

# THE ADVENTURE OF A QUARTER

## PROLOGUE

Can a quarter — a 25 cent coin — change one's fate? Is it possible for a quarter to make one rich, send someone to prison, save a life? Yes, it can.



This is the story of one quarter that did all these things. It was born in the United States Mint in Denver, Colorado, along with hundreds of thousands of other quarters.

It started as part of a 10,000 pound blank coil of metal that was run through a huge press which punched out the shapes of the coins. After that, it went through a second press while a hopper stamped on the impressions. On one side of the quarter appears the word “LIBERTY”. On the other side are the words: “IN GOD WE TRUST.” The coins then slid along a conveyor belt until they reached the plastic bag where they were collected. The bags contained 4,000 coins each. Eleven billion American quarters are circulating around the world today, but we are interested in only one — the quarter that was destined to change the lives of a dozen people.

## CHAPTER ONE

“Hey, hurry up with my order!”

“I asked for my steak well-done.”

“I didn't order potatoes. I ordered tomatoes.”

The evening rush hour had begun and the restaurant was filled with customers, hungry and impatient. There were six waitresses working at the Hollywood Coffee Shop, and Rosemary Murphy was the best of them. Rosemary was in her late twenties, an attractive woman with a nice figure, a clear complexion and intelligent gray eyes. She took care of six tables and was always pleasant and efficient. Regular customers always tried to be seated in her section. Somehow, she made them feel welcome, almost as though they were her guests. But Rosemary hated the job. She hated the restaurant. She even hated the brass stars etched with names of stars that were embedded in the sidewalk outside.

She had come to Los Angeles because she had won a beauty contest in her home town of Salem, Oregon.

“You can be a big star.” everybody told her.

“You're as beautiful as any of those glamour queens, and you've got more talent.”

“You can be as big as Marilyn Monroe.”

“Bigger.”

“All they have to do is see you and they'll fall down.”

She had believed them. She dreamed about stardom and fame. She would work with all the big stars: Burt Reynolds, Robert Redford and Clint Eastwood. She would be rich and have a fancy car and a beautiful house with a heart-shaped swimming pool. She would be famous and everybody would want her autograph.

Rosemary used almost all of her prize money to buy a plane ticket to Hollywood. In the beginning it had been an exciting adventure. She stood at the corner of Hollywood and Vine expecting some director or producer to suddenly tap her on the shoulder and say: "Excuse me, Miss, but have you ever thought about being an actress?" It did not happen. But Rosemary was not discouraged. It's just a matter of time, she told herself.

She went to Mann's Chinese Theater and saw the footprints of more stars. The next afternoon she caught a glimpse of Larry Hagman driving down Santa Monica Boulevard. He looked exactly as she had seen him on DALLAS. All of that happened during the first week; the good week. From there on it went downhill.

Rosemary had thought that all she would have to do was walk up to the studio gates, announce that she had won a beauty contest and demand to see the casting director, who would immediately sign her to a contract. The reality was something different.

She took a bus to Universal City and went to the reception desk of Universal Studios.

"I'm Rosemary Murphy," she told the uniformed guard seated at the desk. "I'd like to see the casting director."

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No, but —"

"He doesn't see anybody without an appointment."

"You don't understand. I won a beauty contest and —"

The guard said in a bored voice, "Congratulations. You'll have to write a letter and make an appointment."

"But I —"

"Send in a photograph and a resume of your acting experience." He looked up at her and said, not unkindly, "You do have some acting experience, don't you?"

Rosemary hesitated. "I played Camille at the Oregon Playhouse and —"

The guard studied the pretty, wholesome-looking girl with the beads of perspiration beginning to dampen her carefully teased hairdo. "Lady, this town is full of beauty queens. They arrive here every day from all over the world by bus and plane and train. And they're all looking for the same thing. They want to grab the brass ring. And it doesn't happen that way. I'm going to give you some advice: Don't even bother sending in that letter. Catch the next bus back to Iowa."

"Oregon."

"Whatever. Go home." And he picked up the phone. "Front gate..."

Go home. Of course I won't go home, Rosemary thought. I haven't even started yet.

Her next stop was at the Burbank Studios. "I'm Rosemary Murphy," she told the uniformed guard in the reception office. "I'd like to see the casting director."

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No, but —"

And the identical dialogue started again. It was the same everywhere she went. She tried Metro-Goldwyn Mayer in Culver City, Disney Studios in Burbank, Paramount Pictures in Hollywood, and

Twentieth-Century Fox in West Los Angeles. It was always the same story: Send in a photograph and a resume of your experience. Rosemary had no photographs of herself. No one had told her what to expect.

All you have to do, baby, is just walk in and when they see that beautiful face and body, you'll be signed to a contract so fast it will make your head swim.

Her head was beginning to swim, but it was from hunger.

A friend from home telephoned her.

"Hello, Rosemary, how are you doing?"

"Fine."

"Have you signed a studio contract yet?"

"Not yet, but everything looks very promising." She could not bear to confess the truth.

Rosemary used the last of her money to have photographs made and she sent them to every casting director in town. Not one of them replied. She tried telephoning them, but they did not return her calls. She remembered what the guard had said: lady, this town is full of beauty queens. They arrive here every day from all over the world by bus and plane and train. And they're all looking for the same thing. They want to grab the brass ring. And it doesn't happen that way. I'm going to give you some advice: Don't even bother sending in that letter. Catch the next bus back to Iowa.

Rosemary was getting desperate. She was living in a small rooming house, paying \$15.00 a day, but she could not even afford that. She was behind in her rent. The landlady was sympathetic.

"Look honey. I don't want to have to throw you out, but I've got to have the rent."

"I should hear from one of the studios any day now."

The landlady had heard that before. Over the years her rooming house had seen hundreds of would-be stars turn into prostitutes, taxi drivers, waitresses and maids. It always started with the same dream, but the dream never seemed to work out.

"I'm sure something will happen soon, but in the meantime you've got to eat. Why don't you get some kind of job just to tide you over until you get your break."

"What kind of job?"

"I heard from the woman in Room 6 that there's a job open as a waitress at the Hollywood Coffee Shop. She says the tips aren't bad."

A waitress! Rosemary hated the idea. She had not come to Hollywood to be a waitress. It seemed demeaning.

"They pay \$150.00 a week."

At that moment, it seemed like a fortune. Not a fortune compared to what she would make when she was a star, of course, but it would pay for her food and rent.

The landlady was studying her as though reading her mind. "You could afford to have some new pictures made. Probably the ones you sent into the studios weren't too good."

"You're right," Rosemary said. She had gone to a cheap photographer and the pictures had not been very good. She suddenly felt much better. When she could afford to have some new pictures made that showed her as beautiful as she really was, the casting directors would all be calling her. "I'll do it. After all, it would only be for a few weeks."

The weeks turned into months, and the months turned into two year. She had sent out her new pictures to all the casting directors and had not heard from a single one of them. From time to time she received letters from her mother and father asking her how she was doing. "Everything is fine," she wrote. "I have a lot of prospects. It shouldn't be long before something wonderful happens."

But as her letters got less and less cheerful, her parents wrote asking if she might like to come home. They missed her. She missed them, too, but she was determined to stay in Hollywood and succeed.

In the beginning when Rosemary had met people and they had asked her what she did, she had said, "I'm an actress." She still said it, but now in her heart she was thinking I'm a waitress. Her dream had faded. Hollywood was filled with beautiful women, younger than she, more beautiful, more talented. Rosemary had dreamed not only of stardom but of having a husband and children. And now it looked as though none of those dreams would ever come true. The men she met in the restaurant wanted only to take her to bed.

"What have you got to lose, baby? We can have fun."

"Thank you, I'm not interested."

"What are you, some kind of lesbian?"

She lay in her lonely bed at night wondering what had happened to her life. It had all started out so promisingly. She remembered the night of the beauty contest and how excited everyone had been when she had won. The most beautiful girl in Oregon! She thought about the little theater plays she had starred in and how exciting it was to act.

"You're a wonderful actress. Hollywood needs you."

Rosemary was thrilled. "Thank you." She believed him. But something had happened to her in the past two years. Had the rebuffs that she had encountered done something to her? The truth was that Rosemary no longer wanted to be an actress. I want to go home, she thought. I want to go back to Oregon before it's too late, and find a nice, decent man and get married and have his children. Coming to Hollywood was a terrible mistake. And her next thought was: I'm going home.

Rosemary Murphy's closest friend was another waitress named Hilda, who worked at the Hollywood Coffee Shop. Hilda had never dreamed of being an actress. She was short and fat with a plain face but always seemed to have boyfriends. She would come to work exhausted and say to Rosemary, "I didn't get a wink of sleep all night. That Tom's an animal. But he's gorgeous. How could I say no to him?"

A few days later Hilda would come up to Rosemary and say, "I just gotta get some sleep. I just can't stay up all night like this."

