

windows and the traffic lights, and turned into a sidestreet leading to the Mews. He slowly approached the dignified, red brick, Georgian mansion which adjoined the Mews. A light was burning on an upper floor, but the rest of the house was in darkness. Without stopping, he turned toward a narrow green wooden door which masked the service entrance. He turned its wrought iron latch, opened it, and quietly closed it behind him. He was in a narrow, cement walkway between the Georgian mansion and a neighboring house of similar dimensions. Their brick walls, partially covered by climbing ivy, rose on each side, disappearing like medieval battlements in the darkness above.

He moved cautiously down the walkway, taking care not to stumble over trash cans or litter. The faint, musty odor of old brick, crumbling slowly in dampness and shadow, enveloped him.

The walkway ended in two shallow brick steps leading downward to the garden. He could see enough now to orient himself. A chilling draft of wind told him he had left the shadow of the house. A branch of a small ornamental tree clutched briefly at his coat and then snapped backward as he pushed beyond it. The darker shadow of the brick wall standing between him and his small garden loomed ahead. He had forgotten how high it was. Of course, he had never planned to climb it.

He walked along the wall until he came to the large magnolia that rose up beside it and shaded his garden. Its lowest limb was about two feet above his outstretched fingers. He found an ornamental urn and dragged it over to the tree. Upended, it provided him with a precarious perch from which he could pull himself into the tree. In another minute he was above the wall and had landed with a thud in his garden.

He stood crouched, his feet stinging and his breath coming in little pants. He heard no sound.

Softly, he moved over toward his French doors. They were bolted from the inside, part of his precautions since Jiggs had been assaulted, and they would be hell to open without noise. He reached out in the darkness and

touched them. With a stabbing surge of fear, he realized that they were ajar. He turned away in panic and then realized for the first time that he had no way to rescale the wall behind him. The only way out was through his front door, and that door was guarded by the police.

His heart pounded painfully. Had Jiggs left the doors open? Had someone broken in? Were they inside waiting for him? He waited, two, three, four minutes. There was no sound except the murmur of the traffic on Wisconsin Avenue in the distance. An airplane struggling for altitude after its take-off from National Airport down the river roared overhead, fifteen hundred feet above, its navigational lights flashing in the mist, its engines creating a sympathetic vibration in the French-window frames.

He ran his fingers over the window panes. They were not broken. A further examination revealed no indications that the bolts had been forced. He exhaled his breath in relief.

Jiggs must have forgotten to lock up. The rapid beating of his heart subsided. He cautiously drew the French doors open and stepped into his living room. The dying fire in the fireplace reminded him that only two hours before this frightening and alien place had been his home and sanctuary. He walked carefully into the bathroom and dropped his tooth brush and a safety razor into his pocket. Then he walked over to his pullman kitchen and pulled the coffee canister toward him. He took off the lid, felt among the ground coffee with his fingers, and extracted a flat rectangle of bills wrapped in a clear sheet of plastic. He placed the bills in his wallet. Now how in hell did he get out of here?

A fit of coughing erupted outside his door, followed by the sound of a nose being vigorously blown. He hadn't heard voices—that meant one policeman on guard. They evidently expected that he would come to his front door like an unsuspecting lamb and meekly submit to arrest. If it hadn't been for Jiggs's warning, he would have done just that.

A gun barrel jammed hard into the small of his back and a hand clamped over his mouth. "Don't move and don't speak, Baylor. I'm on your side," a voice whispered. Baylor nodded his assent.

The hand left his mouth and the pressure of the gun barrel eased. "Turn around."

Baylor turned around slowly. A Chinese man about half a head shorter than he smiled up at him. "My name is Wong," he said in a hushed voice.

"I came here to talk with you and got trapped when the police arrived. I opened the doors onto the garden, but there's no way to get over that ten foot wall."

"How did you get in?" Baylor hissed.

