

RUN, KILLER, RUN



A NOVEL

BRIAN E. DRAKE

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1

A HOT NIGHT IN EARLY JUNE, 1960, and the bar at 17th and Eighth Avenue in New York is quiet. Bill Purdy, the owner, chats quietly with his old customer Joe Starkman. A young man sits at a table near the door to the street and holds a beer, the same beer he bought an hour ago. Bill Purdy doesn't bother his customers, even when the bar is full of people, and that only happens a few times a week, between five and seven, when people are heading home after work. A fan is swaying back and forth above the bar, moving the sluggish, moist air. Bill and Joe are listening to the radio. The announcer is following the ballgame in Chicago.

"Oh!" Starkman groaned as the left-fielder easily snagged the ball and the game ended. "How'd he hand him such an easy out?"

"Mickey wasn't shining tonight," Purdy said.

"White Sox—how can the Yankees lose to the goddamn White Sox? You gotta work to do that." Joe sourly looked at his beer.

“Another?” Purdy asked. “Still got twenty minutes to closing.”

“No, thanks, too late for me. I’ll be awake all night.” Starkman groaned and stood up from the stool, wiped sweat from his forehead with a yellowed handkerchief. “Since I retired, I don’t sleep so good.”

“Nothing to do, huh?”

“The wife says I’m home too much.”

Purdy chuckled. “Told you.”

“Forty years she complained she never saw me. I retire, now she sees me too much.”

“My wife says she’ll kick me out the house if I ever try to retire.”

“Don’t do it, Bill, for the love of god. I don’t want to have to walk more than a block for my beer, and these new places, sheesh. How’s a old guy like me supposed to feel comfortable with music blaring and kids dancing?” Starkman stuck his face into the breeze from the swaying fan and sighed. “Hoo, hot night. Too early in the year for this.”

“Gonna be one hot summer,” Purdy agreed.

“We got a cabin we rent up north right in the Catskills. Pretty place, on a pond. Now I’m finally gonna get to enjoy it the whole summer, not just weekends. Probably head up there next week. I was thinking of going last weekend, but the holiday traffic...” He turned heavily toward the door. “See you, Bill.”

“Take it easy, Joe.”

“Oh yeah, will do.”

Starkman scratched his belly, sat his hat loosely on his head, and went out without looking at the young guy who’d been sitting quietly at the table for the past

hour. A burst of street traffic noise came in through the open door, died as it shut. The bar was quiet except for the murmur of the radio.

Purdy turned that off and started to wipe down the bar. He saw hanging from the stool the suit jacket that Starkman had forgotten. He smiled, dropped the bar towel and reached out to take the jacket so he could go call Starkman back. Then he suddenly saw his other customer standing at the bar in front of him.

“Oh, almost forgot you were—”

It was only then he noticed that the young man held two big revolvers pointed at his belly.

“Yes,” the young man said very calmly. “Don’t be afraid, stay calm. Don’t do anything stupid. I don’t want to hurt you, but I can.”

Purdy stared at the man’s face. Young guy, probably around twenty-five. Dark brown hair and eyes. Maybe 5’8”. Thin. Not good looking, not ugly. Nothing special. Except his big hands held two great big guns.

“Quit trying to memorize me, give me the cash in the register.”

At that moment the street door opened and Joe Starkman entered. “Hey, I forgot my jacket, it’s so damn hot—”

The armed man turned fast and fired once. Joe Starkman gave a short cry and fell to the floor in a heap. The door stayed half-open, caught by one of the fallen man’s feet.

The armed man stared for a moment. He put the revolver that he’d fired into a pocket—his hand scarcely trembled—and turned back to Purdy. His face showed no expression.

“Okay, the money. Only the bills, don’t mess with the coins.”

The calmness of that voice, despite the fierce violence just done, cast a sort of spell over Purdy. He opened the register without a word and took out a handful of bills. He handed them over to the young man, his hand steady.

The guy took the cash, looked at it. “You got a safe?”

Purdy shook his head. “I take the money home every night.”

The guy looked again at the bills. “That’s it?”

“Sunday night.”

The guy shrugged. He moved backwards towards the door.

“Don’t call the cops for two minutes,” he said. “G’night.” He turned, looked for another second at the man who lay twisted on the floor, stepped over the fat body, and disappeared through the door.

Purdy didn’t move for an instant. Then he shook his head, rushed around the bar to the door. He looked carefully out to the street in both directions—there was a woman a block away walking a dog. Nobody else, for a wonder.

He squatted next to Starkman, grabbed his shoulders, shook him and turned him over. Starkman was a big guy, it took effort.

Starkman gasped and breathed, ssss.

“Joe, you okay?”

Starkman opened his mouth. Nothing came out.

“Don’t worry, we’ll get you taken care of. I’ll get an ambulance.”

Purdy ran to the bar, grabbed the phone. God damn everything, it’d been such a nice, quiet night.

2

STUPID OLD MAN! Why'd he have to come back?

Robert Otano moved quickly but not too quickly along 19th Street towards Broadway. He silently counted: his fortieth robbery. A good, round number. The first robbery had been almost a year before, at a supermarket on First Avenue. He always did it the same way: find a little store or bar or cafe, wait till no one else is around, show the revolvers, speak calmly. The people always handed over the money without making trouble. Tonight was the first time he'd had to fire a gun.

Stupid old man surprised me. I didn't mean to shoot him. Reflex. It was a good shot, anyway, right in the gut. Of course, the old guy had a big enough gut, wasn't easy to miss. Why'd he have to come back? I didn't mean to shoot him. He surprised me.

Robert stopped under a streetlight, drew out the wad of bills from his pocket. He noticed that his hands, though they were ice cold, were sweating.

No. Stick to business.

He shook his head forcefully, counted. Sixty-three bucks. Not much. But he didn't often get much more. He didn't even really want much more, though it meant having to pull such jobs more frequently. The cops don't get worked up about sixty bucks. Two or three hundred, they take notice of that.

But now they were going to notice. He'd shot somebody. Was the guy dead? Robert shook his head again, shoved the bills back into his pocket, started walking.

I had to. It's not my fault. He startled me.

Sixty dollars was enough to last a couple of weeks. He didn't need much. He didn't have any vices, never got drunk, never went after women. His mother had always said he was a good boy. A couple of years ago he'd driven a taxi, up till the accident. He couldn't afford a new cab, and anyway, he didn't like driving anymore. Once after the the accident he'd tried driving the cab of a buddy who was off sick. But when he sat at the wheel, his big hands shook and he breathed too fast. That bothered him. He'd never been afraid to drive, he was always cool, even in the worst traffic, even going over the bridges. He was proud of his calmness. Even during the accident—it was the other driver's fault, he'd sped through the intersection trying to make the light and smashed into the cab, then the car coming from behind rear-ended him—even then he'd stayed calm. Even when the ambulance showed up and the medics took out the passenger, even when he saw that the passenger's head was smashed in and his arm cut clean off the shoulder, he'd stayed calm. He wasn't hurt badly himself, just a bruised chest where he'd slammed into the wheel; he carried a black-and-

blue circle there for almost a month. Weird. Just chance, pure chance, that he wasn't as dead as the poor schmuck in the back seat. But when he'd sat at the wheel of his buddy's cab, he couldn't keep his hands still, couldn't even pull out of the parking lot.

After that he couldn't stay at home. His mother, his sisters, all of them griping at him. When you going back to work? How we pay the rent if you don't work? He moved out to a boarding house, and that made his mother moan at him even more, how can you move out and leave us here to make do on our own? Do you think your papa would let you do that? But he'd moved out anyway. He'd looked for work, some other kind of work, any kind of work. No luck there. He'd get a job, pitching crates in the meat district or swabbing floors in a warehouse or even, once, washing dishes in a classy restaurant in midtown. But his hands wouldn't stop shaking. He'd drop things, break dishes. And he wasn't used to taking orders, he'd been driving a cab too long. The boss would yell at him, "Take this, grab hold o' that, get your ass over here and give me a hand." He never lasted more than three days. He moved to a cheaper boarding house. More lousy jobs that he couldn't keep, he'd have to move again. He'd already forgotten how many times he'd moved.

Finally he bought two revolvers from a friend of a friend from New Jersey, a fellow who didn't ask any questions as to why he wanted two guns. He handed over the last of his money and took them from the guy. They were cold and heavy and solid in his grip. When he held them, his hands didn't shake.

That same night he went to the supermarket on First Avenue. That old Greek, he wanted to holler, to fight,

Robert knew it, he could see it in the old man's hard scowl. But Robert, almost inspired, said calmly, as if he'd rehearsed—he hadn't thought about it before, hadn't thought anything—"Don't get worked up, I won't hurt you. It's only money, right? Don't make me shoot you for a few bucks." He said it automatically. He even smiled, just a little. And the old Greek slowly handed over the money, fifty dollars. Robert took it and said, "Thanks," and disappeared into the night.

Robert realized he had a sort of talent for this. He wasn't exactly proud of it, but he was glad of it. It worked. And it had worked just fine, till now.

Robert walked to Park Avenue and entered the subway. He rode down to Spring Street. Now it was almost one in the morning. He walked to Ludlow Street, entered his current SRO hotel, climbed the stairs to the fourth floor. Putting his key in the lock, he heard a soft *tump* from inside and smiled. When he opened the door, his little dog greeted him standing on his back legs, the tail and rear end frantically swinging back and forth.

"Hey, Dino," he said, and squatted down, petted the dog, who scratched at his chest with his paws and licked, trying to reach his face. "You miss me? Huh? I know, it's late. Were you a good boy? Good! Come on, we'll go out right away. Come on."

Robert took the leash that hung on the door knob, clicked it onto the dog's collar. Suddenly he grabbed the dog up and held him tight, inhaled the scent of his ash-blond fur.

Then he led him out of the room, down the stairs, outside into the sticky air. At the bottom of the steps the little dog immediately hiked his leg.

“Good dog,” Robert said. “You’re such a good boy.
Let’s go.” They started to walk.

3

DETECTIVE ED BENJAMIN WAS TIRED. It was nine o'clock in the morning, he'd been working since four on the robbery and shooting, and he was again questioning Purdy, who'd had less than a good night's sleep.

"He was quiet," Purdy said. "He ordered a beer or two, no, just one. Sat at a table listening to the game on the radio, I thought. Never said much. I don't bother my customers if they don't want to be bothered."

"Around five-eight," Benjamin confirmed.

"Yeah."

"Dark hair."

"Uh-huh."

"Black? Brown?"

"Oh, brown. I guess. See, he wasn't the kind of guy you notice. Just a young guy, like anybody."

"No beard, no mustache."

"No. Little bit of stubble, but it was almost midnight. Really, I only noticed the guns."

"I'm sure you did."

The room held more than ten desks, all but one with an officer talking on the telephone, questioning someone, typing up a report, or chatting and drinking bad coffee.

Benjamin turned to his colleague, Det. Charles Holstead. "Gotta be the same guy."

Holstead nodded. "I knew that three hours ago. The two revolvers clinches it."

"The two revolvers?" Purdy asked.

Benjamin struck a match and lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply, spit a cloud of smoke into the stale air of the office. "He's pulled a number of jobs over the last year or so. Always the same approach: waits till it's late, till there's nobody around, always acts real calm, and always the two revolvers. One gun, some folks'd put up a fight, think they could take him. Two, nobody puts up a fight. He never hits the busy places, the high-tone places ... sorry. You know what I mean."

Purdy nodded sourly. "I got no ego. I like having a neighborhood bar."

Benjamin smiled. "The expensive joints. So he never gets away with much money, usually no more than a hundred bucks. He'd get more if he had a regular job, but these bastards don't think that way."

"Always knew he'd wind up shooting someone," Holstead said. "You don't carry two revolvers around without using them, eventually."

"Well, then, who is he?" Purdy asked.

Benjamin shrugged. "Still no i.d. We finally got good fingerprints from that beer he had at your place, but I'd lay ten to one he doesn't have a history with us. He's probably never been arrested, at least in New York, or since he was a kid, anyway. Probably an amateur."

Holstead chuckled cynically. "Some amateur!"

"He's not stupid," Benjamin agreed. "He's not greedy. He knows we don't have the manpower for these little jobs. But now this isn't a little job."

Purdy shook his head. "Joe's a good guy, a good customer. He's been coming in almost since I opened, that's more than twenty years ago now. I hope he comes through okay. He'll have some story to tell his grandkids."

Benjamin sighed and rubbed his eyes. "It probably won't lead to anything, but I gotta ask, can you look through some mugshots for us?"

"Sure I can. But I've got to open the bar at eleven."

"That's all right, it won't take long. I know you want to help as much as you can. Chuck, take Mr. Purdy—" His telephone rang. He picked it up. "Benjamin."

Purdy and Holstead stood up and headed toward the door.

Benjamin listened. "What time?" He listened. "Okay. Send the medical report up to me. Is his wife there? Good, one less thing for me to have to deal with." He hung up, turned and called out to Holstead, who was going through the door, "Chuck!"

Holstead stopped, turned. "Yeah?"

"It's not just a robbery and assault now."

"What's happened?"

"Starkman just died."

Purdy breathed in sharply.

"Perforated intestine, heart attack, multiple organ failure."

Purdy blinked. "He was going up to the country this weekend."

“Well, now it’s murder,” said Holstead. He sighed. “Come on, Mr. Purdy, let’s look at some pictures.” He led the blinking Bill Purdy out of the room.

Benjamin rubbed his eyes again, then hit the desk with his fist. No more little robberies not worth the effort. Now it was murder. He’d get some real back-up from the department, if the chief didn’t transfer the case to homicide. He hoped he could stay on the case, now. They’d give him at least two extra men, maybe he could finally get something done.

He picked up the receiver, dialed, waited. “Chief? Benjamin. That robbery last night’s turned into homicide. Yeah, the poor guy bought it. Ten minutes ago. No, still no identification, we evidently don’t have a file on him, but the bar owner’s looking through mug shots just in case. We’ll need at least two men, Holstead and I can’t visit every bar and store in Manhattan by ourselves. Yeah, we’ve got a description, not much better than any of the others. The guy’s obviously nothing special, except for the two revolvers. Well, he knows what he’s doing, he knows two big guns make a real impact and the people he’s sticking up won’t try anything. But this time he screwed up. Yes? I’d really like to stay on this one, chief, I’ve been working on it a good year, it’s starting to feel personal. Thanks, Chief. Can you get me...? Well, one’s better than nothing. I’ll use Barmun, he’s eager to get ahead, he’ll keep his eyes open. Great. Thanks.”

Holstead came back into the office.

“He’s looking?”

Holstead nodded. “Pretty well useless.”

"I know. The guy's an amateur, he won't have a record."

"Not an amateur any more." Holstead sat down, took up his cold cup of coffee. "Bad luck for the old guy."

"And just retired. What a joke."

"I think about that a lot," Holstead said. "You always hear that about old cops, but you don't expect it with garment workers. D'you talk to the chief?"

"Oh yeah."

"And he wants to palm this off to homicide."

"Oh yeah. But I won this hand." Benjamin stubbed out his cigarette. "He's giving us one man."

"Just one?"

"Better than nothing. Barmun."

Holstead thought a second, nodded. "Good enough. He's a worker, not lazy."

"We'll give him the description, he can start going through the Village, every store and bar, to warn them. Maybe he'll stumble on somebody who remembers this character."

"Not a memorable character."

"He must visit the places before he knocks them up. He seems to plan pretty carefully, knows when they'll be empty, knows if the owner has a gun or not, if there's any other employees. Somebody might remember a quiet fellow all by himself who's paying a lot of attention. Anyway, we can warn them."

Holstead stared at the ceiling. "I've been thinking, why not bring in the sketch artist? If we got two or three of the victims in, couldn't they fill in some of the gaps? One remembers his eyes, another that he's got a scar or a mole..."

Benjamin raised an eyebrow and smiled crookedly. "Maybe, though none of them remembered much. Or they might influence each other and we end up with a sketch of Bozo the Clown. I don't trust these sketches, they never seem to match up. Remember the Simon case? They all said he was a black guy, but he'd just been to Florida."

Holstead laughed. "Just an idea."

"Well, it's not a bad one, whatever lousy luck I've had with them. Before Purdy leaves, we'll ask him if he'll come back. He obviously liked Starkman, he'll want to help. And we'll contact, oh, the three last victims. Any further back, they probably don't remember so well. That bar on Varick was the last before this, right?"

"Yeah. Hmm, four weeks ago. And before that the bookstore on Fourth Avenue."

"A bookstore. That was almost two months ago. See the pattern?"

Holstead nodded. "Whenever he needs to make rent."

Benjamin disgustedly shook his head. "He sure isn't greedy. A couple of bigger jobs and he could lay low for months, but he's too smart, never tries any place where he could make some real dough."

"Too smart to know he's being stupid. Carrying two guns."

"It's not a bad stall."

"But sooner or later someone's definitely gonna get shot."

"And did. He probably thought everything was going like always, but Starkman comes back for his coat, surprises the son of a bitch. The way Purdy says

he turned and fired right away ... he's not as calm as he comes off." He turned to his typewriter. "I'm still working on that robbery at the restaurant on 14th, and you haven't finished questioning the druggie, have you?"

"He's getting good and nervous in the tank, starting to shake. I'll let him stew another hour."

"Good. I'll clean up this description, send it out, then get Barmun up here and start him visiting the bars and shops. Don't forget to ask Purdy before you let him go."

"Yup." Holstead turned to his own desk and lifted the receiver of his phone, tucked it into the fold under his double chin.

Benjamin scrolled in a new form, evened up the edges, started to type.

Not much chance of finding the bastard, he thought. With these loners, we'll just have to hope we get lucky, or he screws up again. At least until he tries it again.

4

Robert lay on his bed and stared at the ceiling while the Everly Brothers softly came out of his transistor radio. Dino lay next to him on his back, his hind legs stretched out, enjoying the hand that gently caressed his stomach.

After two weeks there was only eleven dollars and seventy-two cents left from the job on 19th. Twenty dollars a week for the room, food for him and the dog, and neither ate much. "It's good you're a little guy, Dino," Robert said. The dog lazily wagged his tail twice. Robert chuckled.

Now Bobby Rydell was singing "Volare".

"Yeah, yeah," Robert said. "Time to fly." He heaved himself up.

Dino quickly rolled over and watched Robert.