"Well, tell Tom to leave you alone for a while."

"Oh, it ain't Tom. It's Al. He's insatiable."

I'll miss Hilda, Rosemary thought. But she's the only one I'll miss. She would not miss the pawings of the customers or the drunken whispers in her ears, or the noisy shouting in the restaurant. All she wanted to do was to get away from Hollywood and return to the peace and calm of Oregon.

She informed her landlady that she would be leaving the next day and she told Mr. Tompkins, the owner of the restaurant, that she was quitting.

"Rosemary, you can't quit. You're the best girl I've got."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Tompkins. I'm going home."

"Well, I'm going to be sorry to lose you, kid. You got real class. If you want my personal opinion, I think you should have make it as a star."

"Thank you, Mr. Tompkins."

His face brightened. "As a matter of fact, Rosemary, I got a cousin who lives in the same building as one of the casting fellows over at Warner Brothers. I could have him talk to him about you and —"

"No, thanks." Rosemary had heard that before. There was always a friend who knew a producer or a chauffeur who could talk to the director he worked for, or the secretary of a movie star who had influence over him, or the nephew of an important agent. There was always somebody who knew somebody, but somehow nothing ever came of it. And now it really did not matter to Rosemary. She realized that what had attracted her to Hollywood was not the chance to act, but the glitter, the glamour, the fame, and the money. I came here for all the wrong reasons, she told herself. And so now she said to Mr. Tompkins, "No, thanks. I'm going back to Oregon."

That afternoon she had arranged for a bus ticket home. She had \$100.00 in her purse, but she was not worried about money. Her room was waiting for her at home and she would get a job, maybe she would take a secretarial course. Yes, that was what she would do.

Near closing time when she had finished serving her last customer his dessert, Hilda called her aside. "Can you do me a favor, Rosemary?"

"What is it?"

Hilda was embarrassed. "I got a problem, honey. I need some money."

"What's the matter?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I'm pregnant."

"Does Al know?"

"Al? No. Bill. I haven't told him. I'm \$100.00 short. Could you make me a loan?"

A hundred dollars. Rosemary thought quickly. That was all she had. But her room rent was paid and she had her bus ticket.

"I'll pay you back."

"All right. I'm going home tomorrow, but you can send it to me there."

"Great. Thanks a million, Rosemary."

"Come on, I'll get you the money."

Rosemary and Hilda went to the back of the restaurant where their lockers were. Rosemary took the \$100.00 from her purse and gave it to Hilda. "Here you are."

"I really appreciate this, honey."

"That's all right, Hilda. And I'm sorry about the baby. I really am."

She walked back to the front of the restaurant. The customer to whom she had served coffee and dessert was just leaving. "Here you are," he laid a quarter on the table. It was a shiny quarter and looked new.

"It's my lucky quarter. It will bring you luck."

"Thank you," Rosemary replied. Rosemary picked up the quarter and examined it. It was so sparkling that she hated to spend it, but it would be her bus fare back to the boarding house. She put the quarter in her purse, changed out of her uniform into her blue slacks and blouse, said good-bye to everyone and left the restaurant for the last time.

It was dark outside. When she reached Santa Monica Boulevard, it was deserted, and some of the street lamps were out. This was not a good neighborhood. A lot of crimes had occurred here.

"I don't like walking down these streets alone," Rosemary said aloud.

Usually Hilda went with her, but tonight Rosemary was by herself. Her bus stop was two blocks away. Rosemary looked up and down the dark streets and thought: Nothing's going to happen to me.

There was a shortcut through Plummer Park, and she decided to take it. In the distance she could see the bright lights of Fairfax Avenue where she caught her bus. She passed shadowed trees and the darkness ban to frighten her. There had been a rape here a week earlier.

I'll be glad to get out of this neighborhood forever, Rosemary thought.

There was a sudden rustle from behind the bushes and Rosemary almost screamed, but it was only a cat. You're being foolish, she told herself. Nothing's going to hurt you.

And then she heard the sound of footsteps behind her that seemed to be coming faster and faster. She was afraid to turn around. She began to take bigger steps, and the quicker she walked, the faster the footsteps seemed to move. It's probably someone hurrying to catch a bus, she thought. And at that moment someone grabbed her from behind.

"Don't make a sound," a voice hissed, "or I'll kill you."

For a moment Rosemary's heart stopped beating. And then it began pounding so hard she thought it would burst.

"Please don't hurt me." She said. "I have no money."

She felt the man grab her purse. He held her wrists tightly in a grip with one hand while he opened her purse.

"A quarter! A lousy quarter!"

He spun her around, and she got her first look at his face. He was tall and ugly, with yellow, beady eyes and broken teeth. His breath smelled of alcohol. Rosemary saw that he was holding a gun.

"You bitch. A lousy quarter. I'm going to kill you."

He raised his gun.

I'm going to die, Rosemary thought. I'm going to die for a quarter.

## Carousel Dreams

music & words by Bern Langdon

song by April Stevens

Sometimes I go down to the merry-go-round  
On old Santa Monica pier.  
Listen for hours while the band organ plays  
Old songs from some other year.  
The horses once gay, now their paints peeled away,  
Race off in slow motion it seems.  
And all of the while I just sit by and smile  
Spinning round in my carousel dreams.

The sunsets vermilion fills up the pavilion  
And tears start to fill in my eyes.  
Can't help but think of the brass rings I've missed  
Funny the way that time flies.  
But try as I do, childhood hopes won't come true,  
The mirrors are just shattered schemes.  
Yes all of the while I just sit by and smile  
Spinning round in my carousel dreams.

And then it happens again .....

## CHAPTER TWO

"I've got a problem," Dr. Charles Wilson said to himself.

In fact, he had several problems, and his way of dealing with them was to go jogging. Running in the fresh air, especially in the cool of the evening, cleared his mind. He concentrated on feeling the rhythms of his body: the movement of his arms and legs, the steady beating of his heart. Charles Wilson was 35 years old, the most brilliant surgeon on staff at Mount Cedars Hospital. That was part of his problem.

Dr. Alexander Foxwell, the head of the hospital, had called him in that morning for meeting.

"Charles, I've been looking for someone to head up the Surgical Staff and I've decided that you're my man. I don't have to tell you how much prestige that position will give you. And of course your income will be more than double."

It was a tempting offer, but there were two catches to it: One was that Charles had been dating Dr. Foxwell's daughter, Ellen, and they both expected the young doctor to marry her. He liked Ellen, but he was not sure that he loved her.

Charles Wilson had grown up in Ames, Iowa, a small town. He had moved to Los Angeles because he felt there were more opportunities there in his field, but he tried to get back to his home town as often as possible. The truth was that he did not like big cities. He had been offered positions in hospitals in Boston and Chicago and New York, and he had turned them all down.

That morning he had said to Dr. Foxwell, "I appreciate your offer. I'm very flattered. But I'd like to give it some thought. It's a big step."

"Take your time, my boy," Dr. Foxwell had said. But his tone had said Don't take too much time. "How are you and Ellen getting along?"

"Just fine."

"She's a great girl."

Pressure. It was subtle, but it was pressure. "She sure is," Charles Wilson replied.

He was thinking about that conversation now as he jogged through the Los Angeles park. His life had reached a turning point. He had a big decision to make. Was he going to marry Ellen Foxwell and head the surgical department of Mount Cedars Hospital, or was he going to go back to Ames, Iowa and work as a doctor in his home town? They needed a doctor there. Dr. Johnson, the only one in town, was getting old.

In the midst of his thoughts, Dr. Wilson heard a scream. It rang through the night, startling him so much that he stumbled. Then he heard it again.

"Don't! Please don't." It was a woman's voice, filled with terror.

The doctor sprinted toward the sound, running as fast as he could. Ahead of him he saw a young woman being held by a man pointing a gun at her head.

"Hey, you!" Dr. Wilson yelled.

The man turned, startled. When he saw the muscular young man racing toward him, he hesitated a moment, then grabbed Rosemary Murphy's purse and fled, racing through the bushes until he was out of



sight.

When Charles Wilson reached Rosemary, she was trembling with fright. "Are you all right?" the doctor asked.

"I — I think so."

He looked at her more closely. There was a livid bruise on her cheek. "What happened?"

"He — he hit me with his gun. He said he was going to kill me." She was fighting to control herself.

"Everything's all right now," the doctor assured her. "He's gone. He won't hurt you."

"I — I guess I'd be dead now if you hadn't come along. It's a kind of miracle." Her legs were trembling so hard that she would have fallen to her knees if Charles had not put his arm around her to steady her.

"It's not really a miracle. I jog in this park every night."

He took another look at her swollen cheek.

"Come on. I think I'd like to get you to a hospital. We'll get that swelling down and then give you a sedative. By the way, I'm Dr. Charles Wilson."

"I'm Rosemary Murphy."