"I broke in, of course." Wong shook his head deprecatingly. "Your locks are toys. I relocked the front door from the inside. That has inhibited the police. The stupid jerks now need a search warrant to enter."

"What do you want?"

"That can wait. First, we have to get out of here. You didn't come over that wall and wander around in here in the dark just to surrender yourself to the police?"

"No."

"Good. There is only one cop. You step over to your front door, open it, yawn, and act like you are surprised to see him. Invite him in, but don't turn on the light. I'll knock him out with this blackjack as he passes the door." Baylor hesitated. "What if you run out on me? Then I've had it."

"Run, where?"

"O.K. I'll take a chance."

"Do it now."

Baylor walked over to the door and threw it open. He forced a yawn before speaking to the startled patrolman standing in the darkness. "Hello, there, officer. You surprised me. Is something wrong?"

"You Baylor?" The patrolman asked gruffly.

"Yes, of course."

"Why didn't you answer our demand at your door an hour ago? We raised up the whole neighborhood."

"I was asleep. I took some sleeping pills about mid-afternoon."

"You're under arrest."

"I'm what?"

"You're under arrest, feller."

Baylor lowered his voice. "Come inside, officer. I don't want my neighbors to hear this." He turned his back on the policeman and walked into the deeper darkness of his livingroom. The policeman hesitated imperceptibly and then followed him inside.

Baylor had not turned around when he heard the fall of the policeman's helmet and the thud of the blackjack. He spun about to see the knees of the patrolman buckle beneath him and his body collapse onto the floor, carrying a small table under a wall mirror with him. "Help me lift him free of the doorway," Wong said calmly.

They lifted the body of the patrolman and deposited it in the center of the room. They then hurried out into the alley of the Mews softly closing and locking the door behind them. Wong gestured with his pistol. "This way, Baylor."

"I thought you were on my side?"

"I feel better with a gun. It saves arguments and I haven't much time."

"We're friends if I let you order me about?"

"Something like that. My car is parked at the next corner. Illegally." Wong smirked. "I hope I don't have a ticket. We are going to take a ride. I want to talk with you."

"What if I say, 'no'?"

"I'll place you under citizens' arrest and turn you over to the police. They want you for murder."

"I know that. How do you know it?"

"A little bird told me. They won't like you slugging the cop either. They'll probably rough you up a bit."

"You speak English real good," Baylor said wryly. "I should. I was born in the Bronx."

Baylor shrugged. "Let's go."

Wong swung into the outbound traffic on Wisconsin Avenue. "You're in a tough spot, Baylor. You need a friend."

"I see it that way, too. May I light a cigarette?"

"Go ahead."

Baylor exhaled smoke. "Who are you, Wong?"

Wong turned with a cold glance and a hard smile.

"I'm the guy that killed Frank Bennington, and you're the guy that's going to hang for it if you don't do just what I tell you to do."

Baylor's mouth turned dry with shock and his heart began to race. He couldn't trust himself to speak. He stared at Wong in horror-stricken disbelief.

Wong was silent for a moment. "That sunk in?" he asked brutally.

"Yes." Baylor's voice was muffled.

"Good. It saves time if we understand one another. You and Bennington were poking your noses in where they didn't belong. Bennington worried us. We think that he was a CIA agent. You don't worry us. You're just the patsy, the sucker. You're lucky. That's why you're still alive and Bennington is dead."

Baylor cleared his throat. "I see."

"Now, you are wanted for murder. You have no place to go. It's the end of the line? Right?"

Baylor mumbled. "Right."

"You're not worth anything to anybody. Right?"

"Right."

"But you're worth something to me."

"Oh?"

"I made a little mistake when I killed Bennington. I stopped him, but I stopped myself too, understand?"

"Not exactly."

"My bosses want to know who was behind Bennington. Now he's dead and I can't find out."

"Yes. I see that."

"Lucky you. You can help me find out who was behind Bennington."

"I don't know. I thought he was on his own."

"Sure you did. Now you know different. What I

want from you is this, Baylor. Nose around. If Bennington was CIA, his control may try to contact you. Lead me to him. Set him up."