"Come on. Let's go see Mama."

Dino stood up, wagged his tail. Robert took his flat wallet, shoved it into his back pocket, turned off the radio, pulled the collar over Dino's head and put on the leash. They went out.

The morning was already steaming, summer had come early to grab the city with both sweating hands. Dino panted and eagerly sniffed the garbage outside the hotel, peed, dragged Robert along the well-known route. They strolled north to Delancey, then west to Forsyth—very slowly through Sara Roosevelt Park, Dino liked to crap on the dry brown grass there—then south again to Hester. Robert still had his key. They went into the apartment building, he punched the elevator button, waited, they entered and went up to the sixth floor.

He knocked on the door and went in. “Mama?”

Nobody answered. He heard water running. He closed the door, called again, “Mama.”

“Huh?” from inside. “Berto?”

“Yeah, mama, it’s me.”

Anna Otano came out of the bathroom. Her thick arms were bare to the shoulder, the hands were red and swollen and wet and dripping. She started to hug him, stopped herself, laughed. “I was washing some things.” She dried her hands on her apron and hugged Robert again. “Oh,” she cried, “you’re so skinny!”

“You always say that.” He sniffed the odor of her hair, a mix of perfumed soap and rancid olive oil. He kissed her cheek. “Why are you washing here instead of the laundry?”

“Just a few things. The machines, they cost too much. Oh, you brought the dog.” She gently pushed Dino away, who was trying to stand on her leg for a pet.

Robert picked up Dino and held him and kissed him.

“Where’ve you been so long, ’Berto? Did you find work?”

"I work."

"Where?"

"Here and there."

"You come here in the middle of the day, you're not working. You're getting lazy. I don't understand you, you always used to work so hard, I had to tell you not to work so hard. What are you living on? What do you do all day long? You're not drinking, are you? Uncle Vinny drank and he died on the street."

"No, mama, I don't drink." He bent down and put Dino on the worn carpet. The dog twisted around him and wagged his tail.

"How are you getting by? You're too skinny. Come on." She pushed past him and went to the kitchen.

He followed her and the good smell from the stove, where a pot full of tomatoes and garlic was bubbling.

"I get some odd jobs here and there. I'm doing okay."

"Doing okay. Huh. Well, sit down, I'll get you something." She opened the refrigerator. "You shouldn't stay away so long, I worry about you. I can't help it. I don't understand why you don't come home. You're being stupid. You come back home, you save your money, you help us out, we'd all be better off. Your papa's pension and the Social Security, they don't go so far, you know." She pulled out a packet of waxed paper. "I still got some sausage from yesterday, Sandra didn't eat at home. I'll fry it up for you."

Robert didn't say anything.

"The sauce isn't ready yet, but it'll be good enough for lunch." She took a skillet and a match, lit another of the burners, put a big spoonful of lard in the skillet. It rapidly started to sputter.

"Where was Sandra last night?"

“She had a date.”

The sausage, salted and peppered, was put into the skillet with a loud crackle. Dino, who lay under the table at Robert’s feet, opened his mouth and panted hopefully.

Robert tore a piece of bread off the loaf in a paper sack on the table, chewed. “Who?”

“What, you don’t live at home but you’re interested in who your sister’s seeing?” Anna lifted the lid of the big pot. The puff of garlic-scented steam filled the room. “He’s a boy from school, very polite. Johnny is his first name, I can’t pronounce his last name. He’s Czech.”

“A Czech?”

“But he’s a good Catholic. The family lives on the next block, so he’s not like a stranger. Lots of foreigners moving into the neighborhood.”

“Hmm.”

“Well, nowadays the girls find their own friends. He’s a good-looking boy, very nice, always calls me Mrs. Otano. ’Berto, I was talking with Mrs. Rosetto day before yesterday. Her husband Frank said they still need drivers at your old company. You know they’d take—”

“How’s Elena?”

“You’re so stupid. You could go right back at your old pay. Your license is still good. We need a new refrigerator, you hear the noise this one’s making?”

“Elena.”

Anna stirred the pot of sauce, tasted, shook in some more oregano. “It needs another hour. Huh.” She shrugged, put the lid back on the pot. “The baby’s bothering her, she’s sick every morning, even worse

than when she was pregnant with Tina. And Freddie's working nights now. I don't like her being alone at night. Pregnant, with a one-year-old baby... But, 'Berto, why don't you move back home?" She sat at the table across from him, reached for his hand. "You shouldn't be paying for some lousy little room in some dirty hole where they probably got bedbugs and fleas or who knows what, and right here you can have your own bed and live nice and not waste your money, and then I know you'd get your old job back. Frank Rosetto said they'd take you back in a minute." He pulled his hand away. She stood up again. "No one blames you for that accident, it wasn't your fault, they'd be happy to have you come back, you was always a good driver..."

The chatter continued while she cooked and while they ate. The sausage was drowned in tasty sauce and a fistful of grated cheese. Robert ate eagerly and gave bits of sausage to Dino.

Anne frowned, looking in the paper bag. "We're going to need some more bread for supper."

Robert thought a moment, reached back and pulled out his flat wallet. "Here."

He drew out his last ten-dollar bill and put it on the table.

She glanced at the near empty wallet. "Can you spare it?"

"Yeah, mama, I'm okay."

"I won't pretend it don't come in handy."

She washed the plates and flatware while Robert wandered into the living room, sat at the open window. A warm breeze came in through the chintz curtains. Dino jumped up into his lap. They stayed that

way while Anna talked and complained and worked in the kitchen. A little after four o'clock the front door opened and the younger daughter, Sandra, entered. He heard her kiss their mama and say, "Oh, that smells so good."

"You could've had it last night," Anna said. "It wouldn't hurt you to invite your friend for supper."

"I don't think he's ready for that." Sandra laughed passing the living room on her way to her bedroom, and saw Robert.

"Well, look who's shown up. And about time, too."

"Hey, Sandy."

Dino jumped down from his lap and ran to Sandra, who picked him up for a hug. She looked closely at Robert.

"You look lousy."

"Thanks."

"Paying a visit in the middle of the day. Obviously somebody was hungry."

Robert didn't answer.

"And obviously not working. I can't understand such laziness. There are plenty of jobs, god knows. A perfectly healthy guy like you sitting around on his butt—"

"Hey, watch your mouth. Is that Czech boy teaching you to talk like that?"

Sandra laughed happily.

"Who is this Johnny kid?"

She rolled her eyes. "Mama can't keep her mouth shut."

"Who is he?"

"Just a friend. But kind of cute."

"A Czech," said Robert. "I don't like you having dates with some joker I don't know."

"How could you know him? You don't live here. You can't order me around, you don't got the right."

"If papa was still here, he'd say I'm your brother, I got a right—"

"Oh, you got a right, huh? You don't live here. You don't even have a job," she said sharply. "You're not the king of this dump." She put Dino down and turned. "I do what I want. *I* work for my money and *I* help keep a roof over our heads. I don't answer to strangers."

"I help," Robert grumbled. "Are you dining in tonight, milady?" he asked.

"Of course."

"No date?"

She smiled nastily. "Not till Friday." She flounced away.

Robert stayed sitting for a few minutes.

He heard his sister's voice from the bathroom. "What a mess! Mama!"

Anne called from the kitchen, "Oh, I forgot!"

"Too busy taking care of the big baby who decided to bless us with his presence!"

Robert suddenly stood and walked towards the apartment door.

"Mama, I gotta go."

Anna appeared at the door of the kitchen, spoon in one hand and the dripping pot lid in the other. "She made you mad, I guess. Don't pay any attention to her, 'Berto, she's getting too big for herself. She needs her brother to watch out for her."

"Come on, Dino."

“Where you going?”

He shrugged.

“Stay for supper, 'Berto. Go and buy some more bread, we'll have spaghetti and a nice salad.”

“I don't have—” He suddenly bent down to Dino and attached the leash. “I gotta go.”

“Well, let me fix you a plate to take.”

“No, mama, I gotta go ... I gotta help a friend.”

“Is it a job? Are you getting paid?”

Robert gave her a peck on the cheek and turned away. “Bye, mama.”

“'Berto, I want you to talk to Frank Rosetto about that job. It's been over a year, 'Berto, you got no reason to still be worked up, it wasn't your fault.”

Robert had already opened the door. “Bye, mama. Dino, come.”

They went fast down the five flights of stairs, came out of the stifling apartment building into the stifling heat of the New York City streets. People filled the sidewalks, it was almost five o'clock, everybody was heading home from their jobs. Robert breathed in the sweat-drenched air.

For several hours Robert and Dino wandered the narrow streets of the Lower East Side. They went back to the park. Robert sat on a bench and watched the people going by; the young women and the way their skirts jumped and waved as they walked; the kids running, bicycling, playing basketball; the men wearing suits, ties loosened, fanning themselves with their hats. Dino lay quietly on the grass at his feet, happy to be outside and watching the world.

Once Robert stood, marched across the street to a magazine stand to buy cigarettes, remembered that he

only had one dollar left in his wallet, and when would there be more? He went back slowly to the park, sat down. Dino sat, looked up at him, wagged his tail. Two squirrels appeared, one chased the other around the fenced trunk of a small tree. Dino jumped up and barked. The squirrels stopped, looked at him, quickly skittered up the tree into the branches. Dino contentedly sat again.

Night came. Robert suddenly stood up, determined, started walking fast. Dino ran behind him. They came to the SRO hotel, climbed the front steps, went in through the door, climbed the four flights to the rented room. Robert took off Dino's leash. "Here, come on, Dino," he slapped the bed, "come on up." Dino jumped onto the bed, sat, attentively watched while Robert went to the dresser, opened the top drawer, took out his two revolvers. He opened the cylinder of one of them, put a bullet into the empty chamber, closed it again. Despite the heat, he put on a sport coat and slid the two revolvers into the pockets, adjusted the hang of the jacket so the bulges weren't too evident.

He petted Dino's head, said, "Now, you had a good long walk, so you stay put, be a good boy, and don't bark." And he went out.

5

ROBERT HAD BEEN STUDYING the Dew Drop Inn at 23rd and Tenth for a few weeks, he knew there was a lot of money there, it was a busy place, but always too busy, too full of noisy people. He entered just after eight o'clock and found it packed. Almost every table was taken, the bar was crowded, two waiters and the bartender busy as hell. The stink of french fries and beer and cigarettes filled the room, a gray cloud hung under the ceiling. Robert stood at the door, looked around as if he were searching for a friend, turned and left. He stood on the sidewalk for more than a minute, turned east, wandered for an hour. He looked through the window of a small drugstore: empty enough, probably next to nothing in the register, but he could use whatever there was. He went in. A little bell tinkled. He felt his heart beat more rapidly and his skin went cold. His left hand in the jacket pocket held one of the revolvers tightly. He forced himself to breathe deeply and slowly.

He looked at the druggist, an old man, bald, short, a silvery sheen to his dry skin. He wouldn't be a problem. But Robert's heart raced, he felt a line of sweat trickle down his side, tickling, cold enough to make him shiver.

The druggist looked up at him. Robert turned and hurried back out to the street.

On the sidewalk he wiped a hand across his face. *No*, he said to himself. *You don't get to be afraid. Not this time.* He couldn't afford another fear like what happened after the accident. *You're in charge. Okay, you shot somebody. It was bound to happen to somebody, that's what guns are for. You don't have to like it, but it's done. It doesn't have to happen again.*

He clutched the revolver in his pocket, rubbed the cold metal until it was as warm as his own flesh. His breath slowed, the sweat under his arms dried. He pulled the sticky cotton of his shirt away from his skin. He started to walk aimlessly. He walked for quite a while.

Got to do something. Got to do this. He walked back to Tenth Avenue, to the Dew Drop Inn, and entered.

Now it was almost ten-thirty. Still too many people, but a few more empty tables now. Music, half-muffled under the clatter of dishes and chatter of customers, was blaring from the jukebox, Bobby Darin singing "Beyond the Sea." The gray, thick cloud almost hid the stamped-tin ceiling. One of the waiters, finally able to take a break, was leaning on the bar and chatting with the bartender, who was lining up a row of beers.

Robert found an empty table in a back corner, sat down. The waiter at the bar noticed him, came over. "What can I get you?"

“Miller,” Robert quietly said.

“By yourself?”

“Look like it?”

The waiter was young enough to take that the way it was meant. “There’s room at the bar. We might need the table.”

“I’m waiting for a friend.”

The waiter nodded, went to the bar, said something to the bartender, who opened a bottle and slid it to the waiter. The waiter put it on a tray with a napkin and carried it to Robert, put it down with a little flourish.

Robert thanked him with a nod, lifted the bottle and drank. The waiter returned to the bar. He could see the bartender was watching him. The bartender said something to the waiter, who turned and looked at him again, shrugged.

He managed to make the beer last until 11:30. Customers left, customers entered. Nobody noticed the guy sitting alone in the corner who once in a while slowly lifted the Miller and took a very tiny sip of beer, now flat and warm as the air in the room. Robert watched the bartender, watched while he put more and more money into the register as customers came and went. Once in a while the waiter came back, asked, “Ready for another?” Each time Robert smiled, shook his head. “Not just yet.”

“Guess your friend isn’t gonna show.”

“He’s not real good with clocks.”

The waiter shrugged and went back to customers who’d leave a better tip. Soon the second waiter, a paunchy guy with some gray at the temples, disappeared into the back, came out a few minutes later minus his apron, carrying a sport coat, a straw

pork pie on the back of his head. He talked to the bartender for a few minutes, waved at the other waiter, and left.

Now, just before midnight, Robert stood up, walked to the bar, to the bartender. Half the tables still held customers, but only one couple still sat at the bar, at the far end.

“Hey, buddy.”

The bartender looked up. He was short, his brilliantined hair was slicked straight back from his short forehead. His eyes were brown and small, his smile was automatic and without feeling. “Yes, sir?”

Robert put his hands into his pockets as if he were searching for his wallet. The bartender opened his mouth to say what he owed.

Robert drew out the two revolvers, carefully, holding them tight to his body so only the bartender could see them, and very softly said, “Use your brain and don’t get nervous. See how calm I am? We’ll do this real quiet, nobody needs to know anything’s happening, okay? I don’t want to kill you, but you’re going to find yourself with a hole in your gut if you move the wrong way.”

The bartender looked at the two big guns, looked at the very calm face of the man holding them. He nodded, once.

“Great. Be smart, hand over the money, nice and quiet. We don’t want to scare the customers.”

The bartender opened the register, pulled out two handfuls of bills.

“Yeah, just the bills. I’m not greedy.”

Robert put one revolver back in his pocket, took the cash with his left hand, a nice fat wad. He pushed it

into his pants pocket. "Thanks. Don't say anything. It's just money, right? Not worth the rest of your life. I'm going to leave now. G'night."

Robert slid the second revolver into his left pocket, holding it so the bartender could see it was still pointed at him. He slowly stepped backwards three paces, turned and calmly but quickly made his way to the door.

He'd just leaned forward to push open the door with his shoulder when a voice from a nearby table called, "Hey, Rob-o!"

Robert jumped, spun toward the table with eyes too wide. Three men were sitting there, one of them grinning and waving. He recognized the guy as someone he'd worked with at the cab company, Marty Powell.

"How you doin', buddy? Man, long time no see—"

Robert hit the door and ran out.

The bartender yelled out, "He just robbed us!"

Marty Powell looked around, confused. His two friends and the other customers fell quiet and stared at the bartender.

The waiter dropped a napkin-holder and raced to the door.

"Watch out, Pete, he's armed!" the bartender hollered.

The waiter was already through the door, looking both ways. Some passersby were staring behind them, he followed their looks, saw a shape running away. Without thinking, he ran after him.

Robert had always been fast. He ran faster now. At the corner he wasted a moment to look behind him, saw the white apron of the pursuing waiter. He

thought quickly, saw a taxi with its *Taxi* light on coming towards him, ran into the street right in front of it. The cabby hit the brakes and squealed to a stop. “Hey, asshole, what ya think ya doing, ya crazy—!”

“Help me, buddy!” Robert gasped.

“Get out the way!”

Robert babbled, “I was with my girlfriend and just found out she’s married and the crazy bastard’s coming for me, he’ll kill me!”

The cabby looked behind Robert, saw the waiter barreling toward them, arms wildly waving.

“Please!”

The cabby grinned. “Jump in, friend.”

Robert leaped into the taxi and the cabby hit the gas. The taxi groaned and shuddered and sped right for the waiter, who had to jump aside. He fell to the pavement next to the curb. The taxi raced around the corner, north onto Eighth Avenue. Robert let himself relax on the back seat.

The cabby laughed a horse’s laugh. “Ya see the guy? Splat! Man, he looked like he wanted to rip you a new one. Ya playin’ dangerous, fella.”

Robert made himself smile. “She was worth it.”

The cabby laughed even louder.

“But no more for me.”

“Where to, friend?”

“Drop me at 34th Street.”

The cabby started merrily whistling. Robert breathed deeply. His heart was pounding, but strong, filled with something like joy, like triumph. *Did it! Did it!*

Then he thought of Powell. That something like triumph immediately turned to ice. *Now they know my name.* He put one hand into his pocket and touched the

revolver there. He pulled the wad of bills out and furtively counted them in the darkness of the back seat of the taxi. Almost three hundred dollars. He didn't smile. He'd got a lot, too much. And now they knew his name.

He leaned forward, hissed at the cabby, "Right here, let me out here."

The cabby signaled, braked, pulled over to the curb.

"Dollar-ninety, friend."

Robert stepped out of the taxi, pulled a couple of singles off the wad and handed them to the cabby.

"Thanks, buddy, keep the change."

The cabby's mouth dropped open. "A dime?"

Robert had already turned and was ten yards away.

"A goddamn dime," growled the cabby. He yelled through the window, "I hope the next guy smashes ya face, asshole!" He slammed his foot down on the pedal and roared back into traffic.

6

THE DEW DROP INN WAS BLEAK AND SMELLY and the six men still there were ready to be anywhere else. Especially Marty Powell.

Marty Powell didn't like talking to cops, and Det. Benjamin wasn't the sort of man to jolly someone out of his nervousness.

Two hours had already been lost after the robbery at the Dew Drop Inn before anybody figured out it was Benjamin's case and he was awakened, and now the robber knew that the police had his name. If he fled the city, how could they ever catch him?