In the taxi on the way to the hospital, Charles Wilson was studying the woman beside him and thinking: She's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. He felt a strong attraction toward her that was hard to explain. Was it because she was in distress and he had rescued her? He was not sure. All he knew was that he had never felt this way about Ellen.

When they arrived at the hospital, Dr. Wilson took Rosemary into the emergency room and treated the ugly bruise. He was skilled and so gentle. Rosemary suddenly became conscious of how attractive he was. He was not like any of the other men she had met in Hollywood.

He took her into his office and gave her a capsule and a paper cup of water. "Just sit there for a moment, until that starts to take effect, then I'll get you home. You're going to be fine. Don't worry."

Rosemary looked into the kind eyes of the young doctor and breathed, "Thank you. Thank you so much."

"What kind of work do you do?" he asked.

It was on the tip of Rosemary's tongue to say, "I'm an actress," but somehow she would not lie to this man. "I'm a waitress."

"That's a hard job. I wouldn't go back to work for a day or two, if I were you."

"I'm not planning to. I'm leaving in the morning for Oregon. That's my home."

Rosemary felt the tears beginning to start and tried to blink them away.

The young doctor looked at her questioningly.

"I don't like it here," Rosemary whispered.

"Neither do I," Charles Wilson said. And he found to his surprise that he had said it aloud. It was as though he had suddenly made a decision. Somehow, listening to her, he had made up his mind. Hollywood was not for him. It never had been. It was a place for doctors who were only interested in making money. The rich and famous lived here. It was different in a small town — you charged only what your patients could afford to pay. They were more than patients; they were your friends and neighbors. That was what

he missed most.

Rosemary and Dr. Charles Wilson sat there talking for most of the night, and they were both amazed at how much they had in common. They exchanged stories about their home towns, and it was as though they had grown up next to each other.

"Iowa sounds wonderful. Will you be going back to it?"

He studied her for a long moment and then he said, "I think so."

There was so much he wanted to say to her. And yet he did not dare. If he told her what was on his mind, she would think he was crazy. Dr. Charles Wilson had never believed in love at first sight, but it had happened to him. He could visualize Rosemary living in Iowa with him, married to him, bearing his children. He could not let her get away now. Yet how could he ask her to stay? An idea flashed into his mind.

Trying to make his voice casual, he said, "That bruise needs looking after. I really don't think you should leave town yet. I'd like to see you again. To make sure you're all right," he added quickly.

Rosemary looked into his eyes and read what was there. It was easy, because she was thinking the same thoughts. "I'll stay, if you want me to," she said simply.

And Dr. Wilson felt his heart swelling with joy.

"Good. Well, we'd better call the police and report what happened. Did the thief get away with much?"

She looked at him and smiled. "A quarter."

Danny Collins looked at the quarter in his hand and said disgustedly, "A lousy quarter! What the hell can anyone do with a quarter?"

He was in his tiny hotel room in East Los Angeles drinking heavily. He had been drinking heavily since he returned to his room, trying to get over his fright at what happened in the park. He was not going to kill the dame — he had only meant to scare her, beat her up a little bit. And then that idiot had come rushing at him out of nowhere. It was enough to turn any man to drink.

"A man can't make a decent score in this city any more," Danny said aloud. "I'm going to get out of here."

It had been a bad week. He had mugged four people and only had a few dollars to show for it.

"It's not my fault," Danny told the ceiling. "It's the economy. Nobody has any money."

Danny thought of himself as one of life's winners. He kept telling himself that he had just been unlucky lately. The truth was he was one of life's losers. Everything he touched went wrong, but he never thought it was his fault. He always had an excuse. I'm smarter than all of them suckers put together, Danny thought.

He lay on his bed all night, drinking, wondering what he should do next. The incident in the park had shaken him up more than he cared to admit.

"All I need is one break. Then I'll be back in business. I'll be on top. I won't have to mug people for quarters. I won't have to live in a dump like this."

The more he thought about leaving Los Angeles, the more the idea appealed to him. Where could he go? "Las Vegas. I'll go to Las Vegas. That's where all the action is. There's plenty of money there for a man as

smart as I am. I'll make a big score and I'll be able to stay in the best hotels. I'll have all the beautiful women I want and chauffeurs to drive me around."

He had not been to Las Vegas for five years. He had left in a hurry then because he had broken into one of the hotel rooms during the night and stolen money from a guest's wallet. The hotel detective had seen him, but Danny had escaped before they could apprehend him.

Hell, that was five years ago, Danny thought. They're not going to remember me. One more week and I'll be out of this joint. Las Vegas, here I come!

One week later Danny Collins boarded a bus for Las Vegas. A man in the seat next to him was reading a news paper, but Danny did not bother to glance at it. If he had, he might have noticed a small item stating that Dr. Charles Wilson had resigned from Mount Cedars Hospital and had announced his engagement to Rosemary Murphy.

The minute that Danny Collins walked into the Dunes Hotel in Las Vegas, he knew that this was where he belonged.

"This is for me! I should have come back here a long time ago." The lights and the crowds and the excitement stirred his blood. The dice tables and blackjack tables were crowded with men and women gambling. There were poorly dressed housewives betting dollars at the tables, standing next to expensively-gowned wives and mistresses betting hundreds of dollars on each roll of the dice.

This is for me. This is where the action is, Danny thought.

As he turned to walk through the casino, he bumped into an elderly, gray-haired woman, knocking her into a slot machine.

"I'm sorry," Danny said.

She smiled at him. "That's all right. My name is Alice Zimmer."

She had a pleasant face and clear blue eyes and an engaging smile. Danny had a sudden inspiration. Las Vegas would be a great place to meet women. It was probably full of elderly widows who had more money than they knew how to spend. Well, he would show them how to spend it.

He took a closer look at Alice Zimmer and instantly decided that she was not what he was looking for. Danny knew what was expensive and what was cheap. Her dress was old and shiny from wear and her shoes had slits cut out to accommodate her bunions. So who cared what her name was. He did not bother introducing himself. He just nodded and started to push past her.

Two people hurried up to the woman. One was a middle-aged, fat man with a puffy face, and the other was a thin, unattractive woman. The woman went up to Alice Zimmer and exclaimed, "Mother, you're not supposed to be wandering around the casino!"

The man chimed in, "Yeah, we told you to stay in your room."

"I'm sorry. I just wanted to see the people."

Danny heard part of the conversation, but it was none of his business.

The man said to Alice Zimmer, "You just go on upstairs. You hear? You've got a long day tomorrow. Marie and I are going to dinner."

And the two of them left the old woman standing there.

Alice Zimmer watched her daughter and son-in-law leave. Why didn't they invite me to have dinner with them? She wondered. Her son-in-law Sam was right about one thing. Tomorrow was going to be a long day. They were going to put her into a retirement home where she would be locked up with a lot of old people. This was her last night of freedom.

"Well, I'm not going to my room just yet. It's probably going to be the last time I'll ever be allowed out again."

Danny Collins wandered around the casino, studying the action. There were Arabs playing for enormous sums at the tables and women dripping with diamonds. Well, he was going to get himself a woman like that. But first, he had to look as though he had money. Danny Collins knew how important it was to put up a good front.

"If people believe you need anything, they stay away from you."

The trick is to make them feel that you had everything.

"You've got to impress them. You've got to make them think you are a big shot."

It took money to put up a nice appearance, and Danny did not have much money left. But he knew how to get some. It was easy to open the doors of these hotel rooms. People were careless about leaving cash and jewelry in their rooms. He would wait until dinnertime when most of the guests were out either dining or seeing the shows that Las Vegas was famous for. Then he would slip into a few rooms and help himself. He would probably find enough cash or jewelry that he could pawn so that he could afford to buy a new suit of clothes and some new Gucci loafers. Women liked to see a well-dressed man. He thought about the old days when he had had all the women he wanted. Of course he had been younger then and had been more successful. He had had a lot of money to throw around. He had served two prison sentences, so he had to be careful. If they picked him up again, he would go into prison for life. But that was not going to happen.

I'm too clever for them, Danny thought.

He looked around the lavish hotel.

This is where I'll stay. Just like in the old days.

He walked over to the desk and registered.

"I'd like a large suite," he said.

When he met the rich woman he was looking for, she was going to ask him where he was staying.

He would say casually, "Oh, I have a suite here at the hotel."

That would certainly impress her. He had no money to pay for the suite, but he intended to give the hotel a credit card he had stolen.

When Danny Collins had finished checking in, he wandered through the casino looking for some likely prospects. He was sure that the place was full of women who were rich and lonely.

As he passed a mirror he saw his reflection and he thought: I'm a pretty good looking fellow. I shouldn't have any trouble latching on to one of these old girls. They must be starved for affection. I'll buy them a drink, sweet-talk them, and the rest will be easy. I should have come back to Las Vegas a long time ago. What was I afraid of?

