around her and made what I hoped were comforting sounds. She cried on my lapel. The telephone beside the bed began to ring. In the next room "Rise and Shine" was coming through the radio. My glass was empty. I said: "Walk out on them."

She sobbed again. "You can't walk out on yourself."

"Maybe I don't know what you're talking about."

“Please don’t tease me,” she said humbly.

Nora, coming in to answer the telephone, looked questioningly at me. I made a face at her over the girl’s head. When Nora said “Hello” into the telephone, the girl stepped quickly back away from me and blushed. “I—I’m sorry,” she stammered, “I didn’t—”

Nora smiled sympathetically at her. I said: “Don’t be a dope.” The girl found her handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes with it.

Nora spoke into the telephone. “Yes ... I’ll see if he’s in. Who’s calling, please?” She put her hand over the mouthpiece and addressed me: “It’s a man named Norman. Do you want to talk to him?”

I said I didn’t know and took the telephone. “Hello.”

A somewhat harsh voice said: “Mr. Charles? ... Mr. Charles, I understand that you were formerly connected with the Trans-American Detective Agency.”

“Who is this?” I asked.

“My name is Albert Norman, Mr. Charles, which probably means nothing to you, but I would like to lay a proposition before you. I am sure you will—”

“What kind of a proposition?”

“I can’t discuss it over the phone, Mr. Charles, but if you will give me half an hour of your time, I can promise—”

“Sorry,” I said. “I’m pretty busy and—”

“But, Mr. Charles, this is—” Then there was a loud noise: it could have been a shot or something falling or anything else that would make a loud noise. I said, “Hello,” a couple of times, got no answer, and hung up.

Nora had Dorothy over in front of a looking-glass soothing her with powder and rouge. I said, “A guy selling insurance,” and we went into the living-room for a drink. Some more people had come in. I spoke to them. Harrison Quinn left the sofa where he had been sitting with Margot Innes and said: “Now Ping-Pong.” Asta jumped up and punched me in the belly with her front feet. I shut off the radio and poured myself a cocktail. The man whose name I had not caught was saying: “Comes the revolution and we’ll all be lined up against the wall—the first thing.” He seemed to think it was a good idea.

Quinn came over to refill his glass. He looked towards the bedroom door. “Where’d you find the little blonde?”

“Used to bounce it on my knee.”

“Which knee?” he asked. “Could I touch it?”

Nora and Dorothy came out of the bedroom. I saw an afternoon paper on the radio and picked it up. Headlines said:

JULIA WOLF ONCE RACKETEER’S GIRL;

ARTHUR NUNHEIM IDENTIFIES BODY;

WYNANT STILL MISSING

Nora, at my elbow, spoke in a low voice: “I asked her to have dinner with us. Be nice to the child”—Nora was twenty-six—“she’s all upset.”

“Whatever you say.” I turned around. Dorothy, across the room, was laughing at something Quinn was telling her. “But if you get mixed up in people’s troubles, don’t expect me to kiss you where you’re hurt.”

“I won’t. You’re a sweet old fool. Don’t read that here now.” She took the newspaper away from me and stuck it out of sight behind the radio.



Nora could not sleep that night. She read Chaliapin's memoirs until I began to doze and then she woke me up by asking: "Are you asleep?" I said I was. She lit a cigarette for me, one for herself. "Don't you ever think you'd like to go back to detecting once in a while just for the fun of it? You know, when something special comes up, like the Lindb—"

"Darling," I said, "my guess is that Wynant killed her, and the police'll catch him without my help. Anyway, it's nothing in my life."

"I didn't mean just that, but—"

"But besides I haven't the time: I'm too busy trying to see that you don't lose any of the money I married you for." I kissed her. "Don't you think maybe a drink would help you sleep?"

"No, thanks."

"Maybe it would if I took one." When I brought my Scotch and soda back to bed, she was frowning into space. I said: "She's cute, but she's cuckoo. She wouldn't be his daughter if she wasn't. You can't tell how much of what she says is what she thinks and you can't tell how much of what she thinks ever really happened. I like her, but I think you're letting—"

"I'm not sure I like her," Nora said thoughtfully, "she's probably a little bastard, but if a quarter of what she told us is true, she's in a tough spot."

"There's nothing I can do to help her."

"She thinks you can."

"And so do you, which shows that no matter what you think, you can always get somebody else to go along with you."