"For what?"

"Ten thousand bucks and no murder rap."

"You control the police?"

"Not exactly, but I can arrange for a guy to confess to the crime."

"Tough on him."

"Somebody has to get screwed."

Baylor drew in a last lungful of smoke and extinguished his cigarette in an ash tray protruding from the dashboard. "O.K. I'll play along. I have no choice. What if I get arrested?"

"Don't. You can't earn your money and your ann-

nestly from the clink."

"Where do I live? What do I use for money?"

"Here's two C notes. Live around. I'll drop you at a motel up the line that doesn't ask questions." Wong handed him a card. "There's the names of three or four others. Keep moving. One night in each. Four days ought to be enough for you to find out if you're going to live or not."

"Do I tell you where I am? How do I reach you?"

Wong grinned. "Don't be foolish, Little Red Riding-hood. Why should I tell you where I am? You show up at these motels. If I want to talk to you, I will. If you don't show up, he shrugged, "well, then, we've both got reasons to be disappointed. The only difference is that mine aren't fatal."

Baylor sighed tremulously. "O.K."

"Right." Wong swung into the curb side. "Up there a hundred yards is your pad for tonight. Get going."

Baylor got out of the car and walked up the street to the motel.

He bought a package of cigarettes from a dispensing machine in the small lobby and turned to the registration clerk. "Do you have a single?"

The clerk glanced at a plywood board filled with red tagged keys on brass hooks. "One night?"

"I think so."

"Any luggage?"

"I just flew in. The airline lost it. I hope it will show up tomorrow."

"Tough luck. I'll have to charge you in advance. The house rule when there's no luggage."

"O.K. How much?"

"Nine dollars."

Baylor paid the clerk and received the key. He walked to the rear of the motel and climbed an outside stairway to a second floor balcony. His room was the third from the stairway. He inserted the key in the red pressed-plywood door and swung it open. The room had a faint, musty smell. Closing the door as he flicked on the light switch, he turned on an electric heater in the wall. Its metal reflector popped and crackled as the electric coils began to glow red.

He sat down on the thin beige cotton bedspread with white cotton tufts. The bed swayed and creaked under his weight as he buried his face in his hands and began to tremble uncontrollably.

## SEVENTEEN

HE sat on the edge of the bed until he had smoked half of the package of cigarettes. When he had snubbed out the last, he was still as frightened and as confused as when he had lit the first. The electric heater and the cigarette smoke had made the room oppressively hot and close. He had to get out. He had to get out.

Slipping on his coat, he opened his door onto the balcony and looked about. The traffic was moving imper-sonally up the nearby wet street. A family of five was moving into a ground floor room. The father closed the trunk lid of their sedan with a soft thump and joined his noisy family. The open door to their room closed on the babble of their voices. Everything seemed innocent enough. The normality of everybody else's world filled him with self-pity for his own predicament. It took less than a minute to descend the stairs to the ground level and walk out into the street. He found an all-night counter restaurant a few hundred feet away from the motel. He moved back to the end of the counter where a pay telephone hung on the wall. He inserted a coin and dialed a number.

"Darling, don't mention names and places."

There was a short, sharp intake of breath at the other end of the line. "Where have you *been*? I've been worried sick."

"It's a long story. I'm at a motel over the D.C. line in Maryland. Just a minute." He glanced at the matches he had obtained at the motel with his cigarettes and gave her the name and address. "Can you take a taxi and meet me here? I'm in 6B."

"Why don't you come here?"

"That's what I want to talk about."

"It will take me about a half hour."

"I'll be looking for you."