"But where's this Otano live?"

"I don't know, really," Powell answered again, pouting with fatigue. "I already told you. Probably with his mother, I guess. He's Italian, right? He always talked about his mother. Ask the boss, they'd have his paperwork in the office, wouldn't they? It's late, I got to get some sleep, I got to start my shift at seven."

"Just a few more questions, please, Mr. Powell." Benjamin had to suppress his own weariness and

irritation. Holstead was already at the Rockwell Taxi Service to question the owner about their former employee. Barmun was trying to wake up someone at the Taxi & Limousine Commission to see if they could get a photo of Otano from their files. “Try to understand, your friend Otano probably killed somebody, that’s why we’re keeping you. It’s important.”

Powell shook his head, no. “I can’t believe Rob’d kill anybody.”

“He’s armed, you know that.”

“I didn’t see any guns.”

Benjamin sighed with frustration. “The bartender saw them, big as life. And if he’s the same guy—which we are practically sure of—he’s already used them, and that poor guy’s dead. When did you last see him? Before tonight, I mean.”

“I don’t know. I don’t remember. After the accident. But before he quit driving. No, wait, I’m wrong, I saw him once after that.”

“Tell me about that accident.”

“It was just an accident. Some idiot ran a red light and hit Rob’s cab, then he got rear-ended. The fare died. Pretty nasty, as I heard it. From the other guys, Rob never talked about it. But it wasn’t Rob’s fault. He was damned lucky he didn’t get killed himself.”

“But he quit.”

“He had the shakes afterwards. Can’t blame him for that, can you? He was shook up, who wouldn’t be? Everybody takes it different. Some guys get shook. But it wasn’t his fault.”

Det. Yancek was questioning the waiter and bartender at another table.

“Why’d you run after him? You knew the guy was armed.”

The waiter shrugged, cocky. “Pure reflex. I didn’t think, I just chased him.”

“And scared the crap out of me,” said the bartender. “I don’t want to see anybody get shot. I told you I thought there was something wrong with the guy, the way he sat there so long, nursing a beer.” His hair hung in a plastic, sheened curl on his big forehead now.

“But, man, could that guy run!” the waiter went on. “I used to run, in school, you know, and I got a few medals, but I never saw anybody run as fast as him, not even at the meets.”

“And you didn’t get the cab number.”

“When a cab’s coming right at you, you don’t notice numbers. I saw the driver’s face, though, let me tell you, I could definitely recognize him again. He was grinning, the prick, coming right at me and grinning.”

“We’re contacting all the cab companies, we’ll call you in if we get lucky.”

“But you’ve got his name now, haven’t you?” said the bartender. “The robber’s, I mean.” He pointed a thumb towards Powell. “Ought to be easy enough to find him. I just knew he was the guy that cop was talking about the other day....”

“You should have called it in, if you thought it was him,” Yancek scowled.

“Well, you can’t be sure, can you?” the bartender said defensively. “You don’t want to get an innocent guy in trouble, do you? I see a million guys like that every night, how could I be sure? Even though he sat there so long. We don’t want cops coming in making

trouble, especially if it's the wrong guy. Gives the place a bad rep."

"Anyway," said the waiter, "you've got his name."

"We'll get him," Yancek muttered. "But this guy's smart. He knows now that he's been recognized, that we got his name. He'll get out of the City, and then we're screwed. That's why we got to work fast."

"Sitting there with one beer, over an hour," the bartender said again, "And he never even paid!"

"Hey, I tried to get him to go to the bar," whined the waiter. "But if they're at a table, you got to do a check!"

Yancek snorted.

"You're the only one we've found so far that knew him," Benjamin explained to Powell. "We've got to know how he thinks so we can get to him before he disappears, or commits another murder. Can you remember anything about him? Habits? Did he mention a girlfriend, or any other friends?"

Powell rubbed his cheeks. "I don't know. He didn't talk much about himself. He did mention his mother sometimes. A lot. Oh, yeah, and his sisters. He's got a couple of sisters, I remember. No, he never mentioned a girlfriend. He kept to himself. He was friendly enough, he'd hang out sometimes, came out with us once or twice for a beer after the shift. I only saw him the one time after he quit, until tonight."

"Tell me about that again. Where'd you see him?"

"Sheesh, that was close to a year ago, I don't remember! Somewhere in midtown. I dropped off a fare, I was cruising around, I saw him on the sidewalk. I pulled over and we talked for a couple minutes."

"About what?"

"I don't remember! I guess I asked him what he was doing, where he was working."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing. Said he worked some different jobs, he was doing okay. He asked me about my wife, I remember. Just being friendly. He walked off, I drove off, that was it. I didn't see him again until tonight, never even gave him a thought. I never would've thought he'd be pulling shit like this...."

Another detective came up to Benjamin. "I got some decent fingerprints from that Miller bottle and the table, if it matters."

Benjamin sighed. "Every little bit helps. Confirm that they match the ones from the Starkman murder, that'll speed up whatever warrants we'll need. Okay, Mr. Powell, I'll let you go. Thanks for all your help."

Powell stood up stiffly, twisted his torso till his spine cracked. "About time." He shook his head. "Sorry. It's too damned late, and I guess I'm kinda in shock."

"I don't blame you. You got more than you expected when you saw your old friend. If you remember anything else, please call. Here's my card." He pulled a creased card from his pocket. "Call anytime, day, night, it doesn't matter. If you'll come by the station sometime tomorrow, I'll have a report ready for you to read over and sign. We'll be very grateful," he added as Powell grunted. "And when we catch Otano, we might call to ask you to identify him."

"Seems to me you've got plenty of people who can do that now."

"Judges like us to overdo it when it comes to murder."

"Okay, okay. If I can."

“When you’ve had some rest you might think of something else that’d be useful. After the shock wears off. Anything will help.”

“Okay, okay.” He gave a half-smile. “Don’t mind me, I’m a shit when I get no sleep. Ask my wife. Good luck.” Powell dragged himself out of the room.

Benjamin stood up and stretched. “Take whatever you’ve got up to the office,” he said to the detective.

The detective nodded and left the bar.

Benjamin went to the table where Yancek and the two employees sat. “You got everything, Yancek?”

“Just about finished.” Yancek said to the bartender and waiter, “You’ll come to the station tomorrow to complete your statements, all right?”

“You bet,” said the bartender eagerly.

“Sorry to have kept you so long,” Benjamin said.

“Oh, I couldn’t sleep,” said the bartender. “You don’t just go to bed when somebody sticks two huge guns in your face! But I’ll definitely be saying my prayers.”

The waiter laughed.

“That guy was a real pro, I gotta say,” the bartender went on. “I’ve been robbed before, a couple times, it comes with the territory, you know. But this guy. A real professional. So quiet! So calm! Imagine, pulling a stickup when the place is half full, customers everywhere, and nobody even noticed! Not even Pete here.”

The waiter nodded. “Not till you hollered.”

“A real pro.” The bartender wonderingly shook his head.

“We’ll let you get back to your lives now,” Yancek said, standing.

“Ah, the boss’ll probably show up any minute, he surely got my message by now. And I still got to clean up the place for the day shift.”

Just then the door opened and Holstead entered. He headed directly to Benjamin and Yancek.

“What’d you get, Holstead?” Benjamin asked.

“That old fart who works nights at the Rockwell company didn’t know anything, so he phoned his boss, and the boss wasn’t happy at all. But he finally showed up, pissed as hell, and dug out his old file on this Otano. They’d already put it in the storage room, and he’d already forgotten about Otano, or so he says. The home address is on Hester Street. He lives, or lived, with his family. I’ve already called the office, they’re sending a car to watch the building.”

“Good.”

“Oh, and we don’t have anything on Otano, I had them check the records.”

“I expected that. Well, let’s go.”

“He won’t be there.”

“Course not, but we’ll go anyway. He might not be as smart as we think, or he might be scared and looking for mama. We’ll call another car, we need at least four men, just in case he *is* there. He’s still armed and dangerous, probably more dangerous than even he ever thought he’d be. Yancek, buddy, you go type up these reports and then head home for some sleep, one of us needs to be rested and alert tomorrow.” He looked through the window at the lightening sky. “Or today. Come on, Holstead.”

The bartender grinned at the waiter. “Just like *Dragnet!*”

7

WALKING TO THE CAR, Benjamin looked thoughtful. "Something in this business doesn't coordinate."

Holstead smiled at the word. "Your college is showing."

"You know what I mean."

"Well, what is it?"

"I don't know. It's not like the other jobs this guy's pulled. He's always so careful, never takes a chance. He usually waits till nobody's around. But this time..." He opened the door of the police car. "Tonight he goes to a place that's packed. He hangs out awhile, sure, but not long enough. He pulls the job while the place is still busy. Doesn't make sense." He sat. "It's like he was daring himself, like he's got something to prove."

"You're getting all psychological. Let's roll."

"What's he trying to prove? To whom? Always before he picked the littlest dives, the cheapest shops, the places no one'd care if they got robbed. Now he hits a popular joint on a busy night... Powell said

Otano quit after that wreck, where the passenger was killed. Said he was scared, couldn't drive..."

"Let's roll."

Holstead was behind the wheel and started the engine. Benjamin slammed his door shut and they pulled out into the constant traffic of Manhattan.

"Heard anything from Barmun?"

"Not yet. Probably couldn't get hold of anyone."

"The departments ought to be connected some way..."

They sat quietly for a few minutes as they headed south.

"That Otano guy's afraid..." Benjamin muttered.

"Well, if he wasn't before, he sure as hell is now." Holstead turned the wheel and slid around a corner. "You read too much. Get your head out of those psych books. Guys like Otano don't have psychology. They're animals. You don't analyze a rabid dog, you shoot it."

"It could help find him." Benjamin slapped at his pockets, looking for cigarettes.

"We'll find him like we find most of these guys, either by going door-to-door, or somebody squeals on him, or sheer dumb luck. He's a thief, just another damned thief."

"A thief who was very careful not to make much noise, but then he shot somebody."

"Yeah," Holstead grunted. "He made a mistake, killed somebody. Now he had some bad luck, he got recognized. So he'll make more mistakes, he'll have more bad luck, and finally he'll do something so stupid maybe even we can find him."

Benjamin laughed around the cigarette, lit it.

The apartment house on Hester Street was almost completely dark, only the foyer and two windows on the street side were lit up. Holstead double-parked next to the unmarked police car that sat three buildings down from the front door. Benjamin rolled down the window on his side.

The officer at the wheel in the unmarked car gave a casual salute.

“Anything?” Benjamin asked.

“All quiet. Only nine people’ve gone in since we got here,” the officer answered. He glanced at a notebook in his hand. “Two women, man, wife and two kids. Three teenagers, looked drunk to me, they were laughing a lot. One of them asked me for a cigarette.” He chuckled. “I gave him a good scare.”

A patrol car appeared from around the corner, stopped behind Holstead’s car.

“No one matching the description you gave us,” said the officer.

“Figured as much. We’ll go in with these guys, you two stay here in the car, watch the door.” Benjamin got out and turned to the uniformed officers getting out of the patrol car. “We don’t expect he’s home, but keep your eyes open, he might surprise us. You two’ll come with us.”

They nodded. He and Holstead led them up to the building. They climbed the front steps, Benjamin found the buzzer for the superintendent.

After a long wait, the speaker crackled.

“What?”

“Police.”

Holstead heard a muffled curse.

“Who is it?”

“Let us in.”

“Oh, sure! Just ’cause you say you’re cops, I should let you in? What, you think I’m an idiot? You can just wait a minute.”

Holstead smiled grimly at Benjamin. They waited. After a couple of minutes a curtain moved aside and a round, middle-aged, balding head appeared. The curtain dropped. After another minute the buzzer sounded and Benjamin pushed open the front door. Stepping inside, they found the super standing barefoot in the lobby, in his underwear, his skin shiny with sweat. His goateed chin jutted out petulantly. He looked at the two uniformed officers, then the detectives.

“What’s going on? What you want here?”

Benjamin said, very politely, “Sorry to bother you, sir. There might be a criminal hiding on the premises.”

“What happened?”

“We have to search the building.” Benjamin gestured to the two uniformed officers, who quickly drew their guns, searched the lobby and went down the hall that led to it.

“What’s going on?” the super repeated.

“What do you know about the Otanos?”

“The Otanos?” He looked surprised. “They been here twenty years, longer, yeah, twenty-three, at least! What do you want with them?”

“Maybe nothing. What do you know about them?”

“Real good people. Never a bit of trouble with them. They keep everything nice, the kids never play loud music. Rent’s always right on time, and they sure ain’t rolling in dough since Nick died. Somebody’s led you wrong...”

The two officers reappeared, shook their heads.

"What apartment are they in?" Benjamin asked. "Six-F?"

Holstead nodded, the super said at the same time, "Six-F."

"Should we surprise them, or let 'em know we're coming?" Holstead asked.

Benjamin thought for a minute.

"You," he said to the officers, "go up by the stairs. Check the roof. If you don't find anybody, one of you come back down and wait on the seventh floor. The other come down and let us know, then go back up and wait on the fifth floor. We'll stay here watching the stairs till you give us the sign there's nobody, then we'll buzz them. Be careful. I don't want any heroics, understand? I don't want to scare the family, yet. They might be some help. Understand?"

The officers nodded and headed up the stairs.

"Hey," said the super, "I don't like this! Cops running around with guns in the house! Somebody's gonna get hurt! What are you doing, anyway? The Otanos is good people, they—"

"Nobody's gonna get hurt if we can help it," Holstead said. "Calm down."

"Middle of the night, cops running around with guns, and you want I should calm down!"

The second officer re-appeared on the staircase, shook his head, then started back up.

Benjamin said to Holstead, "We'll give him a minute, then we'll buzz upstairs. If he's there, he'll make a run for it and we'll have him."

They counted sixty.

Benjamin stepped out the front door, hit the buzzer for 6-F. He had to punch the button three times before a sleepy voice finally answered. “Wha-hmm?”

“Robert Otano,” Benjamin said clearly.

“What? Who are you?” It was the voice of a young woman.

Holstead muttered to Benjamin, “One of the sisters.”

Benjamin nodded. “Police. We’re looking for Robert Otano.”

The super breathed in sharply. “Hey, Robbie don’t even live here anymore—”

Holstead hissed, “Ssh!”

There was a long silence.

“Are you there?” Benjamin asked.

Another voice came out of the speaker, a deeper, older voice, heavy with sleep but shaking with fear.

“Hello? Who’s this?”

“Mrs. Otano?”

“Yes?”

“Police. We’re looking for your son.”

“Roberto? What?”

“We’re from the police,” Benjamin said patiently.

Holstead was alertly watching the inside staircase.

“...Roberto? He’s not here.”

“I told you—” said the super.

Benjamin glanced at Holstead. Holstead shook his head. Nothing.

Benjamin nodded. “Mrs. Otano, we need to speak with you.”

“You’re the police?” The voice was shaking.

“Yes, Mrs. Otano. The police.”

Another long silence. Finally the buzzer for the door sounded.

“Thanks for your help,” Holstead said to the super. “Sorry we had to wake you.”

“Is there an elevator?” Benjamin asked.

The super pointed. “Under the stairs.”

“Thanks.”

The super remained watching as Holstead hit the elevator button. A few minutes passed as the elevator came down the shaft and the door finally opened. The two detectives stepped in, stared without expression at the super until the door shut.

Holstead let out a long breath. “Everything’s a battle.”

“He’s not here,” Benjamin said. “So he’s not so stupid, not so scared as I’d hoped.”

Holstead said, “You talk to the family, I’ll be the silent threat.”

Benjamin snorted.

When the elevator stopped and the door opened, they stepped out and glanced toward the stairs. They saw the shadow of the officer on the next floor, cast by the yellow light in the stairway. The shadow waved. They walked down the hall to 6-F.

Anna Otano was standing in the open doorway of the apartment. She was wearing an old bathrobe over her nightgown. Her hair was falling out from under a tied kerchief. Her eyes sat at the bottom of dark circles, she was very pale. Her eyes were wide: she’d seen the shadow on the stairs wave. At her shoulder stood a young woman, fifteen or sixteen, in pajamas, her dark hair skewed every which way, her face hard and suspicious.

The two detectives gave the two women plenty of time to look at their identification.

"I'm Detective Benjamin, Mrs. Otano. I'm sorry I had to wake you up."

"What's happened?" she said. A sob was barely restrained. "What's happened to 'Berto?"

"May we come in?"

"What's happened!"

"Stay calm, please, Mrs. Otano. It'd be better if we talked inside."

The young woman took firm hold of her mother's arm. "Come inside, mama. Nobody needs to hear us." She drew her back into the dark hall. "This way, mister," she said through pursed lips.

Holstead and Benjamin entered, shut the door behind them. In the living room, Benjamin gestured and the mother sat in the stuffed chair. The daughter perched on the arm of the chair, one arm around her mother's shoulders, hand tightly clutching her upper arm. The other hand held her mother's hand.

Holstead drew his gun from inside his jacket.

The two women gasped, Mrs. Otano squeaked.

"Please stay calm," Benjamin said quietly. "We just need to take precautions." He looked around the room, noted that there was no television, just a radio, at least twenty years old. A crucifix hung on one wall. On the other walls were many photographs. He noticed one of a young, ordinary-looking man. The rug was worn through in spots. The furniture was all old. The place stunk of fried fish and garlic.

Holstead rapidly went through the small apartment: two bedrooms, kitchen, bath. It didn't take long. The two women watched him, eyes bulging.

"May I have your names, please?" Benjamin said. "Ma'am?"

The mother looked back at him. "What?"

"Your name, please?"

"Anna Otano." Her voice was flat and dull now.

"Thank you. And you, miss?"

The young woman frowned intensely, answered hard and short, "Sandra."

"Alexandra," the mother said.

"Alexandra Otano," Benjamin said, writing in his notebook. "Robert's sister, right?"

Sandra nodded without speaking.

"Roberto," Mrs. Otano said.

Benjamin looked up.

"His name's Roberto."

"Oh. Thank you."

Holstead came back into the living room, put the gun back inside his jacket, shook his head.

Benjamin said, "May I?" and sat down on the sofa. "I'm sorry we had to wake you and scare you this way. Has Robert—Roberto been here tonight?"

Anna shook her head. She took in a shaky breath, her eyes were already rimmed with red.