He thought of that awful night five years earlier when he had almost been caught by the house detective, and he shuddered.

He could still hear that voice shouting at him. "Hey you! Stop thief!"

They were tough in Las Vegas. Crooks were dealt with very harshly. But that was all in the past. From now on his future was going to be bright. All he had to do now was to find that rich, lonely widow.

Alice Zimmer was walking through the casino, taking her last look at the glamorous surroundings. She caught sight of the man who had almost knocked her down. He had stopped in front of a slot machine. There was a large sign over the machine which read: "WIN THE BIG JACKPOT — \$50,000.00."

Danny looked at the sign and thought: That's a sucker's game. The odds against winning must be enormous.

But then he suddenly remembered the quarter he had taken from the woman in the park. He pulled it out of his pocket and stared at it. It was bright and shiny and seemed to be filled with promise.

"This could be my lucky quarter. I'll give it a try."

He dropped the quarter into the slot and pulled the handle. There were little symbols on the machine. If one cherry came back, it would bring him back two quarters; three oranges would bring him \$10.00; and four bars would mean the jackpot. If a lemon came up it meant that he lost.

He watched, holding his breath, as the wheels spun around.

"Come on," he said aloud. "Jackpot."

The wheel came to a stop. Lemons. He had lost.

Well, that doesn't mean anything. I have a feeling tonight is going to be my lucky night.

As Danny Collins started to walk away from the machine, two huge men blocked his way.

One of them said, "Hi, Danny. We've been looking for you for a long time. Come along quietly. You're under arrest."

## CHAPTER THREE

Alice Zimmer was a very unhappy woman. She hated the idea that her daughter and son-in-law were going to put her in a retirement home with a lot of old people. Alice had just had her sixty-fifth birthday.

"But I don't feel old. I feel young. I feel wonderful. The young don't understand that as a person gets older, the body changes, but the spirit is still the same. Old age is something that happens on the outside. Not on the inside."

She knew that old people were sometimes a burden to their children, and she had tried not to be. She had tried very hard. When her daughter Marie had married Sam Barker, a taxi driver, Alice had invited them to move in with her. She had been pleased to have them live with her in her lovely house.

In the beginning, everything had worked out well. Sam had been a very considerate son-in-law. He kept telling Alice what a beautiful house she had and how much he enjoyed living in it. He listened to his mother-in-law's stories about her youth, and he seemed to be really interested.

"My husband, Marie's father, had a small manufacturing business," Alice told her son-in-law.

"What did he manufacture?"

"Shoes. But they weren't just ordinary shoes. They were beautiful shoes. Paul took a lot of pride in his work."

"I'll bet he did," Sam said admiringly.

"He was a good man. You would have liked him. He was very kind and gentle. He loved me, but he loved his work, too. The truth is, he was a workaholic. Paul wanted everything to be perfect. He used to spend Saturdays and Sundays at the factory and he'd ask me to go down there to be with him. Sometimes I'd bring sandwiches for him and we'd have little picnics at the factory."

"That's very romantic. He really seemed to care."

"We always talked about travelling. There's so many places in the world to see. But do you know why we never went?"

"No. Why?"

"Because Paul didn't want to leave his business. He never took a vacation. There were always little problems coming up and Paul wanted to be there to solve them. Can you understand that, Sam?"

"Sure. I understand. And Paul sounds like a great guy."

"Oh, he was. We had such good times together. We used to talk about what we would do when Paul retired. Dreaming out loud, we called it. We were going to travel all over the world. We were going to see the pyramids of Egypt, and the Great Wall of China." Alice's eyes grew dreamy with memory. "We were going to see Mount Fuji in Japan and the London Tower, and the Coliseum in Rome. I hear there's a magic fountain in Rome where, if you throw in a coin, your wishes come true."

Alice thought that Sam might laugh at what she had just said, but he only nodded.

"Could be. You never know."

"And then a few years ago Paul had a heart attack. It wasn't a serious one. But he couldn't work as hard as he used to, and I think that bothered him a lot. He wasn't able to spend much time at the factory any more. And then one day he had another heart attack. This one was more serious. He was ill for a long

time. We had saved some money, but his illness used it all up. We had to have special nurses for him, and there was a bypass operation, and by the time it was all over, the money was gone. There was no one to run the business and we lost that, too."

Sam was sympathetic. "That's too bad."

"Oh, I'm not complaining. I have this beautiful house." Her eyes misted over with tears. "Of course it's not the same without Paul. I loved that man."

Her son-in-law patted her hand and said, "I'll bet her loved you, too."

"Yes, he did."

Since Paul's death, life had changed for Alice. She had loved Paul so much that she was not interested in meeting any other men, even though her friends had tried to persuade her to. Everything was different without Paul. Somehow the magic had gone. She was alone with her dreams.

But I'm not really alone, Alice thought. I have my darling daughter Marie and my son-in-law Sam. Life was good.

Alice's daughter Marie worked as a secretary, so Alice did all the housework. She did not mind it. She enjoyed keeping the house neat and clean. The way she had once kept it for Paul. Marie and Sam seemed to appreciate what she was doing.

We all get along very well together, Alice thought.

And then things began to change. Marie suggested that her mother move to the small back bedroom so that the couple could have the large master bedroom.

"You don't really need all that room, Mother, and Sam and I could use it."

"I suppose you're right, darling."

"Thank you, mother. I know how pleased Sam will be."

Alice had been unhappy about it at first, but then she thought: I want to be fair. I really don't need such a large bedroom, and that big sunny bedroom will be nice for the two of them.

So she had moved into the tiny back bedroom and let Marie and Sam have her bedroom.

Shortly after that, Marie and Sam had come to her and said, "Mom, we think it would be better if you signed the house over to us."

Alice looked at them in surprise.

"But why? You can both live here with me for as long as you like."

"That's not the point. It's a tax thing. You see, one day you're going to die, and when you do, Marie and I will have to pay a lot of money in inheritance taxes. If you sign the house over to us now, we won't have to pay those taxes and you'll still be living here just like always. So you see, it's just a technical thing. Nothing will change."

Alice Zimmer had believed him. She had gone to her lawyer and had the deed changed so that the home she loved so much now belonged to her daughter Marie and her son-in-law Sam. As Sam had said, it was only a technical change.

Then one day Alice overheard a conversation between her daughter and Sam, as she passed their bedroom door.

"I want your mother out of here. She's too old and she's too much trouble. We should put her in a

retirement home.”

Alice stood outside the door of their bedroom, shocked. She waited for her daughter to protest, but what Marie said was: “I think you're right, darling. She should be with people her own age. She'd be happier.”

Happier! They were talking about throwing her out of her own house. Only it wasn't her house any more. It belonged to them. Alice hated the idea of being shut up with a lot of old people. She had lived in this beautiful house most of her life. She and her husband had shared so many happy memories in it.

When Paul had died, Alice had received a modest amount of money from an insurance policy, enough for her to take care of all her needs. But from time to time Sam or Marie came to her for money, and finally the old woman had nothing left. Now when Alice needed money for a new dress or shoes, she had to ask her son-in-law for it. It seemed to always start an argument.

“What do you need a new dress for? You never go anywhere.”

That part was true. Sam and Marie went out fairly often to the theater or a movie, but they never took her with them. She had nowhere to go. And now finally they planned to get rid of her altogether.

“I won't let them do this to me. I'll fight them. I won't be locked up in a home for old people.”

The following day Sam came to Alice. “Marie and I have been talking. We don't think you're very happy here. You need to be around people your own age, you know what I mean? And we have a nice surprise for you, Mom. We found a great place. It's in Arizona. A friend of mine told me about it. He put his mother there and she loves it. There are a lot of nice old folks there and they play all kinds of games. Bingo and things like that. On Saturday nights they get together for a dance, and on Sundays they run a movie. Doesn't that sound wonderful?”

To Alice it sounded dreadful. Absolutely dreadful.

“I don't want to go. Please. I want to stay here.”

“It's for your own good,” Sam insisted.

In the end, Alice gave in. she had no choice. It was their house now. She had no money and had nowhere to go. She was at their mercy. She was too tired to fight.

They planned this from the beginning, she thought unhappily. All they wanted from me was this house. And so it was settled.

“When am I going?” Alice asked.

“In a few days. I've made all the arrangements. You'll really love it. It's a great retirement home.”

Retirement from what? Alice wondered. Retirement from life. People went to those places to die. And that's what will happen to me there. I'll wither and die.

A few days later, they packed her into the car and they were on their way. Alice turned to take her last look at the house she loved so much. She knew she would never see it again.

“Where we're going is too far to travel in one day. So we'll spend the night in Las Vegas.”

Too far, indeed, Alice thought. She suspected that Sam and Marie had chosen Arizona because it was so far away. Of course they would probably never come to visit her. She would be locked up for the rest of her life with strangers.

“Sam and Marie don't care whether I live or die,” Alice said sadly.