Nora sighed. "I wish you were sober enough to talk to." She leaned over to take a sip of my drink. "I'll give you your Christmas present now if you'll give me mine."

I shook my head. "At breakfast."

"But it's Christmas now."

"Breakfast."

"Whatever you're giving me," she said, "I hope I don't like it."

"You'll have to keep them anyway, because the man at the Aquarium said he positively wouldn't take them back. He said they'd already bitten the tails off the—"

"It wouldn't hurt you any to find out if you can help her, would it? She's got so much confidence in you, Nicky."

"Everybody trusts Greeks."

"Please."

"You just want to poke your nose into things that—"

"I meant to ask you: did his wife know the Wolf girl was his mistress?"

"I don't know. She didn't like her."

“What’s the wife like?”

“I don’t know—a woman.”

“Good-looking?”

“Used to be very.”

“She old?”

“Forty, forty-two. Cut it out, Nora. You don’t want any part of it. Let the Charleses stick to the Charleses’ troubles and the Wynants stick to the Wynants’.”

She pouted. “Maybe that drink would help me.”

I got out of bed and mixed her a drink. As I brought it into the bedroom, the telephone began to ring. I looked at my watch on the table. It was nearly five o’clock.

Nora was talking into the telephone: “Hello.... Yes, speaking.” She looked sidewise at me. I shook my head no. “Yes.... Why, certainly.... Yes, certainly.” She put the telephone down and grinned at me.

“You’re wonderful,” I said. “Now what?”

“Dorothy’s coming up. I think she’s tight.”

“That’s great.” I picked up my bathrobe. “I was afraid I was going to have to go to sleep.”

She was bending over looking for her slippers. “Don’t be such an old fluff. You can sleep a day.” She found her slippers and stood up in them. “Is she really as afraid of her mother as she says?”

“If she’s got any sense. Mimi’s poison.”

Nora screwed up her dark eyes at me and asked slowly: “What are you holding out on me?”

“Oh, dear,” I said, “I was hoping I wouldn’t have to tell you. Dorothy is really my daughter. I didn’t know what I was doing, Nora. It was spring in Venice and I was so young and there was a moon over the—”

“Be funny. Don’t you want something to eat?”

“If you do. What do you want?”

“Raw chopped beef sandwich with a lot of onion and some coffee.”

Dorothy arrived while I was telephoning an all-night delicatessen. When I went into the living-room, she stood up with some difficulty and said: “I’m awfully sorry, Nick, to keep bothering you and Nora like this, but I can’t go home this way tonight. I can’t. I’m afraid to. I don’t know what’d happen to me, what I’d do. Please don’t make me.” She was very drunk. Asta sniffed at her ankles.

I said: “Sh-h-h. You’re all right here. Sit down. There’ll be some coffee in a little while. Where’d you get the snoutful?”

She sat down and shook her head stupidly. “I don’t know. I’ve been everywhere since I left you. I’ve been everywhere except home because I can’t go home this way. Look what I got.” She stood up again and took a battered automatic pistol out of her coat pocket. “Look at that.” She waved it at me while Asta, wagging her tail, jumped happily at it.

Nora made a noise with her breathing. The back of my neck was cold. I pushed the door aside and took the pistol away from Dorothy. “What kind of clowning is this? Sit down.” I dropped the pistol into a bathrobe pocket and pushed Dorothy down in her chair.

“Don’t be mad at me, Nick,” she whined. “You can keep it. I don’t want to make a nuisance of myself.”

"Where'd you get it?" I asked.

"In a speakeasy on Tenth Avenue. I gave a man my bracelet—the one with the emeralds and diamonds—for it."

"And then won it back from him in a crap game," I said. "You've still got it on."

She stared at her bracelet. "I thought I did."

I looked at Nora and shook my head. Nora said: "Aw, don't bully her, Nick. She's—"

"He's not bullying me, Nora, he's really not," Dorothy said quickly. "He's—he's the one person I got in the world to turn to."

I remembered Nora had not touched her Scotch and soda, so I went into the bedroom and drank it. When I came back, Nora was sitting on the arm of Dorothy's chair with an arm around the girl. Dorothy was sniffing; Nora was saying: "But Nick's not mad, dear. He likes you." She looked up at me. "You're not mad, are you, Nicky?"

"No, I'm just hurt." I sat on the sofa. "Where'd you get the gun, Dorothy?"

"From a man—I told you."

"What man?"

"I told you—a man in a speakeasy."

"And you gave him a bracelet for it."