"Yes, something has happened regarding Roberto, but he's not hurt, as far as we know."

Sandra, who had been very pale, turned red with anger. "What's he done?" she hissed.

Anna looked at her, then at them, confused. "What is it? What?"

"Roberto Otano robbed a restaurant tonight."

The two women stared.

"It's not the first time he's done something like this. We figure he's pulled close to fifty robberies during the last year."

Sandra clutched her mother's hand more tightly. "Stupid! Stupid!" she muttered.

Anna shook her head, uncomprehending. "Oh, that can't be," she whispered. "'Berto's a good boy."

"We have a positive identification."

"Can't be him. It can't," she said.

"One of his former co-workers recognized him."

"He made a mistake. You're making a mistake." She looked up at Sandra, looked at them again. "They made a mistake, whoever said it was 'Berto," she said firmly.

"I'm afraid not."

"Well, you're wrong, that's all!"

"Two weeks ago he killed a man."

Anna's eyes rolled upward.

Sandra said, loud, "You're wrong! It wasn't Robert!"

"Unfortunately, it was Robert. Mrs. Otano, your son has killed a man. Did he ever commit any crimes that you know of? When he was a boy, maybe?"

Anna managed to breathe. "No!"

"Even little things? Never took candy from a store?"

"No!"

"Does he live with you?"

Anna was crying now.

Sandra said, "He hasn't lived in the apartment for over a year."

"Where does he live?"

Anna shook her head. "I don't know."

Holstead looked at her with obvious disbelief. "You don't know where your son lives?"

"He moved out over a year ago," Sandra said. "To a place on Avenue C. After that he moved again, it was too expensive. He was on Tompkins Square. But he's

moved a couple times since then. We didn't keep track. He—he didn't tell us."

Benjamin and Holstead looked at one another. "So," Benjamin said, "you don't know where he lives. When did you see him last?"

"Today," Sandra said.

"Today," Anna said. "He brought his dog. He had some lunch." Her olive skin was white. "I had to make him eat. He's so skinny. I tried to get him to stay for supper, but Sandra made him mad, so he..." Anna stopped, gasped suddenly, put her hand to her mouth

Sandra's hand fiercely gripped her mother's shoulder. Anna winced.

"He's got a dog?" Benjamin asked, surprised.

Anna nodded.

"What kind?"

"A little dog. Lots of hair. It gets everywhere."

"What color dog?"

Sandra said, "He's just a little yellow mutt." Her eyes glared.

Benjamin sighed, "Okay... Who else lives here?"

"Just us, since Roberto moved out."

"Your husband?"

"Dead," Holstead reminded Benjamin. "According to the super."

"Oh yeah," Benjamin said. "Sorry."

"Yes, my father is dead," Sandra said sharply. "And my sister is married, so it's just us here now."

"Where does your sister live?"

"Brooklyn."

"How often does Roberto visit you?"

Anna's voice shook. "Two, three times a month."

"Sometimes not even that," Sandra said quickly.

“Oh, Sandra,” Anna said.

“It’s true, mama, you know it is. Once we didn’t see him for two whole months.”

“He comes as often as he can,” Anna said more firmly. “Since he quit the taxi business, he doesn’t get steady work, you see, just once in a while, but when he can, he comes to see me. He’s a good...” Her voice died.

“How often does he visit his sister?”

“Never,” Sandra said quickly.

Benjamin raised his eyebrows. “You sound sure about that.”

She looked back at him steadily. “I am.”

Benjamin gave a small smile at his notebook. “So you saw him today.”

Big tears were running down Anna’s face, her nose was red, the face was blotched purple. “He gave me ten dollars. He tries to help us, when he can. He’s...”

They asked more questions, but didn’t learn much more. Anna could hardly speak, the daughter was too furious and too busy trying to calm her mother. At 3:30 a.m. the two detectives gave in and stood up. Benjamin walked over to the photo he’d noticed earlier and touched it.

“This is Roberto?”

Anna looked up, nodded.

“How old’s this picture?” Holstead asked.

“What?”

“When was this picture taken?” Benjamin asked patiently.

“I’m not sure,” Anna said. “Four, five years ago? When he got his taxi license.”

“We need this,” Benjamin said. “Will you let us have it? We’ll give it back to you, of course, in a day or two.”

Anna didn’t answer.

Sandra said, “It’s ours!”

Anna touched Sandra’s hand. “Ssh, cara. Maybe if they take the picture, they’ll prove it isn’t ’Berto after all.” She looked at Benjamin.

He raised his eyebrows. “Maybe.”

“You can take it.”

“Again, I’m sorry we had to put you through this, Mrs. Otano,” Benjamin said, taking the picture down from its hook. “We have to ask that you let us know immediately if you hear from your son. So that you yourselves aren’t implicated in his crimes. It’s for your own good. Do you understand? He’s committed a murder. If he contacts you and you don’t let us know, well, it won’t look good for you. And it’s for his good, too, see. He’s in a dangerous spot. We know his name, we know what he looks like. Every police officer in New York will be looking for him. You don’t want him to get hurt, do you?”

Anna, ugly with crying, bowed her head. “Oh god, please don’t hurt him.”

“So if he does contact you, you let us know immediately, okay? If he gives himself up, he won’t get hurt, and the judge will look on that favorably. Do you understand?”

Sandra said, “Oh, for god’s sake, we understand. Just go.”

Benjamin nodded toward the door. Holstead opened it. “Good night.”

The detectives stepped out into the hall, closed the door. The two officers on the stairs started toward them, but Benjamin raised his hand to stop them, put a finger to his mouth. They could hear the talk starting behind the closed door, rapid talk, quiet but ferocious, and soft weeping.

“That kid’s a tiger,” Holstead whispered.

Benjamin nodded, pulled Holstead away from the door. “She could be useful, willing or not. She’s madder at her brother than us. The mother’s hopeless, I know the type. Kids, kids, kids, all that matters is her kids, while they run wild in the streets. And there’s something about that married sister.” He looked at the photo. “We’ll swing back by the Dew Drop, maybe the bartender’s still there, we’ll show him the pic, get a positive i.d. Then we’ll get copies out to all stations. I want everyone to have it before the day shift starts. By then Barmun should have a photo from the Commission. And we’ll show it to Bill Purdy when he opens up in the morning, make sure it’s the same guy who shot Starkman, just to clinch it, with the fingerprints.” He pulled out his pack of cigarettes, shook one out, held it for a second, pushed it back into the pack and put the pack in his pocket again. “I need some decent coffee.”

Holstead took the photo, looked at it. “He can’t hide long now.”

“I hope not.” Benjamin sighed. “But it’s a big city, with too many people, and he’s got at least three hundred bucks. I don’t want him getting out before we can find him. Who knows where he’d go? If these bastards would think of their families... Did you see a telephone in there?”

Holstead shook his head. "No phone."

Benjamin took the photo again. "I'll bring this back myself, this afternoon or tomorrow, when they've had a chance to get their heads straight. Maybe I can get the mother by herself, when the girl's not running interference."

"The kid may be mad at him for getting the family in this mess, but she won't rat him out," Holstead said. "I know these Italians."

"Maybe we can make her madder, or mad enough. We'll keep a man on the building, day and night." He turned to the two officers. "You two can go. Tell the plainclothes downstairs they'll have to stick till morning. I'll send a detail to relieve them."

The officers nodded and went down the stairs. Holstead had pushed the elevator button, the door opened immediately.

"He's smart enough, he won't come back here."

"Just in case. He might get desperate. Anyway, he might send some sort of message. He's definitely mama's pet. The only boy in the family. And he's been giving her money even when he doesn't have much."

The elevator door opened again and they stepped into the lobby.

The super was still standing there, but he was wearing a plaid flannel robe now. He'd been looking out the door, watching the uniformed police leave. He spun around. "What happened?" he demanded.

"Everything's fine," Holstead said. "See, we're all leaving. Your building's clear, nothing to worry about."

"What about Mrs. Otano? I don't want 'em to kick her out, she's always been a good tenant."

"Jesus, man," Holstead said, "why'd you even think that? She hasn't done anything wrong. She doesn't need that."

"So it's Robbie?" The super's eyes narrowed.

"If you see him, let us know right away." Benjamin handed him one of his cards. "Any time, call."

"Robbie's always been a good kid. He used to help out around the building sometimes, when he was little."

"Well, if you see him, we need to talk to him."

The super watched them go out to the street.

"So the mama says he has a dog," Holstead said on the front steps. "That means he's got to walk it. Someone might remember him from that. Everybody notices a dog."

"Yeah, maybe. We'll send some men out to check the boarding houses and hotels. Those that allow pets. That might narrow down the search a little. Sounds like he prefers the Lower East Side." He sighed again. "It'll take too long."

Holstead looked at him questioningly.

"He'll either get out of town entirely or lay low till he's out of cash. Then he'll have to pull another job. He has the revolvers." Benjamin looked up at the flat New York sky. "Oh god, fresh air!"

"New York air," Holstead grunted.

"Still better than that apartment."

"I like the smell of garlic."

"That wasn't the smell that got me."

Holstead grunted. "Fear stinks."

They walked towards their car. Inside the building, the super watched another minute, then shrugged and turned away.

“He’ll probably get out of the City,” Holstead said. “That’s what I’d do, three hundred dollars in my pocket. And if he leaves, that’s that. We can wire his picture all over the country, but he’ll just disappear.”

“Wish we had a way to watch the buses and trains,” Benjamin said. “Like in the movies.”

Holstead snorted. “Never enough money, the Chief says. Those movie people, think we’re rolling in it. They never had to work under a municipal budget.” He pulled out a cigarette, lit it, pitched the match away. “I’m just surprised he didn’t shoot Powell, or the waiter.”

“Lucky he didn’t, though that waiter sure asked for it. What a jerk, thinks he’s gonna be Robert Stack.”

“You watch that?”

“Who has a chance to watch television?”

They got into the car.

“To the Dew Drop,” Holstead said.

“To the Dew Drop,” Benjamin confirmed. “Try to catch that bartender and show him the picture.” He slammed his door shut.

Holstead grinned. “He’ll be there. He’s so excited, he’ll probably stay through the whole day shift just so’s he can tell everybody what happened, over and over.” He started the car and pulled away.

8

ROBERT KNEW the police now had his name. He guessed they'd visit his family; so he knew he didn't dare go home, didn't even dare try to communicate with his mother. Probably by now the police even had his photo.

He'd never been without his mother's kitchen to run to, whatever happened.

For one whole day he didn't leave his room. Dino did his business on a newspaper, which Robert threw out the window down the air shaft, and to hell with what people in this dump thought about him. He looked at the dog, shook his head, said quietly, "We can't live like this forever, can we, boy?" The dog wagged his tail and ran to the door, waited, then came back slowly and jumped onto the bed, resigned.

The second day Robert cut his thick brown hair very short, as well as he could using only a pair of short scissors and the small mirror over his sink. It wasn't a neat crew cut, but it gave his head a slightly different shape. He went out briefly and spent a few dollars

from his precious stockpile on a new shirt and a cheap striped necktie. He put these on the few times he left the room to buy food or walk Dino, and he always carried the revolvers. After three days he was getting antsy, paced his room back and forth, back and forth. Dino followed him at first, back and forth, back and forth, then finally lay down in the middle of the room and watched Robert walk back and forth, back and forth. After five days Robert decided he had to leave the City. He'd never been outside the City before, never been further than carrying fares to the LaGuardia and Idlewild airports in Queens. But he still had almost two hundred and seventy dollars, there was a whole world out there, a whole world where nobody knew who he was or would care to ask. He'd go to Hoboken or Boston, or someplace far from civilization, like Cleveland.

The cops might, probably were watching the train and bus stations. Anyway, he couldn't take Dino on a train or a bus. He needed a car. Just thinking about driving a car again made his palms sweat. Well, it had to be done. He'd pushed down the cold dread of pulling another robbery, he could push this down, too.

He pulled out his leatherette suitcase and emptied his dresser drawers and closet of his few pieces of clothing, so he'd be ready to leave as soon as he made it back. Then he put on his new shirt, knotted the tie around his neck, pulled down the collar. He put on his sport coat and slipped the two loaded revolvers into the pockets. He checked himself in the mirror: he looked like a Catholic schoolboy with a bad haircut. He smiled at his reflection, stuck out his tongue.

He put down a bowl of dog food. "You stay here, Dino. Be a good boy. When I get back, we're going to take our first trip out of the City. We'll find you a field to run around in. You'd like that, huh?" He squatted, petted the little dog, stood, and went out. He carefully locked the door.

It was dusk when Robert came out of the hotel and carefully looked up and down the street. His heart was beating so hard he thought his new shirt would move up and down to the pulsing of his blood. He walked north to Houston, then west, went down into the subway, took the 6 train uptown. He glanced at everyone in the car. No one seemed to pay any attention to him. The movement of the train calmed him a little, his heartbeat slowed, his shirt stopped quivering. The further uptown they went, the calmer he felt. At 42nd Street he left the train, walked down through the tunnels to the 7 train, rode crosstown to Eighth Avenue, left the train and walked through more tunnels to the 1 train, took that up to 103rd Street. He left the train, almost bounced up the steps to the street, straightened his tie and shifted the weights in his pockets, and walked with a real spring in his step to West End Avenue.

You're okay. Feeling good. You're gonna do this.

There weren't too many people walking on the street here. Most of them were inside, eating their dinners, watching television. He wandered along the street, carelessly looked into each parked car he passed. The longer he walked, the more nervous he became. It had to be a quiet street, the traffic had to be light, there had to be no pedestrians, no one else around.

He had to wander around for almost an hour before he found what he was looking for on 111th: a set of keys dangling from a dashboard. He quickly looked up and down the street: a couple of guys were standing at the far corner, an old woman sat on the steps of a brownstone six buildings away. It would have to do.

Now his hands were icy cold, the palms slick with sweat. *No. You don't get to be afraid*, he thought. *It doesn't matter what you feel like, you've got to do this.*

Quickly, casually, calmly, Robert walked around the car, opened the driver's door, put a foot inside.

A voice cried out, "Hey!"

Robert looked up, right, left.

Three men had been sitting hidden behind the stone rail of the steps of a building just across the street. They were already up and running towards him. "Hey, asshole! What do you think you're doing?"

They ran fast, but Robert ran faster. Without closing the car door he ran towards the corner, around it, down to the next corner and out into the middle of 110th Street. He heard feet pounding somewhere behind him. He cut across through the two-way traffic, brakes shrieked, he was in one piece on the sidewalk again and turning another corner onto Amsterdam Avenue. Lots of people here, lots of doors, bars, restaurants, a laundry, he heard the shouts behind him, far but not far enough. Three blocks, four. He spun fast onto 106th Street, ran back to Broadway, turned again, north, then he was on 107th jogging back toward Amsterdam where he could get lost in the crowd behind his pursuers. He slowed, crossed Amsterdam again, walking fast but not too fast, made it to Columbus, on to Central Park West. Fewer people

here. He slowed to a stroll. His breathing went back to normal. He walked down Central Park West all the way to 86th Street, turned west and walked to Broadway. There was a movie theater there. He bought a ticket, went inside, climbed the stairs to the balcony and hid himself in the dark, where there weren't many people. He breathed in deep and watched *Please Don't Eat the Daisies*. Twice.

It was almost one in the morning when he finally left the cinema. He never wanted to see Doris Day again.

He wandered along Broadway. He looked into this car, that car, but here, even as late as it was, there was too much traffic, too many people. Despite the heat, cold sweat covered his palms, flowed from his armpits, down his back. He kept his hands in his pockets. His shoulders sagged. He screwed up his face to keep himself from crying. At 79th Street he went back into the subway. When the downtown train finally came, he slid onto a bench in a corner of the car and put his head in his hands.

That's why he didn't notice the man in the gray suit and brown fedora and glasses who watched him closely. He watched as the train entered and left the next station, the next, and the next, and he checked a paper he held in his hand, which had a fuzzy photo poorly reproduced on it. The car wasn't crowded at this time of night, there were maybe ten, twelve people. One older man dozed, snored, his head thrown back, his mouth open. When the train stopped at 50th, the man in the gray suit stood up, still holding the paper with the photo, crossed to Robert, put his hand on Robert's shoulder.

Robert started, looked up.

“Roberto Otano?” He was a middle-aged man with tiny eyes set in a penetrating stare. “Police detective Chowalski. I’m arresting you for robbery and for the murder of Joe Starkman.”

The few people awake in the car looked over with mild curiosity. The sleeping man still snored.

Robert’s face didn’t change. He showed no emotion. He blinked once. He didn’t say anything. His big hands slid slowly down into his pockets.

The train slowed entering the next station, stopped with the usual jerk and grating squeal. Chowalski kept his hand on Robert’s shoulder, gestured with his chin. Robert stood. Chowalski pushed him to the door. When it opened, they stepped out onto the platform.

“Hold on a second,” Chowalski said. His thick hand held Robert’s shoulder firmly. The train doors closed, the train started to roll out. The detective tried to push the page with the picture into a jacket pocket, dropped it, looked down after it.

At that moment Robert pulled out and raised his left revolver and fired once. The bullet pierced Chowalski’s chest. He died instantly. His hand dropped from Robert’s arm, his body fell backwards, hit the side of the moving train and spun. The train kept going, the body hit it again, spun again, slammed down onto the platform. The train was past him now, his head lolled off the platform, his brown fedora floated down onto the rails.

The paper with Robert’s picture skidded across the platform, hit the high heel of a young woman who was staring, mouth wide open.

The woman in the token booth already had her phone to her ear. Somebody hit the fire alarm. A woman screamed. A thickset man leaped towards Robert.

Robert jumped aside, ran, jumped the turnstiles, ran up the stairs to the street. Someone hollered, "Stop that guy!" Another voice cried, "He's got a gun!"

On Broadway, cars were waiting for the light to change. Robert ran to the nearest one, frantically slapped at and pulled open the passenger door, jumped into the empty seat and shoved his gun into the driver's ribs.

"I just killed a cop, I'll kill you too if you don't drive and keep your mouth shut."

The light had just changed, and almost immediately horns started blasting behind them. The driver hit the gas hard and the car jumped out into the intersection.

"Careful, don't stall," Robert hissed. "Don't say anything, just drive straight ahead." He looked behind him, didn't see anyone chasing them. His skin was cold and white as snow, sweat gleamed on his forehead. Just as the car neared 42nd Street, the light turned red.