He sat down at the counter and ordered a cup of hot coffee. After twenty minutes, he left a coin and walked out onto the sidewalk. He had covered about a hundred yards and was about to turn into the motel grounds when he noticed two patrol cars of the Montgomery County police. He walked on by, forcing himself to maintain the same pace, then ducked into an alleyway and cautiously worked his way back. From the alley loading platform of a closed drugstore, he could see over the grapestake fence that surrounded the motel property. Two patrolmen were standing on the balcony talking. The door to his room was standing open, the light spilling onto the balcony. So much for Wong and his secure motels. The police had broadcast his description already and the room clerk had tattled.

A taxi drew up in front of the motel and Jiggs got out. She paid the driver and turned toward the motel. Baylor wet his lips. How in hell did he warn her off?

They would notice her in a minute, question her, demand her address, perhaps arrest her. Then he would be all alone with absolutely no place to go. Jiggs walked by the squad cars with no indication of interest and into the motel office. Baylor stood on tip-toe, just able to see one corner of the office. She walked over to the cigarette machine and obtained a package of cigarettes. Then she turned, reemerged into the street, and disappeared down

the sidewalk. He gave a ragged sigh of relief. She'd seen them first!

Baylor walked cautiously out of the alley and turned down a curving tree-lined street which led into a residential district. Twenty blocks away he reemerged into a commercial street and hailed a taxi. He asked to be dropped on a corner two blocks from Jiggs's apartment. He walked down the brick Georgetown sidewalk, past the bay windows of three-story Victorian houses, until he came to Jiggs's address.

From behind the grillwork of iron bars that covered her windows, light glowed through drawn curtains to illuminate faintly the entrance below street level. He walked down the three steps half-hidden beside the ornate iron staircase leading to the upper floors and across a short walk of white gravel. There was an interval of silence after his light tap on the door.

"Tony?"

"Yes."

The door flew open. She threw her arms about him as she drew him inside. "Oh, Tony!" she breathed. "You big lug! What kind of a game are you playing?"

He kissed her and held her tightly. "I should have come here in the first place. I've been acting like more of a damned fool than usual."

She made him take off his damp coat and fixed him a drink. "I was scared to death. I thought that the police had arrested you. All that I could think of was to come home and wait."

"They just missed me. I saw them as I came back from telephoning you."

"What were you doing, way out there in Maryland? I thought you were coming directly here after I telephoned you at the hospital?"

"I didn't want to involve you, Jiggs. Besides, I had to go home to get some money."

"You went home?"

"I went over the back wall from the neighbor's garden. I got my money and a toothbrush and discovered a

gunman by the name of Wong hiding in my livingroom."

Higgs gasped. "Tony!"

"Wong and I knocked out the cop that was guarding the front door and escaped. He suggested that I hide out at the motel."

"Who is Wong? A pal of yours?"

"He says that he killed Frank Bennington, but that I'm going to hang for it."

"He's no pal."

Baylor slowly shook his head. "No pal. Nobody's a pal of Tony Baylor." He looked up at her. "I'm beat. I can't even get angry tonight at Wong for killing Frank."

"You need to go to bed, chum. You don't even make sense."

"Don't I know it." He laid back on the sofa with his arm under his head and fell fast asleep. She covered him with a blanket and made her bed on a rubber mattress beside a small coal fire.

She gave him fried eggs and bacon for breakfast. After his third cup of black coffee and a cigarette, he began to feel better.

"Why don't you tell the police about Wong?" she asked.

"They won't believe me."

"Why not? They may know all about Wong. Bennington probably isn't the first person he's killed."

"I'm sure of that. You should have seen his eyes." He shivered.

She waited, looking at him expectantly.

"This is a little bit bigger than the Metropolitan Police," he said at last, slowly.

"It's murder and they want you. That's big enough for me."

"O.K. I'll call O'Brien at Homicide. He seemed like a square shooter." He slipped on his topcoat. "I'll call him from a pay telephone. There's less chance that he can trace the call."

He walked out into a bright, sunny winter's day. A cold northwest wind was blowing, but the sky was a clear,

azure blue. He breathed deeply of the dry air as he walked, his exhalations making little white clouds before his face which were soon dissipated by the wind.