"I thought I did, but—look—I've still got my bracelet."

"I noticed that."

Nora patted the girl's shoulder. "Of course you've still got your bracelet."

I said: "When the boy comes with that coffee and stuff, I'm going to bribe him to stick around. I'm not going to stay alone with a couple of—"

Nora scowled at me, told the girl: "Don't mind him. He's been like that all night."

The girl said: "He thinks I'm a silly little drunken fool." Nora patted her shoulder some more.

I asked: "But what'd you want a gun for?"

Dorothy sat up straight and stared at me with wide drunken eyes. "Him," she whispered excitedly, "if he bothered me. I was afraid because I was drunk. That's what it was. And then I was afraid of that, too, so I came here."

"You mean your father?" Nora asked, trying to keep excitement out of her voice.

The girl shook her head. "Clyde Wynant's my father. My stepfather." She leaned against Nora's breast.

Nora said: "Oh," in a tone of very complete understanding. Then she said, "You poor child," and looked significantly at me.

I said: "Let's all have a drink."

"Not me." Nora was scowling at me again. "And I don't think Dorothy wants one."

"Yes, she does. It'll help her sleep." I poured her a terrific dose of Scotch and saw that she drank it. It worked nicely: she was sound asleep by the time our coffee and sandwiches came.

Nora said: "Now you're satisfied."

"Now I'm satisfied. Shall we tuck her in before we eat?"

I carried her into the bedroom and helped Nora undress her. She had a beautiful little body. We went back to our food. I took the pistol out of my pocket and examined it. It had been kicked around a lot. There were two cartridges in it, one in the chamber, one in the magazine.

“What are you going to do with it?” Nora asked.

“Nothing till I find out if it’s the one Julia Wolf was killed with. It’s a .32.”

“But she said—”

“She got it in a speakeasy—from a man—for a bracelet. I heard her.”

Nora leaned over her sandwich at me. Her eyes were very shiny and almost black. “Do you suppose she got it from her stepfather?”

“I do,” I said, but I said it too earnestly.

Nora said: “You’re a Greek louse. But maybe she did; you don’t know. And you don’t believe her story.”

“Listen, darling, tomorrow I’ll buy you a whole lot of detective stories, but don’t worry your pretty little head over mysteries tonight. All she was trying to tell you was that she was afraid Jorgensen was waiting to try to make her when she got home and she was afraid she was drunk enough to give in.”

“But her mother!”

“This family’s a family. You can—”

Dorothy Wynant, standing unsteadily in the doorway in a nightgown much too long for her, blinked at the light and said: “Please, can I come in for a little while? I’m afraid in the dark alone.”

“Sure.” She came over and curled up beside me on the sofa while Nora went to get something to put around her.



The three of us were at breakfast early that afternoon when the Jorgensens arrived. Nora answered the telephone and came away from it trying to pretend she was not tickled. “It’s your mother,” she told Dorothy. “She’s downstairs. I told her to come up.”

Dorothy said: “Damn it. I wish I hadn’t phoned her.”

I said: “We might just as well be living in the lobby.”

Nora said: “He doesn’t mean that.” She patted Dorothy’s shoulder.

The doorbell rang. I went to the door. Eight years had done no damage to Mimi’s look. She was a little riper, showier, that was all. She was larger than her daughter, and her blondness was more vivid. She laughed and held her hands out to me. “Merry Christmas. It’s awfully good to see you after all these years. This is my husband. Mr. Charles, Chris.”

I said, “I’m glad to see you, Mimi,” and shook hands with Jorgensen. He was probably five years younger than his wife, a tall thin erect dark man, carefully dressed and sleek, with smooth hair and a waxed mustache.

He bowed from the waist. “How do you do, Mr. Charles?” His accent was heavy, Teutonic. His hand was lean and muscular. We went inside.

Mimi, when the introductions were over, apologized to Nora for popping in on us. “But I did want to see your husband again, and then I know the only way to get this brat of mine anywhere on time is to carry her off bodily.” She turned her smile on Dorothy. “Better go dressed, honey.”

Honey grumbled through a mouthful of toast that she didn’t see why she had to waste another afternoon at Aunt Alice’s even if it was Christmas. “I bet Gilbert’s not going.”

Mimi said Asta was a lovely dog and asked me if I had *any* idea where that ex-husband of hers might be.

“No.” She went on playing with the dog. “He’s crazy, absolutely crazy, to disappear at a time like this. No wonder the police at first thought he had something to do with it.”