The driver nervously looked sideways at the killer next to him. He managed to say, "S-stoplight!"

"Stop."

The driver braked, just missed rear-ending the car ahead. Robert threw open the door and ran out. In less than a second he had woven through the lanes of cars and disappeared into the crowd that always fills 42nd Street.

The driver watched for a second, eyes wide. Then he stuck his head out the window and vomited onto the side of his car. The light turned green, but he ignored

the blaring horns and shouted curses and stayed right where he was in the middle of Broadway. He'd already started crying when the cop appeared and knocked on his windshield.

9

EDWARD BENJAMIN sat on the green floral-print sofa in the small apartment in Morningside Heights next to Sara Chowalski, the wife—the widow—of the dead police officer. Her hand lay limp in his, cold and motionless. She wasn't crying anymore; her face was pale, sculpted out of pain and resignation. Sara Chowalski had been a policeman's wife for twenty-five of her forty-nine years. She'd lived with the possibility of his death for each of those twenty-five years.

"I thought," she'd said quietly when Benjamin told her, "that after he got promoted to detective he'd be safer than all those years he spent on the street."

"He did his duty," Benjamin said.

"He didn't look like a hero." She looked up at him. "But he was one."

"He sure was."

The buzzer buzzed. She started. She was waiting for her son, Stan, who was coming from the Bronx. Her youngest son, Bob, 16 years old, sat next to her in boxer shorts and a sleeveless tee, blond hair slicked

across his forehead with sweat. He held his fists closed tight.

A uniformed officer opened the door. Barmun was behind it. "Benjamin here?" he said softly.

The cop gestured with a jerk of his head. Barmun took off his hat and entered.

"Pardon me, ma'am." He nodded at the woman and teenager. "Sorry for your loss. Sir, Holstead's sent a car for you."

Benjamin jumped up. "What is it?"

Sara Chowalski looked up eagerly, her hands clutching her nightdress.

"No news, Mrs. Chowalski, sorry," Barmun said. "He just needs you, sir, to coordinate the search and figure out how to handle the reporters."

Sara relaxed miserably.

"He also said, ma'am, that you can come see Al now. Any time you want, of course. He's at the First Avenue office, the medical examiner."

She nodded, whispered, "Thank you." Louder, to her son: "Bob, you ought to get yourself dressed. We'll go as soon as Stan gets here."

The teenager stood without a word, went to his room.

Benjamin pressed Sara's hand. "We'll find him, Sara."

She nodded again.

"We will."

"I know you will. Thanks, Ed."

Benjamin said low to the uniformed policeman, "Wait here with them, go with them to the morgue, and make sure they get back okay, got it?"

"You bet."

He said, louder, "I'll be back, Sara, as soon as we have any news."

He put on his hat, took Barmun's arm, and led him out of the apartment.

"She's holding up pretty good, looks like," Barmun said as they waited for the elevator.

Benjamin nodded. "A cop's wife. The kid's still in shock."

"Sure."

The elevator arrived and they stepped in. The doors closed and Benjamin hit the side of the car with his fist. "God damn shit! Why did Al have to play the tough guy? He usually handles pickpockets and street con artists. The dimwit didn't even check for the bastard's guns." He sighed. "Why'd it have to be him that found Otano?"

The elevator stopped, they stepped out, left the building. He squinted at the rising sun hitting the tall buildings with a glare of red light so that they looked like cliff dwellings in some desert. The traffic was already dense and trucks were making their first deliveries of the day to stores and diners. The stink of diesel exhaust mixed with steam from the sewers and the perfumes and after shaves and deodorants of people hurrying by hit him in the face.

"Another goddamn hot day. Isn't it supposed to rain?"

"Not till Wednesday."

"What's Holstead doing?" They climbed into the car, Barmun at the wheel.

"He had to finally let that driver go," Barmun answered. He pulled out into the street. "Guy was really shook up."

“I bet. I’d’ve shit myself. I like to think I wouldn’t, but I would.”

“Lucky the token-booth attendant was on the ball and i.d.’ed him from the flier, or we wouldn’t even know who it was. None of the witnesses at the 50th Street station agreed with anybody else. This one said he had long hair, this one said he looked like he was on drugs, that one said he looked military. But he’s totally disappeared, could be anywhere by this time. We’ve got a bulletin ready to put out to all the radio and television stations, the Chief wants you to okay it before we send it out.” Barmun looked at the people already filling the sidewalks, glanced over at Benjamin. “You need to get some sleep, you look like shit.”

“Thanks. I always look like shit.”

Barmun allowed himself a little smile. “He can’t hide forever.”

“No, but he can hide a damned long time.” Benjamin also looked at the people walking. “Seven million people,” he grumbled. “And another three million coming in every day to work or shop or drink or sightsee or just to be here. Ten million people at least, and we’ve got to find one nothing little son of a bitch who knows we’re looking for him.” He fanned himself with his hat. “Christ, it’s hot.”

10

ROBERT OTANO PACED in his room. Dino paced with him, little tail wagging.

Killed a cop. And that other guy, I guess. Killed a cop. New York City cop. This isn't a game anymore. They won't stop till I'm dead.

Dino sat, watched Robert pace, his eyes going left, right, left, right.

Idiot. Why'd he take me? I wasn't doing anything. I was just sitting there. Just wanted to go home. Can't go home, they know who I am, they know where mama is. Idiot. Thinks he's a big hero. I didn't mean to do it. He looked down, I had the guns in my hands, I just fired, I didn't think about it, didn't think at all. That should count for something. It wasn't planned. Neither was the other guy, the old man, he just surprised me. That should count for something. They wouldn't even be looking for me if it wasn't for that fat old man coming back when he should have been home. Why'd he have to come back like that? I wasn't expecting it. It wasn't my fault. I just needed money. It was only sixty bucks, not enough to

shoot somebody for. Damn it, it was Marty, he saw me, he told them my name, otherwise they still wouldn't know. Idiot. Just bad luck, bad luck, all the way down. And this damn stupid cop wanted to be a hero.

Dino lay down, whined.

Robert stopped, looked at the dog. He suddenly dropped to his knees and stroked the dog's fur. The dog looked up, opened his mouth and stuck out his tongue, pressed himself against Robert's hand.

"I have to get away."

The dog pricked up his ears.

Robert smiled at him. "But not you, Dino. You've got to stay here."

He thought a moment, stood, filled a bowl with dog food, made sure there was plenty of water in the other bowl. Dino stood, wagged his tail, went to the bowl and started eating.

"Don't eat too much, Dino. Look." He took the bag of kibble, laid it on its side so some spilled out. *Screw the roaches*, he thought. "Okay. There." He sat at the little desk next to the bed, found some paper in the drawer, grabbed a pen, started to write. When he was done he went through the drawers until he found an envelope.

"Okay, Dino, pay attention."

The dog kept eating.

"I'm sending a note to mama. She'll come get you. I know you don't like her so much, but Sandra's there and she'll take good care of you. You're going to have to stay here, no more than a day. Maybe two. You understand?"

The dog kept eating.

“She’ll probably be here tomorrow, maybe day after tomorrow. You’ve got plenty of food and water. You be a good boy.”

Robert stood, put the letter into his pocket, put on his jacket, grabbed his wallet, pulled all his money out of the hiding place he’d made under the mattress and shoved it in, loaded his revolvers, put another box of bullets into his other pocket.

He looked around the room. The twin bed, the little desk, the bureau with one drawer that wouldn’t open. The walls covered in ripped yellow wallpaper. The bare light bulb that hung in the middle of the ceiling. The tiny window that opened onto the air shaft.

He grabbed Dino, hugged him hard.

“Oh god, I’m sorry, sweetpea. I’m sorry,” he whispered. He put the dog down. “Just one day, then mama will come. I promise. Be good...”

He left quickly, locked the door, put the two keys for the room door and the building door into the envelope with the letter, licked the flap and sealed it shut. He listened at the door. Dino didn’t make a sound.

On the street he walked to a magazine stand and bought a stamp. He licked it and stuck it on the envelope. He walked west and found a mailbox, threw the letter inside, closed the swinging door and looked at the box for a long moment.

He lowered his head, shoved his hands into his pants pockets, curved his shoulders, and started walking, he didn’t know where to.

11

ROBERT WANDERED THROUGH LOWER, then midtown Manhattan. He watched the people going to work, watched the kids playing or running errands.

Where to? Where to?

He couldn't make his brain work. He walked, watched the people coming out of the skyscrapers for lunch, watched the women in high heels going into drugstores for a sandwich, watched the men watching the women, watched the workers at the lunch carts gobbling hot dogs, watched the people sitting on park benches behind the library, sandwiches on paper spread out on their laps, bottles of soda lifted to gossiping lips.

He couldn't make himself think. He knew he needed to, but he couldn't manage it. He walked, watched the people come out of the office buildings after work, watched them surge down into the subways, crowd onto the buses, watched the better off flag down cabs or get into cars with drivers, watched the tourists being herded on and off buses, in and out of famous

places, watched kids play on the streets, in vacant lots, in the parks. He listened to the constant thunder of traffic, the endless gabble of people, the careless curses.

They'll be watching everywhere. How to get out?

He couldn't decide what to do, his brain wouldn't give him any answers, only questions. He wanted to punch himself in the head, kick it like a vending machine that had stolen his nickel.

How to get out?

He watched the sun go down behind the high buildings of the West Side, watched the dark creep up the sky over the granite canyons of the East Side, watched the windows lighting up like sparks cast from one burning building to the next. The neon signs were already buzzing and flashing, the streetlights clicked on.

One word spun in his head—*Where? Where? Where?* He couldn't stop it, it was mixed up with the noise of the traffic and hit him as relentlessly as the din around him.

Exhausted, he stopped trying to think. He didn't know where he was. He was hungry. He went into a little deli, ordered a sandwich, roast beef on rye, grabbed a Coke, paid, went out. He walked to the front steps of an apartment building, sat down and ate. A middle-aged woman came up the steps, looked at him suspiciously, sniffed and hurriedly unlocked the front door, slipped in and pulled it shut behind her. He went on eating, like a dog, gulping down the sandwich and soda, they only lasted a few minutes. He stood up, threw the sandwich paper on the sidewalk, walked off sipping the last of the soda.

Where? Where? Where? He had to stop that word eddying inside before he broke down and screamed.

Finally, limp, he went into a movie house. It was blessedly cool, the sweat in the cotton of his shirt froze to his chest and back. *The Apartment* was the feature. He didn't care. As soon as he found a seat in the back row, he fell asleep.

He was awakened by a big hand hard on his shoulder. He didn't start up. He pretended to keep sleeping.

"Hey, buddy."

The hand shook him.

"You can't sleep here."

Robert opened one eye. The theater was dark, he'd only been asleep a few minutes, the film was still playing, its light flickered over the audience. Fred MacMurray was sitting on Jack Lemmon's desk and grinning.

The hand on his shoulder was thick, the fingers square. Robert squinted up at the face of the man, a doughy face, pale as paste in the light from the screen.

"I'm a cop. You come with me out to the foyer."

Robert didn't think, didn't plan. He was alert, but he seemed to be barely awake. He slowly stood up.

"I just wanted to cool off, man, that's not against any law."

"Ssh!" someone in front of them hissed.

The cop showed him a gun, held low.

"Come on. We don't want to bother these folks. Keep your hands where I can see 'em."

"Ssh!"

The cop pushed Robert ahead of him up the aisle to the door of the theater. He motioned that Robert should go through.

Robert pushed the door, stopped, blinked in the brilliant light of the lobby. He raised a hand to rub his eyes.

"Hold it where I can see you." The cop shoved him forward. "Don't you try—"

Robert slammed the door back into the cop. The cop grunted and kicked it back at him. Robert pretended to fall. The cop reached out a hand to catch him. Robert quickly spun and shoved a gun into the cop's stomach.

His white face showed no emotion. He whispered, "Don't make me shoot you."

The cop's potato face went pale, the thick lips parted, his mouth hung slack.

"I don't want to kill you," Robert breathed. "I didn't want to kill anybody."

The eyes of the cop moved slightly to something behind Robert. His eyes went wide.

Robert turned slightly, saw a woman behind him.

The cop quickly grabbed Robert's wrist and collar, jerked him to the left. He screamed at the woman, "Down, get down! I said to get out!"

Robert threw himself headfirst into the cop's chest, pushing him backwards. He tried to pull his wrist free, couldn't, the cop's grip was strong as hell, he drew himself up, down again, shaking hard, the cop wouldn't let go, he was bigger than Robert, heavier by a good fifty pounds.

"Harry!" the woman cried behind them.

"Get down!" the cop panted.

Bigger, heavier, but older. Robert suddenly pulled back his arm, the revolver humped up, smacked the cop's chin. He could hear teeth crack. Blood sprayed out of the cop's bitten lip. Robert pressed the trigger.

The shot thundered in the lobby. The woman screamed. Robert shoved his knee into the cop's gut. That worked, the big hands let go. Freed, he pushed himself to his feet.

Suddenly hands were beating his back. The woman, frantically, furiously smashing at him.

Robert turned, slammed the hot metal of the gun barrel across the woman's face. She shrieked and fell. Robert stood up, reeling, fired again, aiming at nothing. Crouching, he began to run for the door.

Another shot thundered. Something hit Robert's calf. He grunted, fell to one knee with a loud crack, immediately got himself up again, made it through the door.

There was shouting behind him now, but he was on the sidewalk, the eternal New York City crowd was around him, traffic was already drowning out the cries, already muffling his ears, the headlights of the cars blinded him. He pushed at people in his way, ran.

Even wounded, Robert was fast, but the pain told him he couldn't go far. Within a minute he was more than a block away, in two he was three blocks away. There was a subway entrance. He ran down the steps into the stinking furnace swelter. He paused at the bottom of the steps, panting, put the revolver he still held exposed in one hand into a pocket, looked around. No one was looking at him.

He heard the rumble of an approaching train. He heard a siren from the street. He jammed a hand into

his pants pockets, found a token, stumbled at the turnstiles, pushed it into the slot and pushed himself through. The train was there, the doors were already opening. He pushed in before people could come out, somebody said, "Go to hell!" He didn't know what train it was, where it was going. He didn't care. The car was full. He didn't care. He pushed his way to a corner where he could breathe.

He closed his eyes. His leg was burning, pain lanced through his body, his sock was moist.

The train stopped, people got off, people got on, the train started again.

He opened his eyes, looked down. There was a long, neat rent in his pants leg and a red stain that darkened the gray wool. He wondered how much blood he'd lost, how much he was losing, how bad this was. The calf howled with pain, but it held his weight, so the bone must not have been touched.

The train stopped, people got off, people got on, the train started again. The train stopped. More people got off, more got on. After that the train went for quite a while without stopping.

Then it slowed, stopped in darkness. The doors didn't open. People started to shift nervously, some looked up, looked around, some shrugged, one guy smiled and kissed his girlfriend, almost pushing his hat off the back of his head.

Finally the train started to move again, slowly, then more rapidly. Everyone sighed, a youngish woman giggled. After a few more minutes the train left the earth, came out into the sky. Storefronts, apartment buildings, streets, cars flashed by the windows of the train. Robert twisted his neck to look out. He could see

the skyline of Manhattan lit up now in the night, the high shining point of the Chrysler Building.

The train slowed, stopped. The doors opened, people got off. A few people got on.

At every new station more people left, fewer people got on. The buildings became shorter and shorter. Single houses started to be seen along the streets. The streets were narrower, there were fewer streetlights.

The train stopped. The inside door next to where Robert stood opened, startling him. A conductor came through, hollering, "Last stop, last stop, end of the line, everyone out. Last stop." He passed on to the next car.

There were only a few people left in the car. They stood and went out. One man stretched and yawned and slapped his hat against his pants, then crunched it down on his head.

Robert came out last. He followed the others, limping along the platform. Coming to the stairs, he saw a sign. FLUSHING.

He limped down the stairs, past the empty token booth into the dark street.

12

VINCE BULLARD AND HIS WIFE MIMI were sitting on the sofa, watching television, like almost everyone else in the country. An announcer was reporting the ten o'clock news, something about the murder of a police officer. The two kids were in bed. The dog, a 45-pound brown terrier mix, slept on the carpet in front of the television, legs twitching. Mimi, dressed in blue cigarette pants and a knit blouse, was mending a tear in her son's shirt with needle and thread. Vince, a big guy, 6'4" and 240 pounds, was in a white tee-shirt and dungarees. He lifted a can of beer and finished it off, belched quietly, heaved himself to his feet. "Just one more," he said. "You want anything?"

Mimi shook her head. "You'll have to get up in the night."

"I'll sleep okay," he chuckled. He headed towards the kitchen.

There came a soft knocking at the back door.

The dog instantly woke and raised its head, ears up.

Vince stopped in the doorway of the kitchen, a surprised look on his big face.

“Who’d that be?” Mimi said. “It’s too late for company.”

Vince walked on into the kitchen. “Probably old Ted from next door, got a snootful and wants to talk.”

“Be nice,” Mimi said, “he’s all by himself.”

Another knock.

“He’ll wake up the kids. Don’t let him in, hon, it’s just too late.”

The dog jumped to his feet and followed Vince to the kitchen.

Vince pitched the empty beer can into the garbage and went on to the door. He flicked on the outside light, opened the wood door, looked through the screened door.

A big gun was pointed straight at him.

Vince blinked.

Just then the television report about how Roberto Otano, cop-killer, had escaped again was heard clearly from the living room.

Robert caught the last words. A very small smile creased his lips. He pressed his face up to the screen so he could be seen and said, calmly, but with a voice tense with pain, “Word gets around. I guess you recognize me.”

Vince nodded. “Uh-huh.” He kept his eyes on the gun in the killer’s hand.

“I killed two people. I just shot a cop. If you do what I tell you, nothing bad’ll happen—I promise. But if you don’t open this door, right now, I’ll shoot you dead.”

Vince stood silent.

“Open up and let me in.”

Vince, so much taller and more muscular than Robert, wondered how fast he could really move. Faster than this guy's finger? Faster than a bullet?

Vince didn't hold any illusions about himself. He opened the door.

Robert limped into the kitchen, waving him back with the gun. "Thanks."

The dog behind Vince looked at Robert, his ears pressed flat to his head. Robert glanced at it. He smiled. The dog raised his ears, hesitantly wagged his tail, took a step closer, politely sniffed his bleeding leg.