And here she was in Las Vegas, her last night of freedom, and she had nothing to do. Marie and Sam were in the hotel dining room having dinner, laughing, enjoying themselves.

"And I'm supposed to be stuck in my room."

Well. I won't go to my room. Not yet.

"It's my last chance to be around people and bright lights and laughter and fun. It's been so long since I've had any fun."

Alice Zimmer wandered through the casino, marveling at the beautifully dressed people gambling at all the crowded tables. She had been to Las Vegas once before, many years ago, on her honeymoon. She and Paul had had such a good time. Now all that was behind her. She would never be able to do the things she had wanted to do. Her dreams of travelling and seeing the world, going on cruises to exotic places, would never come true.

It's too late. Tomorrow I'll be in an old folks' home.

A waitress came up to Alice. "Would you like a drink?" she asked.

For a moment Alice was tempted. "No thanks. Sam would not like it."

Alice suddenly felt tired.

"Maybe I will go up to my room. Sam will be angry if he finds me down here."

She hated it when he yelled at her. It frightened her.

Alice started walking through the casino, headed for her room. The casino seemed to be filled with slot machines. She was in the middle of a forest of them.

Paul and I played the slot machines on our honeymoon, she thought. She remembered how much fun it had been. I'll bet it would be fun again.

"Why not? It will be my last time."

She fumbled in her worn purse to see whether she had any money. There was nothing there but an old, almost bent quarter. It was her last quarter. But I won't need it where I'm going, she told herself.

She stopped in front of a slot machine. It happened to be the same machine that Danny Collins had played, but Alice was unaware of that. She put the old quarter in the slot and pulled the handle. Two cherries came up on the little screen and two quarters spurted out.

"I won," she said in pleased surprise.

One of the coins that had come out of the machine caught her eye. It was shiny new, as though it had just been minted. It was beautiful.

Perhaps I should keep it as a good luck piece, Alice thought. But what would be the point? I've run out of luck.

And so she put the shiny quarter into the slot machine and pulled the handle. She did not even wait for the wheels of the machine to stop spinning. It was time to leave. Time to go to bed.

She turned away and started down the aisle. Suddenly, from behind her there came the clanging of alarm bells that seemed to fill the whole casino. People were yelling. Alice Zimmer wondered what on earth had happened.

A man behind her grabbed her arm and said, "Lady, you just won the jackpot!"

Alice thought she had misunderstood him. "What did you say?"

"You just won the jackpot."

She still did not understand.

He led her back to the machine and there, in the little glass window were four bars in a row.

"Well, isn't that nice," Alice said. She wondered if it might come to as much as \$50.00. If it did, she would be able to buy some extra things at the retirement home.

The manager of the casino had come running up to the machine at the sound of the bells. "You hit the jackpot! Congratulations."

Everyone was crowding around Alice, shaking her hand, congratulating her.

"Thank you. What — what do I do now?"

"You don't do anything," the manager assured her. "We'll do it all for you."

Alice wondered why they were all making such a fuss over \$50.00.

The truth was that the casinos loved it when someone won a jackpot, because it was wonderful publicity. They saw to it that the pictures of the winners appeared in newspapers all around the country. It was a magnet that drew thousands of other people to the casinos, each one hoping that they, too, would hit the jackpot.

So now the casino manager said to Alice, "We'd like to take a few pictures of you. Would you come over this way, please?"

He led her to a corner of the casino where photographers were already waiting.

"Let's have a big smile," they said.

They kept her standing there for what seemed like hours, snapping pictures of her until Alice was exhausted. Finally she said, "Excuse me, I'm a little tired. If you could just give me my fifty dollars, I'll go up to bed."

The casino manager was staring at her. "Your fifty dollars? Don't you know what you've won?"

Alice guessed that it might be less than \$50.00.

"No, I don't," she said timidly.

"You've won \$50,000."

She thought she had misunderstood him. "I'm sorry. What did you say?"

"I said you won \$50,000."

The room was starting to spin. "\$50,000!"

It was unbelievable. Why, that was more money than she had ever dreamed of in her life. It was enough money for her to do everything she had ever wanted to do, to fulfill all her dreams. To travel all over the world.

And as she stood there trying to realize what had happened to her, Marie and Sam came running up.

"Is it true what I just heard? Did you win the \$50,000 jackpot?"

"It's true," Alice said.

Sam threw his arms around Marie and shouted,

"We're rich!"

And the look of naked greed on his face terrified Alice.

## CHAPTER FOUR

"I can't believe this is happening," Alice Zimmer declared.

Everything seemed like a dream. Alice Zimmer found herself the center of attention.

"From now on," the casino manager told her, "you're our guest at the Dunes. We're going to move you into the bridal suite."

"Let's celebrate our good luck with champagne," Sam said.

And so, instead of being taken back to her lonely room, Alice found herself being escorted to the main dining room. People applauded as she entered. The word had spread quickly. Marie and Sam sat down at the dining room table with her.

"Isn't this great! Fifty thousand bucks. Do you know what we can do with that much money?"

Alice had no idea. It was still too much for her to grasp.

"I can buy a new cab. My old one's starting to fall apart."

"I could use a mink coat."

"Yeah, we could both use new clothes."

Alice saw Marie give her husband a warning look.

"And of course," Sam said quickly to Alice, "we're going to buy a lot of things for you. We're going to really dress you up."

Alice said timidly, "In a retirement home?"

"Forget the retirement home. That's not for rich people, and we're rich. No, you're coming back to live at our house. We didn't really want you to leave us, anyway."

Then why did they arrange it? Alice wondered.

"Yes, sir. From now on we're all going to have a great time together."

A waiter poured champagne.

"Let's drink to the money."

They raised their glasses and drank a toast. Alice felt a little light-headed. She had not had any dinner and she began to see things through a mist.

"In the morning, we'll pick up our check and head back home." He poured more champagne for Alice. "Now tell us all about your good luck. How did you win that jackpot?"

"It was a lucky quarter. It looked bright and shiny and new."

And suddenly she realized that it was a lucky quarter. Because of it, she was drinking champagne and people were coming up to her table and asking for her autograph and she was having dinner with her daughter and son-in-law for the first time in ages. Yes, indeed, it was a lucky quarter. She knew she had to have it back. It was somewhere in that slot machine.

The casino manager came up to the table. "Is everything all right here? Anything you need?"

Alice looked up at him. "May I ask you a favor?"

"Certainly. Anything, Mrs. Zimmer. What can we do for you?"

"The quarter I won the jackpot with. I'd like to have it back."

He laughed. "I'm afraid that's impossible. It's in the machine with hundreds of other quarters. You'd

never be able to identify it.”

Alice said firmly, “Yes, I would. I’ll know it when I see it.”

The manager hesitated. “Well, if it’s that important to you, I suppose we could empty the machine. Come by my office after dinner.”

When they went to the manager’s office an hour later, on his desk were spread several hundred quarters. Some were dirty and worn, some were greasy, some were a little bent. But Alice saw her quarter immediately. It stood out like a shining beacon among all the others. It was gleaming and sparkling.

“That’s it. That’s my quarter.”

And photographers took more pictures while the casino manager handed the lucky quarter to Alice.

She lay in her king-sized bed that night in the beautiful suite the manager had escorted her to and thought about the wonderful evening she had had.

“Oh, I wish Paul could have shared it with me. He would have been so pleased.” And the important thing was that she was going to be saved from going to the retirement home. Sam and Marie were bringing her back to her own house.

While Alice was in bed thinking about all this, Sam was downstairs talking to the casino manager.

“My mother-in-law’s kind of old. It would be easier if you could make out her check to me. She’s not able to handle money.”

The casino manager shook his head. “I’m sorry. I have to follow the rules. She won the jackpot, and the check has to be made out in her name.”

Sam smiled. “Okay. No problem.”

He would take care of it when he got Alice home. He would just have her sign the money over to him, the way she had signed the house over. He would wait a few weeks and then he and Marie would take the old lady back to the retirement home. Life was good. Sam could visualize himself driving that new cab down the street. He might even buy two cabs and hire someone to work for him. And who could tell? Maybe that would be only the beginning. Pretty soon he might be able to afford a whole fleet of cabs and build an empire. He could become a tycoon. That was certainly a lucky quarter, all right!

The next day, Alice, Marie and Sam returned home. As she walked in the front door, Alice thought happily: I was afraid I was never going to see this place again. The quarter was carefully tucked away in her purse. She would always be grateful to it.

Marie said, “Why don’t you go upstairs and rest, mother. You’re going to have a busy day.”

“I am?”

“Yes, I’ve arranged for a lawyer to come over.”

For one instant, Alice’s heart skipped a beat. They were going to give her back her house!

Sam continued. “It’s about that jackpot you won. The lawyer will arrange it so that Marie and I can put the money in our own back account.”

“But why — ?”