“What do they think now?” I asked.

She looked up at me. “Haven’t you seen the papers?”

“No.”

“It’s a man named Morelli—a gangster. He killed her. He was her lover.”

“They caught him?”

“Not yet, but he did it. I wish I could find Clyde. Macaulay won’t help me at all. He says he doesn’t know where he is, but that’s ridiculous. He has powers of attorney from him and everything and I know very well he’s in touch with Clyde. Do you think Macaulay trustworthy?”

“He’s Wynant’s lawyer,” I said. “There’s no reason why you should trust him.”

“Just what I thought.” She moved over a little on the sofa. “Sit down. I’ve got millions of

things to ask you.”

“How about a drink first?”

“Anything but egg-nog,” she said. “It makes me bilious.”

When I came out of the pantry, Nora and Jorgensen were trying their French on each other, Dorothy was still pretending to eat, and Mimi was playing with the dog again. I distributed the drinks and sat down beside Mimi. She said: “Your wife’s lovely.”

“I like her.”

“Tell me the truth, Nick: do you think Clyde’s really crazy? I mean crazy enough that something ought to be done about it.”

“How do I know?”

“I’m worried about the children,” she said. “I’ve no claim on him any more—the settlement he made when I divorced him took care of all that—but the children have. We’re absolutely penniless now and I’m worried about them. If he is crazy he’s just as likely as not to throw away everything and leave them without a cent. What do you think I ought to do?”

“Thinking about putting him in the booby-hatch?”

“No—o,” she said slowly, “but I would like to talk to him.” She put a hand on my arm. “You could find him.”

I shook my head.

“Won’t you help me, Nick? We used to be friends.” Her big blue eyes were soft and appealing. Dorothy, at the table, was watching us suspiciously.

“For Christ’s sake, Mimi,” I said, “there’s a thousand detectives in New York. Hire one of them. I’m not working at it any more.”

“I know, but— Was Dorry very drunk last night?”

“Maybe I was. She seemed all right to me.”

“Don’t you think she’s gotten to be a pretty little thing?”

“I always thought she was.”

She thought that over a moment, then said: “She’s only a child, Nick.”

“What’s that got to do with what?” I asked.

She smiled. “How about getting some clothes on, Dorry?”

Dorothy sulkily repeated that she didn’t see why she had to waste an afternoon at Aunt Alice’s.

Jorgensen turned to address his wife: “Mrs. Charles has the great kindness to suggest that we do not—”

“Yes,” Nora said, “Why don’t you stay awhile? There’ll be some people coming in. It won’t be very exciting, but—” She waved her glass a little to finish the sentence.

“I’d love to,” Mimi replied slowly, “but I’m afraid Alice—”

“Make our apologies to her by telephone,” Jorgensen suggested.

“I’ll do it,” Dorothy said.

Mimi nodded. “Be nice to her.” Dorothy went into the bedroom. Everybody seemed much brighter. Nora caught my eye and winked merrily and I had to take it and like it because Mimi was looking at me then. Mimi asked me: “You really didn’t want us to stay, did you?”

“Of course.”

“Chances are you’re lying. Weren’t you sort of fond of poor Julia?”

“‘Poor Julia’ sounds swell from you. I liked her all right.”

Mimi put her hand on my arm again. “She broke up my life with Clyde. Naturally I hate her—then—but that’s a long time ago. I had no feeling against her when I went to see her Friday. And, Nick, I saw her die. She didn’t deserve to die. It was horrible. No matter what I’d felt, there’d be nothing left but pity now. I meant ‘poor Julia’ when I said it.”

“I don’t know what you’re up to,” I said. “I don’t know what any of you are up to.”

“Any of us,” she repeated. “Has Dorry been—”

Dorothy came in from the bedroom. “I squared it.” She kissed her mother on the mouth and sat down beside her.

Mimi, looking in her compact-mirror to see her mouth had not been smeared, asked: “She wasn’t peevish about it?”

“No, I squared it. What do you have to do to get a drink?”

I said: “You have to walk over to that table where the ice and bottles are and pour it.”

Mimi said: “You drink too much.”

“I don’t drink as much as Nick.” She went over to the table.

Mimi shook her head. “These children! I mean you were pretty fond of Julia Wolf, weren’t you?”

Dorothy called: “You want one, Nick?”

“Thanks,” I said: then to Mimi, “I liked her well enough.”