His ears were tingling when he reached the gasoline filling station on M Street and stepped into the glass telephone booth against a retaining wall. He leafed through the dog-eared telephone book hanging from a chain inside the booth and thaled police headquarters.

"Homicide please."

"One minute."

"Homicide."

"I'd like to talk with Sergeant O'Brien."

"O'Brien? Just a minute." The voice became half muffled as the speaker turned away. "O'Brien on duty? I got a call in. O.K." The voice became louder. "Just a moment, sir. Sergeant O'Brien will be right with you."

Baylor waited for over a minute, then he heard the familiar, flat voice. "O'Brien."

"This is Baylor, Sergeant."

"Baylor?" O'Brien's voice was sharp. "Are you coming in?"

"No. I didn't kill Bennington. You know that."

"You better give yourself up, Baylor. You've already slugged a cop. He's in the hospital with a serious concussion."

"You ever hear of a guy called Wong?"

"No."

"He slugged the cop and he told me he killed Bennington."

"No kiddin'. Then bring him in with you. We'll sort it all out."

"Why are you so hot after me all of a sudden? You could have arrested me at the Press Building, or the other night after the girl was shot. Do you think that I did that too?"

O'Brien had been off the line. "What was that again, Baylor?" he asked in an easy voice.

"Are you trying to trace this call?"

"Now why would I want to do that?"

"I'm signing off, O'Brien. I didn't do it and I'm not going to give myself up. Check out this Wong thing."  
"Look, son, hang on. Don't be a damn fool. After last night, we got orders to shoot you on sight. Turn yourself in to me. You'll get a square shake and you'll be safer. We gotta prove our case, you know. You're entitled to a lawyer."

Baylor could hear sirens in the distance. He slammed up the telephone and bolted out of the telephone booth. He ran across to the gas pumps where a grey station wagon was being filled. The owner had stepped into the men's room and the keys were in the ignition switch. Baylor slid into the driver's seat. The big car was moving forward almost as the engine roared into life. The gas pump hose clattered to the ground as gasoline began to pour forth over the driveway. As he swung the car into M Street, Baylor could see the startled face of the attendant in the rearview mirror. He trod heavily on the accelerator and headed up river toward Chain Bridge.

He swung across Chain Bridge into Virginia and took the George Washington Memorial Parkway back toward Washington. There was no indication that he was being followed, so he moderated his speed and joined the inflowing traffic of the later commuters. Entering Washington by the Fourteenth Street Bridge, he left the car in a parking garage near Tenth and F Streets and entered an old four-story brownstone office building. The groundfloor passageway was hung with the signs of the tenants, lawyers, engravers, clothing salesmen, and accountants. As he remembered from an effort to get a gift engraved some months before, the tenants rarely appeared and there was a pay telephone on each floor.

The pale, dispirited operator of an ancient open cage elevator took him to the fourth floor. After several efforts with an antique rotary hand control, the operator placed the elevator more or less even with the floor and laboriously opened the sliding wrought-iron door. A flat metallic summons from a buzzer indicated that there was another passenger waiting on the ground floor and with a

resigned shake of his head, the operator took the elevator down again. As the uncovered white bulb in the elevator car's ceiling winked downward, Baylor turned and walked rapidly down the fourth floor hallway to the telephone. First thumbing through a worn telephone book, he called the Red Onion. A sleepy subdued voice answered.

"I'd like to speak with Rosie Dawn."

"She ain't here. It's only 10 A.M. for God's sake."

"I'm sorry. It's very important that I speak with her."

"When will she be in?"

"She's gonna rehearse a new number, like, noon-

time."

"Thanks. I'll telephone then."

"Save your time. She don't take no phone calls. Drop around. If she knows you, she'll see you. Otherwise, you're nowhere, bud."

"Thanks again." Baylor hung up and glanced at his wrist watch. It was ten minutes past ten. Where could a fugitive wanted for murder hide for two hours? It was too risky to go back to Jiggs's apartment in Georgetown for an hour's visit. The movie houses didn't open until eleven-thirty. His office. They'd never think to look for him at his office. If he could get in and out without being seen, he could sit in his office without turning on the lights. His office was only three blocks from the Red Onion.