“Because then you won’t have to worry about it. There are all kinds of taxes and everything that we don’t want you to worry your pretty little head about. You wouldn’t know what to do with the money.

There are investments to consider, money markets... You just leave it to us. We'll see that you're taken good care of, Mom."

The lawyer arrived shortly after lunch. Alice had never seen him before. He was a stern-looking man, very brisk and businesslike.

They all sat down at the dining room table, and the lawyer said, "Well, I drew up the papers as you asked."

"Good," Sam said. He turned to Alice. "You'll feel much better after you've signed these."

Sam handed Alice a pen and shoved a paper in front of her. "Just sign here."

Alice put the pen to the paper and hesitated. She turned to the lawyer. "What happens after I sign this?"

"Well, nothing, Mrs. Zimmer. It's a very simple transaction. You're giving the money to your daughter and son-in-law. They'll pay the taxes on it and you won't have to worry about a thing."

Alice remembered how she had signed another paper not long ago giving the house to Marie and Sam. They had taken the house away from her and had tried to put her in an old folks' home. She remembered Sam saying: We're rich. I can buy a new cab... and Marie saying: I could use a mink coat...

That is what would happen to her money. It would buy things for them. And when the money was gone, they would probably send her to the old folks' home.

Alice put the pen down. "I won't sign it," she declared.

They were all staring at her in surprise.

"What do you mean you won't sign it? You have to sign it."

"No. I don't have to do anything of the kind. It's my money. I intend to keep it."

"But you wouldn't know what to do with it," Sam yelled.

Alice looked into their faces, one by one, and then she said sweetly, "I'll think of something."

The Queen Elizabeth II was even more beautiful than she had imagined. It was an enormous ship, filled with friendly people, and as it sailed from New York to Southampton, she made dozens of friends. Of course Marie and Sam had argued bitterly when Alice had first told them she had decided to go to Europe.

"You're an old woman. You can't travel alone."

"I'm not old." Alice had replied with dignity. "I feel young."

"But it's so expensive."

"Yes. Look at all the money you'll be wasting."

"If it makes me happy, then I don't think it will be a waste."

Nothing they said could talk Alice out of it. God had given her a second chance at happiness and she was going to take it.

The Queen Elizabeth II was only the beginning. Alice had not told her daughter and son-in-law all her plans. They would have gone into a state of shock. As long as I am fulfilling my dreams, Alice had told herself, I might as well go all the way. And she did. From Southampton she took the boat-train to London, marveling at the beautiful green English countryside on the way.

She checked into the Savoy Hotel and luxuriated in the largest bath tub she had ever seen. The British

really know how to live, Alice thought.

She had dinner that night at the Mirabelle, a glamorous restaurant filled with theater people. She tipped the waiter generously. She could afford to. Before she had left home, Alice — without telling Marie or Sam — had gone to the bank she and Paul had dealt with for years and had asked the advice of the vice-president, an old friend.

"We'll keep your money in a money market account where you'll be drawing a maximum rate of interest. While you're in Europe having a nice vacation, your money will be working for you. We'll send you a statement every month, Alice."

"Thank you."

"Would you like us to send a duplicate statement to your son-in-law?"

"No, thank you. I'm handling my own affairs from now on."

And so now as Alice tipped the waiter, she knew that her money at home was earning more money for her all the time. If she was careful and did not use up all her capital, she would never be poor again as long as she lived. It was a lovely feeling.

She went to the theater and saw the Royal Shakespeare Players, and she went to Sadler Wells Ballet and to the colorful shops of London. At the Burlington Arcade she bought a beautiful silk scarf for Marie and a wrist-watch for Sam. He was always complaining about his watch.

Paris was the next stop. She and Paul had always wanted to go to Paris together. He had been there once when he was a young man and he had wanted to show it to Alice. "Wait until you see the Eiffel Tower," he had said. "And the Arc de Triomphe and the Champs Elysees."

And now she was seeing them, and it was like a dream, but a dream come true.

"It's even prettier than you said, Paul." She felt he was there with her, watching her enjoy herself.

The Champs Elysees was the most beautiful street she had ever seen in her life — beyond imagination. Alice walked through the parks and visited the Louvre where she saw the Venus de Milo and the Mona Lisa, and she stared at them for a long time, awed by their timeless beauty.

Because she was a gregarious person, Alice kept making friends. She would meet them in hotel lobbies and museums and restaurants. She was a warm and good-looking woman and she attracted other people. She was never alone.

She received a telephone call from Marie and Sam.

"Mother, are you all right?"

"Of course I am. Why wouldn't I be all right?"

"Well, Sam and I have been worried about you. You know, a woman your age travelling around the world alone."

Alice wished they would stop talking about her age. They made her sound like a fossil in some museum. She was very much alive, thank you.

"I'm not alone much," Alice said into the telephone. "I've met friends"

"When are you coming home?"

I have no home, Alice thought. "I don't know."

"Well, just a minute, mother. Sam wants to talk to you."

She heard her son-in-law's voice on the phone. "Hello, Alice. How are you?"

"Fine, thank you, Sam."

"Marie and I miss you. Come on back here. You must be tired of travelling by now."

"On the contrary, I'm just beginning to enjoy myself, Sam."

There was a silence. "You mean you really like it over there?"

"I love it."

"Well, don't stay too long. We're waiting for you back here."

"I'll keep in touch," she promised. And she hung up.

When Alice had had enough of Paris, she decided that her next stop would be Italy. She and Paul had often talked about Venice. Her husband had called it a magical city.

"It's built on the water and instead of streets they have canals. You travel everywhere by gondolas or motor boats."

It sounded exciting.

The next morning Alice boarded an Air France plane to Venice.

"Fasten your seat belts, please."

Alice fastened her seat belt, and moments later the huge plane was in the air. When she arrived in Venice, she checked in the Hotel Danieli right next to San Marco Square, and it took her no time at all to discover that Paul had been right. It was a magical city. It was centuries old and all the buildings seemed to be inlaid with golden tiles. There was the huge Campanili in San Marco Square and the Doge's Palace. She had lunch at Harry's New York Bar, where she met some of her friends from the Queen Elizabeth II and London and Paris. They were nice people and they liked including Alice in their group. She watched them, husbands and wives, as they held hands and bantered with each other, and she wished that she had someone that she could be really close to. It would be wonderful to share her remaining years with one very special man.

"But I'm being greedy. Life has been good enough to me by giving me this second chance."

She spent five days in Venice.

Where shall I go next? She asked herself. And then she answered her own question. Rome. She packed her things that night, making sure that her lucky quarter was safely tucked in her purse, and in the morning she took the Rapido, the train that runs from Venice to Rome.

Rome was even more exciting than Venice. The sights were spectacular. Alice went into the Coliseum — the enormous crumbling building where centuries earlier naked gladiators had fought wild lions and tigers while screaming Romans sat safely in their seats above them cheering them on, watching the bloody battles to the death. She visited the Vatican where the Catholic church ruled the world. It was filled with statues and paintings beyond price. There was more beauty under that one roof than was gathered in all the rest of the world.

She dined at small taverns filled with Italian workmen and their wives and children. They all spoke in lovely lilting voices that sounded like music. She dined in the splendid restaurant in the Excelsior Hotel

with friends she had met in Venice. But Alice was beginning to feel a little lonely. All the couples around her seemed so happy. Every woman had a man, and that was the way nature had intended it to be. Every woman except her. Oh, there were plenty of charming men who took her to dinner and told her how attractive she was. “Bellissima,” they said. But she was not interested in any of them. She needed someone very special. Still, life was a glorious adventure, and she intended to enjoy every minute of it.

“Where shall I go next?” she asked herself. “Spain. That will be exciting.”

But there was one thing she had to do before she left Rome. There was a fountain — a wishing well.

Paul had said, “If you throw a coin into it, your wish will come true.”

On an impulse, Alice went to the fountain the following morning. She opened her purse. It was filled with coins, but one coin in particular caught her attention. Her shiny new lucky quarter. She hesitated before throwing it into the fountain.

But then she said, “Why not? It will make my wish come true.”

She closed her eyes and stood there thinking about her wish. Then she threw the coin into the still water.

A man was standing near her, watching. He was tall and gray-haired and very distinguished looking. As he watched Alice, he thought: What a lovely looking woman. He stood there looking after her, wishing that somehow he could meet her.

Alice, meanwhile, was headed back to her hotel. She had no idea that she had thrown the coin into the wrong fountain.



## CHAPTER FIVE

Romantics throw their coins into the fountains of Rome hoping that their wishes will come true. What they are not aware of is that each night poor people come to the fountains and collect the coins for themselves. They find pennies and pesos and lira and yen — coins from countries all over the world — tossed in by hopeful tourists.

On this particular night, Alice Zimmer's shining quarter was picked out of the water by a Roman beggar. He went into the nearest bar and bought a cheap glass of wine with it.