“You’re the damnedest evasive man,” she complained. “Did you like her as much as you used to like me for instance?”

“You mean those couple of afternoons we killed?”

Her laugh was genuine. “That’s certainly an answer.” She turned to Dorothy, carrying glasses towards us. “You’ll have to get a robe that shade of blue, darling. It’s very becoming to you.” I took one of the glasses from Dorothy and said I thought I had better get dressed.



When I came out of the bathroom, Nora and Dorothy were in the bedroom, Nora combing her hair, Dorothy sitting on the side of the bed dangling a stocking. Nora made a kiss at me in the dressing-table mirror. She looked very happy.

“You like Nick a lot, don’t you, Nora?” Dorothy asked.

“He’s an old Greek fool, but I’m used to him.”

“Charles isn’t a Greek name.”

“It’s Charalambides,” I explained. “When the old man came over, the mugg that put him through Ellis Island said Charalambides was too long—too much trouble to write—and whittled it down to Charles. It was all right with the old man; they could have called him so they let him in.”

Dorothy stared at me. “I never know when you’re lying.” She started to put on the stocking, stopped. “What’s Mamma trying to do to you?”

“Nothing. Pump me. She’d like to know what you did and said last night.”

“I thought so. What’d you tell her?”

“What could I tell her? You don’t do or say anything.”

She wrinkled her forehead over that, but when she spoke again it was about something else: “I never knew there was anything between you and Mamma. Of course I was only a kid then and wouldn’t have known what it was all about even if I’d noticed anything, but I didn’t even know you called each other by your first names.”

Nora turned from the mirror laughing. “Now we’re getting somewhere.” She waved the comb at Dorothy. “Go on, dear.”

Dorothy said earnestly: “Well, I didn’t know.”

I was taking laundry pins out of a shirt. “What do you know now?” I asked.

“Nothing,” she said slowly, and her face began to grow pink, “but I can guess.” She bent over her stocking.

“Can and do,” I growled. “You’re a dope, but don’t look so embarrassed. You can’t help it you’ve got a dirty mind.”

She raised her head and laughed, but when she asked, “Do you think I take after Mamma much?” she was serious.

“I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“But do you?”

“You want me to say no. No.”

“That’s what I have to live with,” Nora said cheerfully. “You can’t do anything with him.”

I finished dressing first and went out to the living-room. Mimi was sitting on Jorgensen’s knee. She stood up and asked: “What’d you get for Christmas?”

“Nora gave me a watch.” I showed it to her.

She said it was lovely, and it was. "What'd you give her?"

"Necklace."

Jorgensen said, "May I?" and rose to mix himself a drink.

The doorbell rang. I let the Quinns and Margot Innes in, introduced them to the Jorgensens. Presently Nora and Dorothy finished dressing and came out of the bedroom, and Quinn attached himself to Dorothy. Larry Crowley arrived with a girl named Denis, and a few minutes later the Edges. I won thirty-two dollars—on the cuff—from Margot at backgammon. The Denis girl had to go into the bedroom and lie down awhile. Alice Quinn, with Margot's help, tore her husband away from Dorothy at a little after six and carried him off to keep a date they had. The Edges left. Mimi put on her coat, got her husband and daughter into their coats.

"It's awful short notice," she said, "but can't you come to dinner tomorrow night?"

Nora said: "Certainly." We shook hands and made polite speeches all around and they were away. Nora shut the door after them and leaned her back against it. "Jesus, he's a handsome guy," she said.

So far I had known just where I stood on the Wolf-Wynant-Jorgensen troubles and what I was doing—the answers were, respectively, nowhere and nothing—but when we stopped at Reuben’s for coffee on our way home at four the next morning, Nora opened a newspaper and found a line in one of the gossip columns: “Nick Charles, former Trans-American Detective Agency ace, on from Coast to Coast to sift the Julia Wolf murder mystery”; and when I opened my eyes and sat up in bed some six hours later Nora was shaking me and a man with a gun in his hand was standing in the bedroom doorway.

He was a plump dark youngish man of medium height, broad through the jaws, narrow between the eyes. He wore a black derby hat, a black overcoat that fitted him very snugly, a dark suit, and black shoes, all looking as if he had bought them within the past fifteen minutes. The gun, a blunt black .38-calibre automatic, lay comfortably in his hand, not pointing at anything. Nora was saying: “He made me let him in, Nick. He said he had to—”

“I got to talk to you,” the man with the gun said. “That’s all, but I got to do that.” His voice was low, rasping. I had blinked myself awake by then. I looked at Nora. She was excited, but apparently not frightened: she might have been watching a horse she had a bet on coming down the stretch with a nose lead.