He stopped along F Street and bought a cheap hat and a pair of dark sun glasses. The window of a novelty store caught his eye. He went inside and bought a heavy brownish red moustache with adhesive backing. It was corky, but he needed something to get up and down in the Press Building elevator—just enough to avoid the recognition of casual acquaintances. If he met Charley Digges or someone else who knew him well, he was sunk.

He entered the National Press Building automatic elevator with his hat, glasses, and moustache in place and felt an hysterical urge to laugh. The problem was he'd had no experience in running from the law. He was an amateur fugitive and he felt like a damn fool. The moustache itched. It probably looked phony. He must be going nuts to

put on a thing like that. Only one person entered the elevator between the lobby and his floor, a preoccupied middle-aged woman with a frown on her face. She got on at three, pushed a floor button, and got off at six. She didn't look at Baylor. She had her own troubles.

Baylor walked down the familiar corridor, his heart pounding wildly. He approached his office door. If anyone appeared, he would walk on by. No one appeared. He inserted his key in the door and ducked inside. He was safe until he had to leave. He exhaled his breath and wiped a damp brow with a handkerchief.

He sat in his familiar chair and lit a cigarette, inhaling it gratefully. Perhaps his silhouette could be seen against the light from the windows? He hurriedly got up and adjusted the blinds behind him, casting the office into an even deeper gloom.

The hands on his wrist watch crept around the dial with agonizing slowness. A film of perspiration reformed on his face. Realizing that he was still wearing his coat, he took it off and removed the sun glasses. He did not remove the moustache. It might not be possible to get the damn thing on again.

It was eleven-thirty. He could leave soon. A shadow appeared on the other side of the frosted glass door. A key was fitted into the lock. Baylor seized the marble base of his desk pen, sprang from his chair, and flattened himself against the wall beside the door. The shadow was having some trouble with his key. The door opened and closed and a figure stepped into the room. It tensed as it smelled the odor of Baylor's cigarettes and spun around. It was Charley Diggs.

He looked at Baylor, a series of emotions ranging from embarrassment to fear crossing his face. "Hi, Tony," he croaked. "What's with the moustache?"

Baylor swung the marble pen base against Diggs's skull and the little newspaperman collapsed to the floor. "Sorry, Charley," Baylor whispered. "It was you or me."

Retrieving his hat, coat, and sun glasses, Baylor glanced outside the door cautiously and then walked boldly

down the hallway to the elevators which were full with the noonday crowd. He left the building unnoticed and walked up Fourteenth Street toward the Red Onion.

He pounded briskly with his knuckles on the wooden frame of the shabby black vinyl upholstered door which was studded with ornamental brass nailheads. He took off the glasses and the false moustache while he waited. The door opened. Baylor recognized the tough face of the owner. His eyes were red rimmed and he had not yet shaven.

"Yeah?"

"I'd like to speak with Rosie Dawn. I understand that she's rehearsing."

"She know you?"

"Yes."

"What's the name?"

"Sessena."

The owner looked at him suspiciously. "O.K. Come on in. I'll ask. If you're givin' me a line, out you go. We can't have guys with ideas disturbin' the dancers."

Baylor stepped inside and waited in the gloom near the door. Rosie Dawn was practicing a dance routine to a slow rhythm played on an upright piano by a thin scrawny man in a white sleeveless shirt. When she had finished, the owner spoke to her. She glanced in Baylor's direction, nodded, and came slowly over to him, patting her face with a hand towel.

"What's the big idea, using Sessena's name?"

"I had to talk with you and you don't know my name."

"Oh?"

"I've got to talk to Sessena right away. Where can I find him?"

"You were in here the other night, weren't you?"

"Yes. You took me to Sessena unmasked. Now I'm asking."

"Why?"