Mimi's voice came from the kitchen, softly calling so she wouldn't wake the children, "Vince, who is it?"

Vince breathed in and opened his mouth to respond.

Robert pulled out the second revolver, pointed it at the door.

Mimi came into the kitchen, stopped short in the doorway, stared at the two men and the two big revolvers.

Vince said softly, "Honey, don't get excited. This is that guy they were talking about on tv. Otano. He said if we do what he says, he won't do anything to us. Okay? So don't make a noise.

Mimi didn't make a noise.

Robert very calmly said, "Good. I need a place to hide out till I can figure out what to do."

Mimi nodded. "Okay. Okay. Don't worry, we won't do anything."

"Mama?" a small voice came from the upper floor.

The parents looked at one another, eyes wide and fearful.

Mimi quickly whispered, "We have two children. If they see your guns, they'll cry. It's better we pretend you're a friend."

Robert stared at her.

"Mama?" The voice was nearer. They could hear small feet on the carpeted stairs.

"Bobby!" Vince called. "What are you doing up? You go on back to bed!"

"I ought to go to him," Mimi whispered.

Robert, still clutching the revolvers, put his hands into his jacket pockets, kept them pointed at Mimi and Vince.

"Okay," he said. "Good idea." He pointed with his chin. "Go on."

Mimi turned to go, but the little boy, Bobby, was already standing behind her. He wore blue cotton pajamas with cowboys on horseback printed on them. He squinted into the light at the three adults and said, "Mama, you woke me up."

Mimi glanced at Robert, then squatted down and pushed the hair out of the child's eyes. "I'm sorry, honey. A friend came to visit us. So you need to go back to bed." She stood, lifting the child in her arms, and pressed him tight to her breast.

"Who is it?" the boy asked.

"Just a friend."

"Go on to bed, Bobby boy," Vince said hoarsely. "You ought to be asleep."

"I want to stay with you."

"I'll come up in a minute to say goodnight again. You go on up."

"Let's all go," Robert suddenly said.

Vince and Mimi looked at one another.

"We can all say goodnight," Robert added.

Vince thought fast, nodded, touched Mimi's arm. "Okay. Come on." He led the way to the stairs.

The boy put his head on his mother's shoulder, eyes fixed on Robert. Mimi followed Vince, and Robert followed her. They climbed the stairs, Robert limping painfully and tightly holding the handrail for support. The dog waited at the bottom of the stairs, tail slowly wagging.

"You walk funny," Bobby said, staring at Robert over his mother's shoulder.

Robert smiled. "Yeah, I twisted my ankle."

"Oh."

They went into a small bedroom holding a child's bed and a crib. Robert glanced into the crib, saw a little girl sound asleep, fist in her mouth, thin brown hair wispy on her forehead.

"Okay, into bed, champ," Vince said softly, and he lifted the boy out of Mimi's arms, put him down on the bed, pulled up the sheets.

"It's too hot," the boy complained.

"Okay, sorry." Vince pulled the sheet halfway down. "Now you need to go to sleep right away. I'm going to check on you when mama and I go to bed, and you'd better be asleep."

"Mm-hmm," the boy muttered.

"G'night, chickie," Mimi said.

"Mm-hmm."

Mimi tugged Vince's shirt, trying to get them out of the room, away from the children.

Robert backed out into the hall. The parents came out. Vince shut the door without a sound.

"Cute," Robert said softly. "How old?"

Mimi answered tightly. "Bobby's five, Kathy's twenty-two months."

"Cute kids. Okay, back downstairs."

He waved them ahead of him. They went downstairs. The dog was waiting and followed them into the living room, where the television was still droning.

"Sit down. We'll stay in here."

Vince and Mimi sat on the sofa, Mimi holding Vince's arm with one white hand. Robert sat in the easy chair. He winced as he sat.

After a minute, Mimi said, quietly, "How—how long are you going to stay?"

Robert's face showed nothing. "I don't know. I don't know."

Vince thought rapidly. "Do you need money? I'll give you money. I don't have much, but you can have it."

Mimi clenched his arm.

Robert shook his head.

"A car? I'll give you my keys."

Robert shook his head again. "And call the cops and give them the tag number right after I drive off."

Vince sighed. His big hand caressed Mimi's cold fingers.

Robert muttered to himself, "I got to think. Got to think." He closed his eyes. "Can't."

Mimi looked at his leg. "You're hurt."

Robert didn't answer.

"You're bleeding."

Robert didn't answer.

"There's blood. On the rug."

He opened his eyes. "Oh. Sorry."

Mimi almost let herself smile. "Would you let me get you a bandage?"

Vince stared at her.

Robert blinked. After a long while, he nodded. "Thanks."

"I'll have to go to the bathroom."

"Where?"

"Upstairs."

"Is there a phone up there?"

"No."

Vince said, "There's only one, in the kitchen."

"Good. Don't say anything. Don't do anything dumb. Remember, I'm here with him."

"I won't. I'll be right back." Mimi stood, went upstairs, returned carrying gauze, tape, a bottle of hydrogen peroxide, and a thin towel. She said, "Come in the kitchen where I can see better."

Robert looked at Vince. "Up." He gestured. Vince stood. Robert pushed himself up, felt his wounded leg start to give way, clutched the chair, breathed deep, straightened himself, followed them in.

Mimi gestured and he sat at the table and pulled up his torn pants leg, revealing a long, deep, red slice along the calf, now partially scabbed, the edges a bright purple. The bullet had evidently grazed his flesh. His sock was sopping wet, dark brown with blood.

Mimi knelt on the floor and gingerly pulled the wet sock down to his ankle, then off his foot, held it with the tips of her fingers, and tossed it into the trash can. She dowsed the towel with peroxide. "This'll probably sting." She pressed the cloth to the wound. Robert hissed, bit his lip.

She stood and rinsed the towel, wrung it out and carefully wiped the crusted blood off the wound. When it was clean, she wrapped gauze tightly around the calf and taped it. "I guess that's okay," she sighed. "I don't know much about these things."

"Thanks."

"Your pants are ruined," she said.

Robert vacantly looked at his pants. His eyes went wide, then he gave a little laugh. "Well, darn."

Mimi went to the sink and washed her hands, dried them with the dish towel. She looked at Vince, then at Robert. "Do you want something to eat?" Vince shot her a look, then blinked.

Robert didn't answer. After a minute of silence, he suddenly stood up. He winced putting weight on the leg. "It's better, a little. Into the living room," he said. "We'll stay in there."

Mimi and Vince went together into the living room, Vince's hand on her shoulder, and sat on the sofa. Robert limped back to the chair, eased himself down with both hands on the arms of the chair, and put his guns on his lap.

Minutes passed. Robert stared at the television. Once he stood, went to it and changed the channel. On this one another announcer was repeating the story of Roberto Otano and his daring escape from the movie theater. Robert listened dully. The police officer was only slightly wounded, but his wife, who had valiantly tried to help him in the struggle, had been wounded by a stray bullet and had a fractured jaw and multiple contusions. She was in the hospital in critical condition.

Robert sat back. "Huh. So I didn't kill that one. Huh."

The news ended and Jack Paar appeared. Minutes passed. They didn't speak. They didn't laugh at Paar's jokes.

Finally the dog, who'd been sitting watching the strange behavior of these people, stood and looked at Vince.

Robert asked, "What's the dog's name?"

"Baby," Vince answered. "My son named him."

"Baby."

The dog wagged his tail and looked at Robert.

Robert put his hand out. "Hey, baby. Good dog. Good Baby."

13

BENJAMIN SLAPPED HIS DESK. “How does this son of a bitch always manage to disappear? Fifty people watched him pull this latest stunt, and nobody saw where he ran to?”

“Gunshots tend to make people forget details,” Holstead said laconically.

“You’d think after twenty years of Sam Spade and *Dragnet* one person could stay halfway coherent during a crime.”

“Everyone wants to be a hero, but nobody wants to die.”

Benjamin threw a pen across the desk, stood up, grabbed his hat. “I can’t sit here doing nothing, waiting around for a lucky break.”

Holstead was already on his feet. “Where to?”

“Hell, who knows? He probably panicked after this. What would you do if you were a smart aleck little shit from the Lower East Side and you were in a panic? Where would you go?”

Holstead grinned. “Home to mama.”

Benjamin raised his eyebrows. "Not a bad idea. Let's go. I haven't paid the ladies Otano a visit since I took back the photo."

"We've already got a man watching the building, if he'd seen anything he'd have radioed it in."

"A desperate man who lived there his whole life might figure a way to get in without anybody seeing."

They were on the street, got into Holstead's unmarked car.

"Pretty late," he said.

"They won't be sleeping, that's for sure, not if they listen to the radio, and certainly not if he's there. Hell, they probably haven't slept since my last visit."

"We should search the area first, see if anybody's noticed him sneaking around."

"Yeah. I'll radio whoever's watching the place, have him cruise the neighborhood."

"Otano'll be watching out for a car."

"He can go on foot. Just the two, three blocks around the building." Benjamin grunted. "Probably a waste of time."

"Probably. At least we're out of the office."

"And everybody screws up sooner or later. I got a feeling this guy's luck is running out. First he gets seen on the train by poor Al. Now he's spotted at the movies. Bad luck twice in a row."

Holstead turned south while Benjamin radioed. They made it to Hester Street and Holstead found a spot to double-park. He put an official police sign inside the windshield. They found the police car; it was empty

"Who is it on duty?" Holstead asked.

"Roth."

"Don't know him."

“He’s okay, but he won’t take a chance.”

“Good. I’m sick of people taking chances.”

They waited till they saw Roth coming around the corner at a slow stroll. Roth gave them a wave.

“See anything, Roth?” Holstead asked as the man drew near.

“Nothing.”

“Figures.”

“Verne, he’s the beat cop, he’s keeping his eyes open, of course, and he’s been showing the photo around, just in case.”

“Good.”

Benjamin pushed his hat back, scratched his scalp. “Otano’s got to be out of Manhattan by now, if he’s not a total idiot.”

“Let’s go on up to mama,” Holstead said. “Maybe she’s heard something she hasn’t let on about.”

Benjamin grinned. “If she is, twelve to seven I can get the kid to spill it.”

“I will not take that bet.”

Roth looked at Benjamin. “I should stick in the car?”

Benjamin nodded, disgusted. “Unless you can think of anything better.”

Roth grinned, shrugged. “It’s the taxpayer’s dime. Here, in the office, cruising the streets, it’s all the same to me.” He got back in his car as Benjamin and Holstead climbed the steps to the building.

Holstead pushed the button for 6-F. A couple of minutes went by, then the angry voice of the younger daughter came fuzzily out of the speaker. “Well, what?”

“Police.”

“Surprise surprise.”

The two men looked at each other, nodded.

The buzzer sounded. Benjamin pushed open the door.

Sandra defiantly pulled open the apartment door as they came out of the elevator. She was wearing pajamas and a robe of robin's-egg-blue sateen. She glared at the two detectives.

"Good evening, Miss Otano," Benjamin said.

"No cops on the stairs this time?" she spit out. "I don't have to worry about getting shot by mistake?"

"May we come in?"

"He's not here. He hasn't sent any message. Are you ever going to leave us alone?"

"May we come in?"

She stepped back, furious. In the living room, the exhausted mother sat on the couch listening to the radio. Another woman, young, rather pretty, not too evidently pregnant but wearing a maternity blouse, sat next to her, fists clutched together in her lap. Anna's face was pale.

"Good evening, Mrs. Otano."

"Sorry if we woke you," Holstead added.

Sandra snorted. "Like we could sleep!"

Anna tried to answer, but her voice was hoarse and she choked a little. She cleared her throat several times.

"I guess you've heard the latest about Robert. Roberto."

The pregnant daughter turned a foul expression on the two men. "What do you want here? We can't help you. It's very late. Mama's not well. It's not a good time."

Benjamin, who had taken his hat off when he came in, twirled it between his hands. "It wasn't a good time for Officer Harry Dunne's wife to take a bullet in the hip and get her jaw broken. It wasn't a good time for Detective Al Chowalski to have a sloppy hole drilled through his chest and leave his wife and sons alone. We all have our little problems."

The pregnant daughter turned white and dropped her eyes. Anna sobbed. Behind the two detectives, Sandra was rhythmically hitting her thighs with tight fists.

"You're Elena, the older daughter, right?" Benjamin asked.

"That one already questioned me at my home." She pointed at Holstead. "He knows who I am."

Benjamin continued to stare at her.

She looked down. "Yes. Elena Williams."

"Where's your husband?"

"At home. With the baby."

"He won't let himself get mixed up in our shame," Sandra hissed.

"Shut up!" Elena said.

"He's too high and mighty. Too good for us!"

"Shut your mouth!"

"He never comes here," Sandra drove on. "Mama has to go all the way out to Brooklyn to see the baby."

"Ssh, cara," Anna whispered. She swabbed a wet handkerchief across her swollen eyes.

Holstead stepped between the two sisters. "Have you heard anything from your son? Has he called, or sent you any message?"

Anna opened her mouth, but Sandra spoke first.

“Of course he hasn’t! I told you he hasn’t! He may be just another lousy crook to you, but he’s not dumb.”

Benjamin turned on her, his face red with anger. “He’s a murderer, kid. He’s killed two men, one of them a police officer, shot another officer and seriously wounded that officer’s wife, and it’s just dumb luck they’re still alive. You feel like mouthing off to them, little girl? Or to the two widows he’s made?”

Sandra stepped back, but shot back, voice only slightly shaken, “Anyway, you’d know if he came here. You’ve got somebody watching the house. We’re not blind.”

Holstead raised his hands. “Everybody just calm down, okay? We’ve got a job to do. That job is to find your son before anything more happens. And until we do, we’re going to keep coming here and we’re going to keep asking you questions, and we expect straight answers.”

Benjamin said, his voice level now, “You don’t want your brother, you don’t want your son, Mrs. Otano, to be shot down in the street like a dog, do you?”

Anna gasped. The two daughters closed their mouths tightly: at that moment, they looked very much like sisters.

“Every officer in the five boroughs is looking for him, and they know he’s armed and dangerous and desperate, and not a single one of them is inclined to treat him with kid gloves when they find him. You understand that?”

All the steel in the two daughters melted at that.

Holstead leaned against the door frame, Benjamin sat down, tossed his hat onto an end-table; it knocked over two photos in fake-silver frames. One was of a

smiling little boy holding a puppy. Benjamin moved his hat and righted the two pictures. "Sorry."

Sandra had gone to the couch and sat next to her sister.

"Okay," Benjamin said. "I have to inform you that from now on a police officer will stay with you here, in the apartment, day and night, until Roberto's been caught. Just in case he comes here or tries to contact you."

"He won't," Sandra muttered.

"Just in case. Holstead, go downstairs, have Roth radio to the station, get Yancek or Barmun over here for the night. We'll set up relief when we get back to the office."

Holstead nodded, put on his hat, left the apartment.

Elena twisted her hands together. "It's very late. I should go. I need to go. I need to go to my child."

Benjamin paid no attention to that.

Anna clutched her daughter's hand. "Oh, honey, couldn't you stay? Just for tonight? I don't know ... I don't know what to do."

Elena scowled.

Benjamin settled himself, determined. "Now I've got some more questions. You want some coffee first? It's probably going to be a long night."

14

BEFORE THE TELEVISION played the national anthem and showed the test pattern at midnight, Mimi had managed to fall asleep, tight in Vince's arm, her face pressed into his tee-shirt. Vince's eyes were closed, but he wasn't sleeping. He was carefully watching the man who held them hostage.

Robert sat in the easy chair, revolvers still on his knees, and watched the now turned-off television. However it seemed, he wasn't thinking about how to get out of this house, he wasn't thinking about where he could go, he wasn't thinking about how he was stuck on another island and there was no way off without passing over a half dozen watched bridges or through a dozen watched train stations. He wasn't even thinking about the people he held hostage. He wasn't thinking, because he wasn't able to think.

An hour passed. Robert did not fall asleep. He at least understood that much, that he mustn't fall asleep. He kept his hands on his guns. One hand kept

touching the pocket that held his remaining wad of cash.

At two a.m. Vince felt his arm prickling from his wife's weight. He moved, stretched the tingling arm. Robert instantly raised a gun, watching. Vince tried to smile. It wasn't easy.

"Sorry. My arm's asleep."

Robert's face didn't change.

"I'm thirsty," Vince said. "You want a beer?"

Robert stared. After a few seconds, he nodded agreement. He stood. His knees cracked.

Vince gently moved Mimi's head to a cushion. She stirred but didn't wake. Vince stood slowly, went towards the kitchen. The dog sat up, ears erect.

Robert followed Vince. He stood at the doorway where he could watch both Mimi and Vince.

Vince opened the refrigerator. "I only got Blatz. That okay?"

Robert blinked. "Good enough."

Vince pulled out two cans of beer, closed the fridge, took the can opener off the counter and punched two holes in the top of each can. He set one on the counter and pushed it to Robert, cautiously, arm fully outstretched. Robert put away one of the guns and took it with his left hand.

"Cheers," Vince said quietly, and drank.

Robert turned the can, raised it to his mouth. He gulped, lowered the can, licked his lips. They stood that way for several minutes.

"Let's go sit down," Robert said at last, and wagged the revolver in his right hand toward the living room. Vince passed him, carefully sat down next to Mimi, put his right arm around her again after shaking it.

If Vince had hoped to get Robert drunk, he was disappointed. Robert drank the beer slowly. It took more than a half hour for him to finish it and set the can down on the end-table. On a magazine.

The dog, Baby, sat in front of the dark television and looked now at Vince, now at Robert, back to Vince, panting. After putting down the beer can, Robert lowered his left hand and gestured to the dog. Baby watched him. Robert smiled, made a kissing sound. Baby stood and slowly came near. Robert let the dog sniff his hand, then he gently touched the dog's head, scratched his ear. The dog leaned his head into Robert's hand, opened his mouth and panted comfortably.

"Good boy," Robert murmured.

"Yeah," Vince whispered. "He's a good dog."

An hour later Vince said, "I'm sorry, but I got to take a leak."

Robert, who'd been looking for a long time at the dark staircase, sharply glanced over at Vince. He relaxed. "Me too. Is there only the toilet upstairs?"

"Yeah. We're not rich."