I said: “All right, talk, but do you mind putting the gun away? My wife doesn’t care, but I’m pregnant and I don’t want the child to be born with—”

He smiled with his lower lip. “You don’t have to tell me you’re tough. I heard about you.” He put the pistol in his overcoat pocket. “I’m Shep Morelli.”

“I never heard about you,” I said.

He took a step into the room and began to shake his head from side to side. “I didn’t know Julia off.”

“Maybe you didn’t, but you’re bringing the news to the wrong place. I got nothing to do with it.”

“I haven’t seen her in three months,” he said. “We were washed up.”

“Tell the police.”

“I wouldn’t have any reason to hurt her: she was always on the up and up with me.”

“That’s all swell,” I said, “only you’re peddling your fish in the wrong market.”

“Listen.” He took another step towards the bed. “Studsy Burke tells me you used to be O.I. That’s why I’m here. Do the—”

“How is Studsy?” I asked. “I haven’t seen him since the time he went up the river in ’23 or ’24.”

“He’s all right. He’d like to see you. He’s got a joint on West Forty-ninth, the Pigion Club. But listen, what’s the law doing to me? Do they think I did it? Or is it just something else pinned on me?”

I shook my head. "I'd tell you if I knew. Don't let newspapers fool you: I'm not in this. As the police."

"That'd be very smart." He smiled with his lower lip again. "That'd be the smartest thing ever did. Me that a police captain's been in a hospital three weeks on account we had a argument. The boys would like me to come in and ask 'em questions. They'd like it right down to the end of their blackjacks." He turned a hand over, palm up. "I come to you on the level. Studsy says you're on the level. Be on the level."

"I'm being on the level," I assured him. "If I knew anything I'd—"

Knuckles drummed on the corridor door, three times, sharply. Morelli's gun was in his hand before the noise stopped. His eyes seemed to move in all directions at once. His voice was a metallic snarl deep in his chest: "Well?"

"I don't know." I sat up a little higher in bed and nodded at the gun in his hand. "That makes it your party." The gun pointed very accurately at my chest. I could hear the blood in my ears, and my lips felt swollen. I said: "There's no fire-escape." I put my left hand out towards Nora, who was sitting on the far side of the bed.

The knuckles hit the door again, and a deep voice called: "Open up. Police."

Morelli's lower lip crawled up to lap the upper, and the whites of his eyes began to show under the irises. "You son of a bitch," he said slowly, almost as if he were sorry for me. He moved his feet the least bit, flattening them against the floor.

A key touched the outer lock. I hit Nora with my left hand, knocking her down across the room. The pillow I chucked with my right hand at Morelli's gun seemed to have no weight; it drifted slow as a piece of tissue paper. No noise in the world, before or after, was ever as loud as Morelli's gun going off. Something pushed my left side as I sprawled across the floor. I caught one of his ankles and rolled over with it, bringing him down on me, and he clubbed my back with the gun until I got a hand free and began to hit him as low in the body as I could.

Men came in and dragged us apart. It took us five minutes to bring Nora to. She sat up holding her cheek and looked around the room until she saw Morelli, nippers on one wrist, standing between two detectives. Morelli's face was a mess: the coppers had worked him over a little just for the fun of it. Nora glared at me. "You damned fool," she said, "you didn't have to knock me cold. I knew you'd take him, but I wanted to see it."

One of the coppers laughed. "Jesus," he said admiringly, "there's a woman with hair on her chest."

She smiled at him and stood up. When she looked at me she stopped smiling. "Nick, you're—" I said I didn't think it was much and opened what was left of my pyjama-coat. Morelli's bullet had scooped out a gutter perhaps four inches long under my left nipple. A lot of blood was running out of it, but it was not very deep.

Morelli said: "Tough luck. A couple of inches over would make a lot of difference the right way." The copper who had admired Nora—he was a big sandy man of forty-eight or fifty in a gray suit that did not fit him very well—slapped Morelli's mouth.

Keyser, the Normandie's manager, said he would get a doctor and went to the telephone. Nora ran to the bathroom for towels. I put a towel over the wound and lay down on the bed. "I'm all right. Don't let's fuss over it till the doctor comes. How'd you people happen to pop in?"

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