"I'm in trouble. He can help me."

"He know about it?"

"Yes."

She hesitated.

"Please, I'm desperate."

Her voice was not unkind. "You're scared, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Tell you what. Let's have a cup of coffee and a cigarette and I'll think it over." She left him and returned with two chipped cups filled with coffee. "Sit down. Take a load off your feet." She motioned toward a chair.

Baylor sat down across the table from her and sipped the black coffee. She took one of his cigarettes and let him light it. "The other night when you were in here. It was your first time?"

"Yes."

"You asked about Williams. You a friend of his?"

"No, I'm a newspaperman. I was interested in him for a story angle."

"The cops after you?"

"Yes."

She nodded. "I can always tell. Guys on the lam give off a certain something. You know?"

He shook his head.

"What they want you for?"

His eyes met hers. "Murder."

Her eyes didn't flinch. "Well?"

"I didn't do it."

She held his gaze for a moment. "I believe you.

What does Sessena think?"

"He knows I didn't."

Her long, strong fingers pushed out her cigarette.

"O.K. I'll tell him about it. Can you come here at 10 P.M. tonight?"

"Yes."

"I'll ask Sessena to be here."

"Tell him it's got to be tonight."

"O.K."

"If he shows and I'm not here, forget it. It'll be too late."

"O.K."

He got up to leave.

"You got some money, fall guy?"

"Yes. But thanks a lot."

She nodded. "You can hole up until tonight?"

"Yes. I'm O.K."

"Take it easy."

"I will."

He stepped outside and hailed a taxi. He got out a block from Jiggs's apartment and, after loitering to be certain he was not being followed, rapidly walked the remaining distance. She had left the door unlocked and a note she'd be back in two hours. He sat down and lit a cigarette. He had nine hours to wait. He sighed heavily. Sessena was his only chance.

EGHTEEN

THE Man Behind the Desk was looking pensively out of the window with his hands clasped behind his back when Ernie Sessena entered his office. He spoke over his shoulder.

"Sit down, Ernie."

Sessena sat down on the sofa and lit a cigarette.

"How's your Wax Works case coming along?"

"Stalled. No information is being passed. They've gone to ground."

The Man Behind the Desk turned around and looked at Sessena. His eyes were pinched and his face had a grey, closed look. "We are going to call it a day on that one, Ernie."

Sessena stared at him, his cigarette dangling limply from one side of his mouth. He cleared his throat. "You're calling me off?"

"We are closing the Wax Works file and you are

going on extended leave. I'll reassign you when you get back."

"Well, I'll be damned. They finally swung the political axe."

The Man Behind the Desk adjusted the papers on his desk. His voice sounded smothered. "I have orders from top-side to shelve this case. We are embarrassing high government officials with a fishing expedition. If you have concrete evidence against Williams or others, let me have it and I'll try to reverse the decision. If you don't, this is it. No more frigging around."

"You know damn well that I haven't tied it together yet, and you know equally well that our suspicions are well founded on circumstantial evidence. If this involved a John Doe, we wouldn't call it off."

The Man Behind the Desk remained silent.

"What about Frank Bennington?" Sessena added bitterly.

"What about him?"

"Why was he killed?"

"I can think of a dozen reasons that don't involve the House Armed Services Committee. Frank had been around a long time."

Sessena savagely ground out his cigarette in an ash-tray and got up. "I've had my suspicions in this case and my working hypothesis. They involve Williams, Probar, and others as yet unnamed. They unfortunately involve the House Armed Services Committee. I wasn't certain how high we had to go in this thing, but I didn't doubt that we'd go as high as we had to go to protect the national security. Are you telling me that we've gone too high and that now we have to quit? Do we only go after junior spies?"

"Ernie," the words were spoken in a tired, subdued voice, "don't debate this thing with me. I've expressed my feelings top-side and I was given a direct order. I'm giving you a direct order. Starting right now you are on leave and have no assigned duties."

Sessena stood glowering.