The bartender to whom he gave the quarter bought an evening paper with it on his way home.

The newspaper vendor got a shine and gave the quarter to the shoe-shine boy, who passed it on as change to an American customer.

The American's name was Donald Adams, an architect.

Donald Adams was staying at the Excelsior Hotel. He was seated in the dining room, and though the dinner was excellent, he was not enjoying it. He was thinking of the conversation he had had earlier that day.

"I hate to tell you this, Donald, but your partner Pete Turkel is a crook."

"What are you talking about?"

"He's an embezzler."

"I don't believe it."

But it had turned out to be the truth. Pete Turkel has been robbing the company for years. When Donald Adams returned to New York, he would have to confront his partner. They had been partners for many years, and it was going to be a very difficult situation. They had gone to school together, traveled together, had so many good times with each other. Then Pete had gotten married, and things seemed to have changed. They saw less of each other socially. He was not particularly fond of Pete Turkel's wife, Amy. It seemed to Donald that she was a hard, calculating woman. They had disliked each other on sight, and that had made the relationship between the two men difficult. They were both equal partners in the architectural firm, but Donald Adams was better known. He was certain that Pete's wife was making Pete discontented. He could hear the conversation in his mind:

"You're the brains of the company, Peter. Why should Donald get all the glory? You could do a lot better without him."

That was not true, of course. Pete depended upon him. But there had been a lot of friction between the two men lately. And now Donald Adams had learned about his partner's embezzlement. Why had he stolen the money? To buy things for his greedy wife? Probably, Adams thought.

But the reason did not matter. Pete Turkel had done something wrong. He would have to be punished for it.

We can't work together any longer, Donald Adams decided. One of us is going to have to leave the firm. He was so deeply wrapped in his thoughts that he did not hear the waiter speaking to him.

"Mr. Adams?"

He looked up. "I'm sorry. What did you say?"

"I said you have not touched your dinner. Is it not good? Perhaps you would care for something else."

Donald Adams replied, "No, thank you. I'm not very hungry, Luigi."

He had come to Rome on a vacation, but the discovery he had made had spoiled everything. He wondered if the other people in the room were enjoying their vacations. He looked around. There was a pleasant-faced lady seated at a table alone. He had noticed her before. He had heard someone call her name. What was it? Alice. That was it — Alice Zimmer. She was an American, too, and seemed to be traveling by herself.

As Donald Adams watched, an attractive, grayhaired man rose from another table and walked over to Alice Zimmer. He heard the man say, "Excuse me. My name is Mark Whitney. I saw you making a wish at the fountain today. I was wondering whether it came true."

Alice Zimmer looked up and saw that it was the attractive man who had stood next to her earlier. In fact, he — or someone like him — had been what she had wished for.

She felt herself blushing. "I don't know yet," Alice replied.

Mark Whitney smiled. "Sometimes it takes a while for wishes to come true. If you're alone, may I join you?"

"Please do,"

This man reminded her so much of Paul.

"Are you in Rome on business?"

"No. I've retired. When my wife died, there was nothing to keep me at home any more, so I decided to see the world."

Just like me, Alice thought excitedly.

"Are you traveling alone?"

"Yes." She had not meant to say more, but he was so sympathetic that the words came spilling out. She told him about Marie and Sam and the old folks' home and about the jackpot. It was like talking to an old friend.

"And all because of a quarter. A miraculous quarter."

And neither of them had any idea that at that moment the quarter was resting in the pocket of the man a few tables away.

"Have you ever been to the Terme di Caracalla?"

"I don't think so. What is it?"

"It's the ancient Roman Baths — centuries old. They stage operas there now, and they're really spectacular. Do you like opera?"

"Very much."

"If you're free tomorrow night, I'd like to take you. They're doing Faust."

"I'm free, and I'd love to go."

She smiled. She did not tell him that she had already made reservations to leave for Spain in the morning. Instead, when she had said good-night to Mark Whitney, Alice walked up to the concierge.

"Excuse me. I wonder if you could change some reservations for me?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Zimmer."

"I was supposed to fly to Spain tomorrow morning, but I think I'd like to stay on in Rome for a few days more."

"No problem," the concierge assured her. "I will be happy to take care of it. What day would you like to leave?"

Alice hesitated. "I'm not sure."

It depended on Mark Whitney.

"I'll let you know."

The next evening was beautiful and cool, and the opera was spectacular and exciting. It was a perfect night. Mark Whitney took Alice to supper afterward and they talked about the opera and theater and movies and songs, and it seemed to both of them that there was no end to what they had to talk about. They had so much in common. It was as though they were two old friends who had met again after a long time. Alice had not felt so comfortable with any man since Paul.

Mark Whitney said, "If you have no plans for tomorrow, I know a wonderful place for lunch near Piazza del Popolo."

"I'd love it," Alice said.

The following morning Marie and Sam telephoned her at the hotel. This time Sam got on the phone first.

"How are you?" Sam asked.

"I'm just fine, thank you, Sam."

"Listen, the reason I called is that Marie and I are really worried about you."

"Why?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, we don't think all this travel is good for —" for a woman your age, he started to say, but he remembered just in time that she did not like to be reminded of her age. "— is good for anybody. Marie and I think you should come home now."

"Do you?"

"I mean it."

"I'm sure you do, Sam."

But they could no longer tell her what to do. She remembered all the time that she had gone to Sam to beg for money for a new dress or a pair of shoes. You don't need them, Sam would say. You never go anywhere.

So now she said to Sam, "You two don't have to worry about me. I've never been happier in my life."

There was no way she was going to trade in the joy she was having so that her son-in-law could buy himself a new cab and her daughter could buy a new mink coat.

Sam said, "I still think —"

"I'm sorry. I have to go now, Sam. Someone's waiting for me. Give my love to Marie." And she replaced the receiver.

She was on her way to meet Mark. And something within her told her that it was only the beginning for the two of them. The lucky quarter she had thrown into the fountain had granted her wish.

Donald Adams flew the Concorde back to New York. He was in a hurry to get this unpleasant ordeal with Pete Turkel over with. Their architectural firm had some big projects in the works, and he did not want the situation with his partner to delay them.

When Adams arrived in New York, he went directly to the office. Pete Turkel was waiting for him.

"Well, how was your vacation? Did you have a good time?"

Donald Adams's face was grim. "I have to talk to you, Pete."

"Sure. What's up?"

"You're going to have to leave the firm."

Pete looked at him in surprise. "What are you talking about? I'm your partner. I own half of this firm."

"You've been stealing money from it. You've been doing it for years."

"Wait a minute, pal —"

"I'm not your pal. Not any more. Not after what you've done."

"I don't know who you've been talking to, but — all right. Maybe I did borrow a little money from time to time, but I intended to pay it back."

"It's not just the money that's bothering me. It's your whole attitude lately. I understand that while I was away you turned down the new housing project we were going to build."

"That's right. We don't need it. Why should we put up a housing project for poor people when we can take the same amount of money and build a high-rise where people can afford to pay big rents?"

"Because there are a lot of people in this city who can't afford to live anywhere. They need low-cost housing."

"We're not in the charity business. We're in business to make money."

"Look. This partnership isn't going to work any more, Pete. I haven't been comfortable with it for a long time. I don't know when it happened, but one of us has changed. We used to see eye to eye on everything. Now we don't seem to agree on anything."

"Well, it's not my fault," Pete Turkel said.

"Okay. Maybe it's my fault. It doesn't matter. All I know is that it would be better if we dissolved the partnership. I want to buy you out."

"No chance. This business is too good for me just to walk away from it. I helped build it up. I'll buy you out."

"I'm not going to give it up, either."

"Then what do we do?"

Donald Adams thought for a moment. "I'll tell you what. We'll toss a coin. The winner keeps the business and buys the other one out."

Pete Turkel, who was a gambler, said, "All right."

He fumbled in his pocket.

"I don't have a coin."

"I think I have one."

He reached in his pocket and took out a shiny quarter. It was the one he had been given in Rome.

"You call it. Heads or tails?"

"Tails."

Donald Adams tossed the coin high in the air and let it fall to the carpet. It was heads. Pete Turkel stared at it in dismay.

"You lose. I'll have the lawyers draw up the papers. I want you to clear out your desk and be out of here by tomorrow."

Pete Turkel was filled with fury. I never should have agreed to the toss of a coin, he thought. It had not occurred to him that he could lose. Adams and Turkel was one of the most successful architectural firms on the world. And now he was out. He would have to start all over somewhere. He was not sure he could do it without Donald Adams. Adams was the talented one, the creator. Pete Turkel was the salesman, the one who went out and got everyone excited about Adams's designs. He couldn't leave the firm. But what choice did he have?

"You fool! You stupid fool!"

Amy Turkel was screaming at her husband in a voice so loud that it could be heard all over the neighborhood.

"Donald Adams can't fire you from the firm. It's your firm, too."