Robert looked at Mimi, who hadn't moved. "Is she really asleep?"

"Sure. Don't worry, she wouldn't do anything."

Robert thought, finally nodded. The two men stood up. Vince went first up the stairs, Robert close behind. He led the way down the hall to the little bathroom. Robert let him piss first while he stood in the doorway, gun aimed at the big man, but he stared at the ceiling. Afterwards Robert had Vince stand in the doorway while he clumsily undid his fly with his left hand. He waited, but nothing happened. He breathed, "Huh."

"I'm not watching," Vince said.

"Huh." Robert blushed.

"I'm not watching," Vince repeated. He was looking at the door of his children's bedroom.

"I have two sisters. Makes you kinda shy." He breathed deeply, finally he began to piss.

After he finished and closed his fly, left-handed, they went back down the hall to the stairs. Vince listened for a second at the door of the kids' bedroom, heard the soft whisk of their breathing. Robert touched his back with the barrel of the gun. They went downstairs.

Another two hours crawled by. Light began to creep up the dimity window curtains, the red light of a hot new day. Baby lay next to the easy chair. Robert's fingertips lazily caressed the dog's flank.

Vince, exhausted, closed his eyes and quietly asked, "How long are you going to stay here?"

Robert stared at him wide-eyed, as if he were surprised there was someone else in the room. "I—I don't know. I don't know what to do."

Vince looked at the clock on the wall above the television. "Can I turn the tv on?"

Robert stared at him, uncomprehending.

"It's five," Vince said.

Robert blinked. "Okay."

Vince stood up. Mimi murmured, opened her eyes. "Vince?"

Vince turned on the television. "I'm right here, honey."

The screen of the television slowly grew bright as the tubes warmed up.

"Ooh, I've got a kink in my neck." Mimi looked around, saw Robert in the easy chair, saw the guns.

“Oh,” she said, as if a bad dream had gone on too long.
“You’re still here.”

Robert looked at her. “Sorry.”

Mimi gave a desperate little laugh.

Baby stood up, stretched, walked toward Mimi and Vince and vigorously wagged his tail, looking up eagerly.

“He needs to go outside,” Vince said.

Robert didn’t move for a moment. Then he suddenly nodded. “Sure. Sure he does.” He rubbed his left hand quickly across his eyes. “Poor guy.” But he didn’t take the gun off the couple.

A soft *thud* came from upstairs.

15

"THE KIDS ARE AWAKE," Mimi said.

"You all get up early," Robert said.

"I have to," Vince said. "I have to go to work."

A moment's silence. "Not today."

Vince looked at Mimi. "If I don't show up, they'll think something's wrong."

Robert looked at him. "What do you do?"

"Drive a truck. For A&P."

"Call 'em. Tell 'em you're sick."

Vince didn't hesitate. "I've never called in sick. They'll think—"

Mimi grabbed his arm. "Just call, Vince. Please."

Robert slowly nodded. "Just call, Vince."

Vince raised an eyebrow. "Well, I can't call yet, there won't be anybody in the office till six. That won't give them time to find a sub."

Mimi pressed his arm.

"I'll call 'em at six."

The dog whined and looked from Vince to Mimi to Robert.

"He's got to go out," Vince said. "He expects his walk."

"You walk him?" Robert asked.

"Sure. Usually."

"Not today. You got a chain? I think I saw a chain last night at your back door."

Vince sighed. "Yeah, I got a chain. For rainy days."

"You can put him out on the chain. I'm watching you."

Mimi looked at Robert. "I need to go to the kids."

"Okay. Don't say anything, stay nice and calm. Just another day, right?"

Mimi looked bleak. "Sure." She went up the stairs.

Robert looked at Vince. "Go ahead, put him out."

Vince slapped his thigh and Baby turned around twice, excited. Robert smiled at the dog and followed them into the kitchen. Vince caught Baby by the collar, opened the back door.

"Nothing dumb," Robert warned.

"Of course not." Vince stepped out, picked the end of the chain up from the dew-wet grass next to the concrete steps, latched it to the collar. "Okay, Baby, go do your thing."

The dog looked at him quizzically.

"No walk today, Baby. Go on."

The dog stayed on the steps another minute. Vince pushed him down to the grass. The dog looked up at him.

"He won't do his business without me."

"He'll be fine," Robert said. "Come inside."

Vince came in, shut the door.

Robert glanced through the window in the door—the dog walked in a dejected circle at the bottom of the steps, finally stepped to a bush and hiked his leg.

“See?” Robert said.

“Well,” Vince said. “Can we make some coffee?”

Robert nodded. Vince opened a cabinet, pulled out a can of Folgers. He took the percolator off the stove and set it under the faucet, filled it halfway. Then he put several spoons of the Folgers into the top. He slipped on the lid and lit a burner on the stove, set the pot down on it.

Robert heard the toilet flush upstairs, then running water and Bobby’s chatter.

“You want some toast?” Vince asked.

Robert nodded. “Thanks.”

Vince noticed the thanks, but kept his face blank. He opened the bread box, took a couple of slices of Wonder Bread and put them in the toaster. He opened the fridge, took out butter, a jar of grape jelly. “Bobby and I usually have cereal. You want some?”

“Just toast is fine, thanks. I’m not hungry.”

Vince set the table for the family, pulled the high chair out of the corner up to the table for the baby. From a pantry he took out a folding chair, set it up. “Here, have a seat. I keep these for when friends drop by.”

Robert looked at him. Then he sat down.

Vince went on preparing breakfast for the family. Robert sat on the folding chair. He was still holding the gun aimed at Vince.

“You always make the breakfast?” Robert suddenly asked. Vince glanced at him. “Looks like routine for you.”

“We’re a team,” Vince said. Placing some napkins on the table, he looked at the gun. “Do the kids need to see that?”

Robert looked down at the gun. “Oh. Right.” He put it and his hand into his jacket pocket.

Mimi came in carrying the baby, Kathy, perched in one crooked arm. She was wearing a pair of pale yellow overalls snapped over her bare chest. Her brown hair was tied into a topknot with a yellow ribbon. Bobby walked behind them, holding the tail of his mother’s blouse. His hair was wet, neatly brushed. He still wore his blue pajama shirt, but had a pair of blue cotton shorts on. He was talking about playing in the park when he saw Robert and suddenly fell silent.

Mimi glanced down nervously. “You remember our friend, Bobby. From last night?”

Robert smiled at the boy. “My name’s Robert. Sometimes people call me Bobby, too.”

Bobby looked at him a long time. “Did he sleep here?” he asked.

Mimi hesitated, said, “Yes, Robert’s visiting us. Like when Uncle Pete comes.”

Bobby pointed. “Your pants are icky.”

Robert looked down. “I had an accident. Remember? I told you about my ankle.”

“Howja get hurt?” Bobby asked, suddenly interested. “Can I see?”

The little girl, who was hanging from her mother’s arm next to Robert, reached out a hand and caught Robert’s hair.

Mimi and Vince caught their breath.

Robert smiled. “Good morning, Kathy.”

Mimi looked at Vince. He made the barest shake of his head.

Kathy grinned and stuck her fist in her mouth.

“Hungry, huh?”

The family and Robert had their breakfast. While the adults remained silent, Bobby, after a little shyness, talked about everything from his favorite television show—“*The Flintstones*, it’s got dinosaurs”—to his favorite comic books—“The Flash, ’cause he can run really fast and so can I.”

“It’s true, he’s a fast runner,” Mimi said.

“I’m pretty fast, too,” Robert said.

Bobby eyed him suspiciously.

“When my leg’s not hurt.”

The television was playing in the living room, talk and talk interrupted with louder bits of music as someone tried to sell something.

Mimi was pretending to feed the baby. Vince stood and refilled his cup, automatically refilled Robert’s cup.

Robert said, “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Mimi glanced at her husband.

“Hey, you’re wearing yesterday’s clothes,” Bobby suddenly said when he’d finished his bowl of corn flakes. “Why isn’t Daddy dressed for work?”

“Well, we have a visitor, Bobby. So I’m going to stay home today.”

“We’re not on vacation, are we?” Bobby asked suspiciously.

“Well, no. But it’s like a vacation.”

“We’re not going away, are we?” Bobby went on. “Because I’m supposed to play with Tim this afternoon at the slide.”

Robert looked at Vince, shook his head.

Mimi said, "Oh, I'm sorry, honey, but we've all got to stay home today."

"You promised!"

"We have a visitor," Vince said. "When someone comes to visit, it's polite to stay home."

"Tim thinks I'm gonna come to the slide!"

"We'll call Tim and let him know," Mimi said.

Bobby pouted. "It's not fair. He's your friend, not mine."

Vince put his hand on Bobby's shoulder. "Now, is that a nice thing to say? Here we have a friend visiting us and you say a thing like that. You can see Tim tomorrow." He looked away and muttered something that sounded like, "I hope."

Bobby pouted.

"I'm sorry, Bobby," Robert said. "I didn't know you had a date with your friend. If I'd known, I'd have come some other time."

Bobby looked at him, sulking. "It's okay."

"That's better," Mimi said, "Well, let's go get your room cleaned up, okay?"

Bobby put his bowl in the kitchen sink. "It's already clean."

"No, I saw some toys out and your closet's a mess."

"If it's vacation, I shouldn't have to clean my room."

"Up we go."

After Mimi took the kids upstairs, Robert listened carefully while Vince called his job and let them know he wouldn't be in. The conversation was short. "Some sort of stomach bug," Vince said. "Sorry, I really don't dare leave the house. I know, I know, I'm sorry. Tell

Lon I'll make it up to him." He hung up the phone.
"They don't believe me."

"Doesn't matter."

"They'll get mad."

"Doesn't matter." Robert gestured with the hand in his jacket pocket. "Okay, back to the living room."

"I'd really like to brush my teeth."

Robert stared for a second, then smiled. "Okay."

They went up the stairs to the bathroom. "I wouldn't mind taking care of some business, too," Vince said.

"I'll stay with Mimi and the kids," Robert warned.

Vince nodded, grimly closed the bathroom door.

A half hour later Robert and Vince were back in the living room.

The announcer on the television was talking about a typhoon in the Philippines, more than a hundred dead. An accident on the Grand Central Parkway involving three cars and a truck, two lanes closed to traffic. A commercial for cigarettes.

A siren came from the street. Robert and Vince tensed. The dog started barking. The siren neared, got louder—it was an ambulance. It flashed past, the siren faded. The dog stopped barking. The two men relaxed.

When the local news came on, it was all about Robert. The newsman repeated the story about the murder of Det. Chowalski, the daring escape from the movie theater. The wife of the police officer was out of intensive care and resting comfortably.

Robert didn't look at Vince. He said quietly, "I guess you don't think much of me."

Vince watched him.

"I wish ... I didn't mean to shoot anybody. It was reflex. Like when a dog snaps at you if you grab at it

too sudden.” He kept watching the television. Now it was the weather, no break in the high temperature, no sign of rain for at least two days. “Anyway, I guess it doesn’t matter. Doesn’t matter.”

He looked at the television. Vince looked at him.

16

THE SCENE wasn't any more exciting at the Otanos'. Yancek sat with the mother and two daughters, waiting for his relief to show up. The Otano sisters either paced angrily or sat angrily. They made coffee, grudgingly offered some to the detective. He thanked them as politely as he could.

Anna wouldn't leave the radio, listened eagerly to every news item about Robert, though they were all the same. Whenever a story about Robert came on, Elena stood up and went into the bathroom, or the bedroom, or the kitchen. Sandra, hearing the reports, would pace or furiously smoke a cigarette. Seeing her light the first cigarette, Anna said mournfully, "Oh, Sandra, you don't smoke, do you?"

Sandra spit a spume of smoke into the air. "I do now."

A little later, after seven, she said to Yancek, "I should be getting ready to go to work."

Yancek said lazily, "Okay, I'll get an officer to go with you." He reached for the telephone.

"Mrs. Evans would never let a cop hang around in the store!"

Yancek shrugged. "Inside or outside, doesn't matter to us. We just have to be sure you don't get in touch with your brother without our knowing."

"You'll make me lose my job!"

"Up to you. One day off won't hurt anybody."

"Don't go, Sandra," Anna pleaded. "Please. I need you here with me. I can't be by myself, not knowing."

"You won't be alone," Sandra sneered.

"Well," Elena said, as angry as Sandra but careful not to show it, "If you're staying home, I have to get back to my baby, if nobody objects this time. My husband has to go to work."

Sandra snorted.

Yancek reached for the phone again. "Same for you. I'll have a man go with you. It'll take a few minutes to get someone free."

Elena shrugged. "He'll be late anyway, there's no way I could get there so he'll be on time."

Yancek glanced at his watch. Forty-five more minutes of this.

Just before eight, Sandra moaned, "This is driving me crazy!"

"Oh, calm down," Elena said. She was sitting with her purse, waiting for her police escort to arrive. "We just have to put up with this until..." She glanced at her mother and shut up.

Sandra dropped into a chair. "He's ruined our lives!" she muttered.

Yancek stayed quiet.

Sandra immediately stood up again. "I've got to get out of here."

Yancek stood, opened the door of the apartment, revealing the cop who'd come to relieve him. "Perfect timing, Thorne," he said. He turned and smiled at Sandra, taking his hat off the little table. "Where to, sister?"

Sandra glanced around desperately. "To get the mail. I forgot, yesterday."

"Fine. Thorne, you go down with her, I'll wait here." He added, low, "If I get to breathe some real air, I won't be able to force myself back up here."

Thorne smiled, made a little bow to Sandra. She grabbed the mailbox key off the hall table and puffed past him. Spitefully, she took the stairs. Thorne had to hurry to catch up.

A few minutes later Sandra burst puffing into the apartment. "That guy won't even let me get my own mail!" she yelled.

Thorne entered behind her, handed a few letters to Yancek.

"You're interfering with the United States mail!" Sandra shouted. "That's a felony, I don't care who does it. I'm going to complain to somebody!"

"What a surprise," Yancek murmured, glancing through the letters. Two bills and a scribbled envelope. He looked up at Anna.

"What is it?" Anna instantly said. "Is it from 'Berto?"

Yancek walked across the room, handed it to her. "Please open it. Carefully."

Anna took it with a trembling hand. She looked at the scribbled address, gasped, tore open one end of the envelope and pulled out a sheet of paper. Two keys fell out of the envelope onto the thin coffee-colored carpet. Yancek immediately squatted and picked them up.

Anna read the letter. "Oh!"

Yancek held out his hand. She reluctantly gave him the note. He read, called, "Thorne!" The cop at the door turned to him. "Stay here, I'm going to use the call box on the corner." He pointed at Elena. "An officer's coming for that one." He ran past him into the hall, punched the elevator button, but the elevator didn't come fast enough and he ran down the stairs, along the street to the call box. He unlocked it and pulled out the receiver. After a second he said, "Yancek, Hester Street. Connect me with Benjamin, fast."

17

THE SIRENS OF THREE POLICE CARS screamed towards the SRO hotel on Ludlow Street. Benjamin, Holstead, and three uniformed police officers jumped out of the cars and ran to the door. Holstead called, "You, get around the corner and watch that alley coming from behind the buildings. You, stay here and watch the door and fire escape. Keep your eye on the roofs, too. Everybody stay sharp."

At the door Benjamin pushed the button for the super. No response. He held the keys Otano had mailed and was already opening the outer door, Holstead still buzzing, when a startled face whose obvious first reaction to everything was anger appeared behind the inner door, the face of a shapeless woman around sixty years old, wearing a blue house dress so faded the pattern couldn't be recognized.

Benjamin showed his badge and gun through the glass of the inner door. "Open up, now!"

The face turned pale and the woman pulled open the door. "What's going on?"

“Otano!”

“Otano? No one here named Otano.”

“Using a false name, of course,” Holstead grunted.

“Room 426,” Benjamin growled, pushing past her.

The woman stumbled backwards. “Hey, watch it! Four-twenty-six? That’s the kid with the dog.”

A uniformed officer came in behind them.

“Where’s the door to the air shaft?” Benjamin yelled.

The woman pointed down a narrow hall.

Holstead gestured to the cop. “Get out there and stay there till we call you.”

“Come on.” Benjamin led the way up the stairs, Holstead and the cop behind him. “Eyes open, if he’s still here he’ll know we are.”

They came to the fourth floor, went along the hall to the door marked 426. A smell came from under it.

“Dog shit and piss,” Holstead whispered. “He left, like the note said.”

“Or he didn’t dare go out and just sent that note to get his mother up here. Okay, I’m making the move.” Standing to the side, he banged on the door. “Otano! Police!”

The dog inside started yapping.

“Otano, if you’re in there, tell us. Open the door real slow and show us your hands empty. You can’t get out of here, so play nice.”

The dog kept barking.

The woman in the house dress appeared panting from the stairs. “What are you doing? I haven’t seen the kid for a day or two.”

“Get back!” Holstead shouted at her. He looked at Benjamin and said, low, “Do we dare try the key?” He held it up.

Benjamin took the key from Holstead's hand, quietly slipped it into the lock.

Something hit the door from inside.

Benjamin and Holstead jumped back, aimed at the door.

"Don't damage my house!" the woman cried.

Holstead and Benjamin fired through the door, once, twice.

They pressed against the wall, listened. Nothing.

"Otano!"

Nothing.

Doors along the hall had opened, heads had popped out.

Benjamin nodded at Holstead. Holstead kicked at the door.

The door fell open.

Benjamin and Holstead, the uniformed officer covering them from behind, slid around the doorjamb, guns ready.

The room was empty, except for the little dog that lay whimpering where a bullet had pitched it half under the bed. It had evidently been standing up at the door when they'd fired.

Its tongue lolled out, it breathed fast and shallow. A spray of blood stretched between it and the door. It looked at the cops with wide eyes.

Benjamin looked at the dog. Holstead went through the room fast, checked the closet, looked out the window, waved down to the cop standing at the bottom of the air shaft. He stepped around a couple of piles of dog shit, several puddles, one empty bowl, one bowl still half-full of kibble. He went through the dresser, the desk drawers.

He looked at Benjamin. "I didn't think he'd be here."

Benjamin was still looking at the wounded dog. "Couldn't be sure."

"Nothing to show where he went. Just some underwear, dog food."

"He's running wild. Christ knows where he is."

Holstead gestured to the cop outside the door. "Radio for forensic, they can check the place for prints and anything else useful."

The woman in the hall yelled, "You're gonna pay for that door! Dja see that?" she yelled at the other tenants, several of whom had ducked back and slammed their doors shut at the shot. "Dja see what they did to my door?"

Benjamin was still looking at the dog. Dino's front paws jerked, like he wanted to try to crawl.

Holstead turned away. "For god's sake, do it."

Benjamin nodded, pointed his gun, fired once, from the side, so the bullet wouldn't go through the floor. The woman in the hall screamed. The dog's little body jumped across the floor, stopped, motionless.

Benjamin said, "Shit."

18

THE NEWSCASTER was reviewing the short and dull biography of the murderer Roberto Otano. "...after the death of his father, Otano left school at the age of 14 to work as an errand boy, then as a clerk in a drugstore, and worked weekends as a cleaner..." Robert watched but didn't see the screen. "...finally licensed as a cab driver, an occupation he pursued until a traffic accident occurred in which a passenger was killed. After this he disappeared for several weeks and did not contact his family. According to the police, this is when Otano began his career as a petty thief and has since lived in a series of boarding houses and single-room occupancy residences..."

Mimi and Vince still sat on the sofa, faces pale, thin with strain, their eyes sunk into dark holes. The baby slept curved against Mimi's hip.

Bobby, bored, lay on his stomach on the floor in front of the television, sulkily playing with two toy horses that he made jump over Baby's tail again and

again. He looked up at the screen. "Hey, that's you!" He peered closely at Robert.

Robert's dead eyes sparked to life.

Mimi opened her mouth, "Bobby—"

Vince quickly cut her off. "He does kind of look like Robert, doesn't he?" he said, hoarse from the long hours of silence. "But Robert's not a bad guy like that man is."

Bobby looked at his father, scowling with thought.

"Robert's our friend. We don't have bad guys for friends. You can see, they don't really look that much alike."

Bobby looked back at the screen. "Oh yeah. That guy's got longer hair. Like a beatnik." He picked up his toy horse again.

Mimi closed her eyes and let out a long breath.

Robert let himself smile.

"...the night before last at the Orpheum Theater, Otano was sleeping in the last row of seats when Police Officer Dunne recognized him from the photo provided by the family. Knowing the risks he ran, Officer Dunne sent his wife out of the theater before..."

Robert blinked. "I'm just sorry about one thing," he said softly.

Mimi and Vince looked at him wearily.

"I never made my mama proud. I never did anything to make her proud of me." He scratched the bandage on his leg. "What a lousy, nothing life. I thought I wasn't stupid, at least. Huh. Now it's too late."

Vince pressed Mimi's hand.

Robert reached down and touched the dog's head.

"I have a dog, too," he said. "He's a cute little guy."

Vince said, "I think you're not a bad guy."

Mimi stared at him.

Robert looked at him, eyes wide.

"Not really. I guess you had some bad breaks. I think you could probably turn yourself around, if you got the chance."

"It doesn't have to be this way," Mimi added quietly. "I'm sure, if you went to them, if you told them how it really was, they wouldn't hurt you." She smiled at him hopefully.

"I'm sorry you've had such a rough time," Vince said.

Robert stared at him. "I couldn't..." Then he whispered, "Afraid. I was always afraid."

Mimi reached out a hand to touch his arm.

Bobby suddenly threw one of the toy horses across the floor. "It's hot in here! Mom, I'm hot."

"I know, honey," Mimi said gently. She pulled her hand back. "It's hot everywhere."

"I want to go outside," Bobby whined. "Why can't I go out and play? I want to play outside."

Vince opened his mouth to speak, but Robert suddenly shocked them by saying, "You're right, it's really hot in here. Let's go out in the yard."

Vince and Mimi stared.

"For a little while," Robert added. "Maybe there's a breeze."

He stood up, winced as he put weight on his wounded leg. "It's better," he said low to himself, and nodded. His right hand was still in his jacket pocket, holding the revolver.

Bobby jumped up and ran to the door.

"Wait for us, Bobby!" Vince yelled, frightened, and jumped to his feet. He glanced at Robert, his eyes wide.

Robert said, "It's okay. Let him run, poor kid."

Bobby had already opened the front door and run out. Baby barked, jumped up and ran out after him before the screened door swung shut. Mimi stood up, painfully stiff, and Kathy woke up and began to cry.

Robert said, "You go out. I'm right behind you."

Vince took Mimi's hand and led her out the door onto the porch. Robert glanced at the television, then followed close behind them.

It was almost 5:30 in the afternoon and there was a lot of traffic. The houses across the street were blindingly lit up by the declining sun. On this side the houses' shadows stretched out in short rectangles. The small front yard was browning, it hadn't rained in too long. Two short rhododendrons were planted at the corners of the house. The post of the yard lamp still had a red Christmas ribbon tied around it.

Vince and Mimi stepped down off the porch towards Bobby, who was running from Baby in circles. Vince watched Robert, still on the porch. His thumb tapped Mimi's hand, three times. She kept her eyes on his face.

Robert pulled his empty hands out of his pockets, stretched both arms up to the sky. He closed his eyes against the glare.

Vince quickly jerked his head toward the house next door. Mimi understood. Vince grabbed Kathy from her arms and hissed, "Run!"

They ran faster than they'd ever thought they could. Bobby, who already by the neighbors' hedge, stopped, surprised. Vince came by him, yelled, "Come on, run! Run fast as you can!"

On the porch of the Bullard house, Robert stared, dumbfounded. His mouth opened. He took a step forward, reaching for his jacket pocket, his bum leg came down on the first step, crumpled under him, he hit the wrought-iron porch rail and slid down, hitting the next step with his knee. He grunted and fell face-first onto the dry grass.

Vince and Mimi didn't look back. Baby ran ahead, barking excitedly. A couple was walking toward them on the sidewalk. Vince yelled, "Look out! Get out of the way! He's got a gun!" They were already past the hedge of the house next door. A woman on a porch across the street was shaking out a dust cloth. "Get in your house, quick! There's a guy with a gun! Call the cops! It's Otano!"

They were past the corner of the next house. This had taken seconds.

Robert looked up, couldn't see the fleeing family, they were already hidden by the yew hedge next door. He stood up painfully. Several people had come out of their houses, a car had stopped in the street.

Robert was now carrying his revolvers—when had he pulled them out of his pockets? He stood in the middle of the yard, plainly visible to everyone. He licked his lips, looked around frantically.

The woman with the dust cloth was staring at him, she screamed seeing the guns and stumbled back into her house.

So, Robert thought. *That's it.*

He wasn't sure how long he stood there. It had to be more than a minute, because finally he heard the siren. The distant whine kicked him into consciousness.

No. No, not yet.

Robert shook himself forcefully, ran up the steps back into the house, slammed shut the door, locked and bolted it. He tried to think, but he was breathing too hard, too fast, his leg hurt like a son of a bitch, the revolvers shook in his hands. Just two words circled in his brain: *Not yet, not yet, not yet.*

The sirens came closer, fast, who knew they could get here so fast in rush-hour traffic? Were there so many cops in Flushing? Robert looked through the window curtains.

The first police car squealed to a halt in front of the house, people in the street were pointing at the house. A second police car shrieked up, it jumped the curb and stopped in the tiny yard just in front of the yard light.

Not yet, not yet.

Police jumped out of the cars. A lot of people were still standing on the sidewalk, in their yards, some had pulled over and gotten out of their cars.

One of the cops was on the sidewalk, yelled, "Get inside! Get inside! This guy's a killer! He's armed and dangerous! Get in your houses!"

Think, think, think! Why can't I think? Robert raised his arms, pointed the guns at the window, stood there, uncertain, in the living room. The television was still going, somebody was singing plop plop, fizz fizz, oh what a relief it is.

One of the cops, from behind his car, raised a bullhorn to his mouth. "Otano! Otano! Throw your guns out and come out with your hands in the air!" He turned and said something to one of the other cops, who nodded and ducked and bobbed to move behind the two cars toward the house. Another siren was

swelling in the distance. “Otano, toss your guns out! Make it easy on yourself!”

All right then.

Now he wasn’t afraid. Without thinking, because there was no possibility of thought, Robert fired twice through the window.

Those people who were still standing on the sidewalk, in the street, outside their houses watching the spectacle, screamed or squealed or hollered, ran off, ducked back into their cars, jumped back into their houses. The cops dropped behind their cars and began firing into the Bullard house. Windows shattered, the glass in the door exploded into the living room, plaster and asbestos puffed from a line of holes in the siding.

Robert fired again. Then he ran back into the kitchen, looked out the back door, saw no one, they hadn’t gotten behind the house yet. He pushed open the door and ran outside, bent low, past the little aluminum clothesline to a row of trashcans and the fence that separated the next yard.

“Otano! Otano!” came the voice from the bullhorn. “Come out with your hands up! Toss out your guns and we won’t shoot!”

Not yet, not yet. The words spun like a top in his head as the demands from the bullhorn faded. *Not yet, not yet.*

He ran.

19

BENJAMIN AND HOLSTEAD got the call from Flushing while they were driving up the FDR. Benjamin punched the dashboard. "God damn it, they'll have him before we can get there! Hurry!"

Holstead was driving. "Rush hour," he said.

"Do it!"

Holstead switched on his siren and flashing light, hit the gas, and sped toward the Queensborough Bridge.

NO ANSWER CAME from the Bullard house. The police sergeant raised the bullhorn again. "Otano! Otano! Come out of there!"

Nothing.

"This isn't gonna do you any good, Otano, you can't get out of this. For the last time, toss out your guns and come out!"

Nothing.

A third police car roared up the street, jerked to a stop behind the others.

“Finally!” The sergeant lowered the bullhorn, turned and hollered, “Head around the block, make sure he doesn’t get out the back!”

The cop at the wheel waved acknowledgment, backed up and spun around.

The sergeant waved to a cop behind the second car in the street. The cop nodded and carefully duck-walked behind the car, ran squatting to the side of the house. The sergeant looked at the other side of the house, where another cop had made it. He gestured, the cop nodded and ran alongside the wall of the house toward the back.

He got to the back first and saw that the back door was swinging open. He turned and yelled, “Back door’s open!”

“Watch that door, we’re going in!” the sergeant yelled. He waved the other three officers to move forward, then raised the bullhorn. “Otano! Don’t do anything stupid! We’re coming in!”

Guns out, they approached the front door.

A man next door suddenly stuck his head out a window and yelled to the cop at the corner of the house. “He ran off! I saw him! He jumped my fence!”

The cop ran around from the back and yelled to the sergeant at the front door, “He’s already gone! Guy next door saw him run off!”

“I heard him!” The sergeant thought a second, then he kicked open the front door and went in. “Otano! Otano!”

Silence.

The sergeant relaxed. “You stay here, search the house. Then find the people who live here, find out if they know anything about where he’d go. Morris!” The

other cop came forward. "Which way'd the guy say he went?"

The cop pointed.

"Good, I've got a car there already. Take Burns and follow behind the houses on foot, see if anybody else saw him. I'm taking the car."

He ran out of the house and leaped into the car, squealed into reverse, almost running down a teenage boy who'd come out to watch. As he rounded the corner he saw the third car and a small knot of people frantically pointing east. He hit the siren and took off that way.

The crowd was gathering again. Among them was Vince, Mimi behind him with the kids. "Oh god," she whispered, "look at the house!" She finally started to cry.

ROBERT RAN, PANTING HARD. He'd climbed two fences despite the agony in his leg, made it to the street, ran as fast as he could with that leg. Somebody saw him, yelled, he fired a shot at random into the air behind him, the yelling stopped short. Robert ran till he saw a bigger building, it was a laundry. He raced around it. The next building was four stories high, he jumped up to grab the fire escape ladder, missed, jumped again, caught it, pulled himself up and clambered up to the flat tarpaper roof, ran across it, around a spinning circular vent. He dropped to his butt, trying to catch his breath.

Across the street heads were already appearing in windows, looking down into the street, "What's going on?" "What the hell?" Somebody on the street yelled

up, “Otano, it’s Otano!” Other voices joined in, “Otano!”

Too many goddamn people.

Robert hid himself behind the low border of the roof, tried desperately to slow his breathing. But a building across the street was taller than the one he was on by two stories, and someone in a window who was watching the ruckus noticed him.

“I see him! I see him!”

Too fucking many people!

Robert raised himself, waved his gun. The man in the window yelped and ducked back.

Sirens were getting close, a cop car turned the corner into the street, a woman in another window was staring at him, talking to somebody behind her. The guy who’d first seen him ran out of the building, gesturing wildly to the cops and pointing up.

Robert ran hunched over behind the roof border, peeked across, saw another fire escape on the other side. He ran there, climbed up on the border, exposed for a moment. A cry went up from the street. He leaped down to the fire escape. The pain in his leg thrilled through his body, he fell onto the metal grillwork. He felt the bandage come undone and blood start from the re-opened wound. But he stood, limped down the metal steps, pushed the ladder to the ground and climbed down to the pavement. Nobody here, yet.

Not yet, not yet.

He ran behind the building, away from the noise on the street, slipped through a narrow space between two buildings, found himself behind a big apartment building, followed the wall away from the noise, came to a highway. His breath was steel knives cutting

through his lungs, his leg was pulsing agony, the bandage had come loose and was trailing from under his cuff, his shoe was already damp with blood.

But the sirens were on the move again, coming closer, the clamor of voices was seeping this way.

Robert looked around, delirious, saw another fire escape, the ladder already carelessly lowered and rusted into place. He climbed up it to the first floor. He stopped there, gasping. He looked through the window. He saw no one inside.

A cop car appeared at the end of the alley. Too narrow for it to navigate. A cop jumped out.

Robert somehow raised himself, aimed, fired. The cop pressed himself to a wall, dropped down. Two other cops came puffing around the corner of the building. All three began firing. Robert dropped. He kicked at the window, glass fractured, split, fell in with a crash. He crawled under the storm of bullets through the broken glass, slicing his hands, knees. He turned, fired. The revolvers clicked, empty.

He shoved a hand into a pocket, pulled out the box of bullets. His shaking hand couldn't hold the box, it fell to the linoleum floor. Bullets rolled in all directions. He frenziedly grabbed whatever he could, but his cold hands couldn't catch them, his frozen fingers wouldn't bend to hold them. He heard himself sobbing.

Not yet, not yet, not yet!

There was silence.

A voice outside yelled, "Stay there! Cover the window!"

POLICE RAN INTO THE BUILDING, up the stairs, half a dozen men, guns in hand, faces hard and ferocious and

eager. Their radios crackled and echoed in the hallways.

“It’s the second floor!”

“Ten windows from the north side!”

People in the building were screaming, doors slammed.

“Don’t shoot! There’s kids in here!”

The cops counted doors. In seconds they’d figured which apartment he must be in.

With no warning, they fired at the apartment door till the lock was loose, then they kicked it. The door cracked from the frame, swung open. They jumped back.

Nothing.

The cops moved through.

They found a young man huddled in a smear of blood on the floor of the kitchen, his arms covering his head, hands empty. He was sobbing, “It’s not me! It’s not me! I live here! He shot me in the leg and ran out!”

At that moment two cops appeared outside the broken window.

One of the cops looked down at the weeping man. “Don’t give us shit, Otano. It’s you. Get up.”

He roughly grabbed him by the collar and hauled him up. Otano’s bleeding leg gave way and he fell, but another cop grabbed him and pulled him up again, pulled his arms forward and handcuffed him.

The wheezing sergeant came into the apartment. “Huh, huh,” he panted. “Search the place, see if there’s anybody else here, see if anybody got hurt.”

The cops on the fire escape crawled through the window, started searching the kitchen. “Hey,” one

called, "look at this. He tried to hide his guns in the garbage."

"They both there?"

"Yeah, two revolvers. Nice."

"Bullets everywhere," another said.

A thirdcop came out of the bedroom. "Nobody."

"Thank god for that," said the sergeant, thinking of the bullets that had been flying moments earlier. "You're goddamn lucky, Otano. You didn't give us the chance to shoot you like the fucker you are. Let's go." He shoved Robert forward.

Robert fell again, cried with pain. "I can't," he gasped. "I can't."

"The fuck you can't." The sergeant grabbed him by the shoulders and stood him up like a kid's toy.

Stumbling, half-carried by two of the cops, Robert went down the stairs and out into the glaring light of the low red sun. A crowd was gathered around the steps, blocked the street, despite the police trying to push them back. But when an unmarked police car came up, siren screeching, the people jumped out of the way.

Benjamin and Holstead jumped out of the car, ran up to the group at the door, "Let us through! Let us through!"

"Benjamin!" Benjamin yelled at the sergeant, badge out. "You got him? Anybody hurt?"

"Nobody, detective, far as we know," the sergeant said. "He was holding a family hostage six blocks east, but they managed to get away."

"Thank God," Holstead sighed. "Well, Otano, you put up some fight, but it's over now."

Over.

Robert stared at him.

"You're just damned lucky you didn't hurt anybody else," Benjamin said. "I don't think anyone here was anxious to give you a break."

Over.

They started to pull him down the front steps.

"Hey," Robert said.

Benjamin looked at him, questioning.

"Call my mama, okay?"

Holstead sneered.

"Ask her if Dino's okay."

Benjamin looked at Holstead, puzzled.

Holstead said, "The dog."

Benjamin lowered his eyes.

Holstead said to Robert, "The dog's dead, Otano."

Robert stared a second, then dropped his head.

Over.

"Come on."

Suddenly Robert threw himself against the sergeant, his cuffed arms grabbed for the gun in his hand.

The sergeant cried out. Benjamin grabbed Otano's shoulder, turned him around. The sergeant fired.

People in the crowd screamed.

Robert fell to the steps, slid headlong down to the sidewalk, a gaping wound in his stomach. He twisted for a few seconds.

The two detectives watched him. He stopped twisting.

Benjamin straightened his jacket. He looked around for his hat, which had fallen off in the brief struggle. Holstead picked it up, handed it to him.

"Thanks," Benjamin muttered.

"I had to do it," the sergeant said.

Benjamin nodded. "Yeah."

"I had to."

"Fucking asshole," Holstead said. "Better this way, I guess. Won't be wasting taxpayers' money on a long trial."

Benjamin nodded. "Yeah." He looked at Robert. "Yeah. God damn it."

They started down the steps towards the body.