"He didn't fire me. We tossed a coin and I lost."

"You tossed a coin. What did you think you were doing, playing some kind of kid's game? Why did he want you out, anyway?"

Pete Turkel could not tell his wife about his embezzlement. The reason he could not tell her was that he had spent the money on and increasingly expensive mistress, and on losing bets at the race track. So all he said now was, "I guess he was jealous of me, Amy."

"Of course he was. And do you know why? Because you're the real talent at that office, Pete. That business would be nothing without you. You spent years building it up for him. And now he's trying to take it away from you. Well, we're not going to let him do it."

Pete Turkel walked over to the bar and poured himself a shot of whiskey. He downed it in one gulp. His wife was right. The business would have been nothing without him. He had poured his life's blood into it. Sure, Donald Adams was a good architect, but without someone to sell his ideas, he would be nothing. Without Pete Turkel, he would be nothing.

He poured himself another drink. Adams had always been an idealist. His crazy idea of building housing for the poor was ridiculous.

"Let someone else worry about the poor," Turkel said. "In this world you have to look out for yourself." Well, Pete Turkel intended to look out for himself.

"I know what you should do. You should go back and talk to Donald. After all, you've been partners for a long time. He'll listen to reason. You go talk to him in the morning. You'll see. Everything will work out fine."

But Pete Turkel knew that talking would do no good. Not now. Not after Donald had discovered the embezzlement.

He lay awake all night thinking about what had happened. The firm had several big contracts that they were about to go ahead with, and now it would all belong to Donald Adams. Pete was going to be left out in the cold. Well, no one was going to do that to Pete Turkel.

If it wasn't for that damned quarter, the firm would be mine. Well, he was not going to let a lousy quarter ruin his life. He was going to get the firm back, and there was only one way to do it.

He had to kill Donald Adams.

## CHAPTER SIX

The murder of Donald Adams had to be planned very carefully. The thing in my favor, Pete Turkel thought, is that nobody except Amy knows about the fight I had with him. As far as anybody knows, we're still partners and friends.

Pete Turkel was up at dawn, sitting in the kitchen drinking cup after cup of coffee, planning the murder. There were two important elements: (a) Donald Adams must die; and (b) No one must suspect Pete Trukel.

"My old partner Donald Adams is going to disappear. There won't be any clues, because the police will never find his body."

His mind began to work feverishly, figuring out the details of what he was about to do.

The first thing I have to do, Pete Turkel decided, is to get hold of a gun. After that...

He began to plan each step very carefully. When he was satisfied that there were no loopholes, he stood up and went to the telephone and called Donald Adams.

"I've been thinking about what happened, Don, and you're right and I'm wrong. I just want you to know that there are no hard feelings."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that."

"As a matter of fact, I got an offer this morning. It's with a pretty good firm. They want me to come in as a full partner."

"Well, that's fine, Pete. I'm glad. I really am."

"I wanted to discuss it with you first. You know I've always relied on your opinion. I'm not sure whether I should take it or not. I wonder if we could meet this evening around 6:00 o'clock?"

Donald Adams hesitated. He had a busy schedule. But on the other hand, they had been partners for a long time.

"All right. I'll expect you here at 6:00."

"Thanks, Don. I really appreciate it."

Pete Turkel replaced the receiver, satisfied. He would not be at the office at 6:00 o'clock. He would wait until 6:30, when everyone would have left the office building. Adams would wait for him.

He looked up, and Amy was standing by his side.

"Was that Donald?"

"Yeah. He wanted to talk to me. I guess he's having second thoughts."

"He should have. When are you going to see him?"

"He said he had a busy schedule today, but we're going to have lunch tomorrow."

"You make him apologize to you."

"Oh, I will," her husband assured her.

Pete Turkel went out that afternoon and bought a carpet. His next stop was at a hardware store.

"I'm going camping. I want to tie up my gear."

The clerk walked him over to the wall where there was an assortment of various sized ropes. Turkel picked one that looked strong.

"I'll take this," he said. And then, as an afterthought, "Oh, I'll need a shovel, too. Got to bury my trash, you know. Too many fires lately."

"Right this way, sir."

The clerk took him to a selection of shovels, and Pete carefully selected one.

His last purchase was made at a pawn shop, where he bought a gun and bullets.

At 6:30 that evening, Pete Turkel took the elevator to the fifteenth floor where the offices of Adams and Turkel were located. He was carrying the rug with him. As he had known it would be, the building was entirely deserted. As he walked into the office, Donald Adams said, "I've been waiting for you for half an hour. What happened?"

"I'm sorry I'm a little late, Donald. I stopped to buy a little present for you. I thought your office could use a little brightening up. Just consider it a farewell gift from your old buddy."

He took the paper off the rug and spread it out on the floor. It looked out of place there, but Donald Adams did not want to seem unappreciative. I'll get rid of it later, he thought.

Aloud he said, "Well, that was thoughtful of you."

"Not at all."

Donald Adams looked at his watch. "I'm late for an appointment now, Pete. Could we make this fast?"

"It'll only take a few minutes," Turkel assured him. "And I really appreciate your seeing me. It's very important."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I feel pretty bad about what happened between us. I want you to know that I have no intention of going to the authorities about the money you took. I don't want any hard feelings."

"There are none. None at all. As a matter of fact, it's better this way. Everything turned out just fine."

And it's true, Turkel thought. Before I only had fifty percent of the business. Now I'm going to have all of it.

"You said something about an offer from another company?"

"That's right. But I didn't want to accept it without asking your advice first. You see, what's probably going to happen, Donald, is that I'm going to take over the whole company."

"That's interesting. What's the name of the company?"

"Adams and Trukel."

Donald Adams was staring at him. "What did you say?"

"I said Adams and Turkel."

And Pete Turkel reached in his pocket and pulled out the revolver.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"Just what I told you, Donald. I'm going to take over this company."

"You're crazy."

"Am I?"

"You'll never get away with it."

Pete Turkel raised the gun and said, "Take a step forward."

"What?"



"You heard me. Come on, move!"

Donald Adams took a step forward. He was on the rug that Pete Turkel had brought.

"Let's stop this foolishness, Pete."

And at that moment Turkel fired two bullets into his partner's chest. There was a look of stunned disbelief on Adams's face as his lifeless body fell onto the rug.

"Good-bye, partner," Turkel said.

He put the gun in his pocket, straightened Adams's body out and rolled him up in the rug. There would be no clues left in the office. No way for the police to track him down.

"You're going to disappear," Turkel told the lifeless body of his partner. "Tomorrow morning I'm going to walk in like nothing happened and when I learn about your disappearance, I'm going to be as shocked as everyone else. When I'm over my shock, I'm going to take over the company."

When the body was tightly rolled up in the rug, Pete Turkel took the heavy piece of rope from his pocket and tied it around the rug so that it held firmly. The dead body was heavier than he had anticipated, and it took all his strength to drag the rug out of the office, down the elevator and into his car, which he had parked at the back of the building. He opened the trunk of his car and put the body inside. The police would never suspect him in a million years, but even if they did, and they examined his car, they would find no clues. The rug would absorb all the blood.

Adams thought he was pretty clever, Turkel thought to himself. Well, who's the smart one now?

He closed the trunk firmly and then started driving north out of Manhattan toward the mountains of upstate New York. He had plenty of time. He had told Amy that he had a business appointment and would be home late.

I didn't lie, Turkel thought to himself as he drove along the west side highway. It was a business appointment. The best business deal I've made in a long time. Yesterday I owned half a company. Now I own the whole thing. I'm rich. If Adams hadn't been so greedy, this never would have happened to him.

He drove steadily, careful not to exceed the speed limit. Everything had worked out perfectly so far and he did not want to be picked up by the police. Not with that body in the trunk. He was in the clear. He had committed the perfect crime.

The city gradually gave way to wooded country-side on each side of the parkway. Turkel got off at the next exit, then continued until the second side road, where he turned right. It was dark and the moon lit up the lonely side road.

When he came to a particularly heavily wooded section, Turkel pulled the car off the road where it would not be seen. He turned off the engine and then went into the woods. It took him about five minutes to find what he was looking for. There was a deep gully going almost straight down. It was a perfect place to bury a body because no one would ever have any reason to go down in that gully.

Smiling happily, Pete Turkel returned to the car and opened the trunk. He lifted the body of his partner out of the trunk and started dragging it toward the woods. The body had stiffened.

I'm almost finished now, Pete Turkel thought.

When he reached the ravine, he let go of the rug and he watched the body roll down.

"I'm sure you won't mind the ride, old boy."

He chuckled and returned to the car for the shovel. When he came back to the top of the ravine, he climbed down, holding the shovel.

"Now I'm going to unwrap you, my friend."

A less clever man, Turkel thought, would have left the body in the rug. But it would have taken longer for the corpse to decompose. So he rolled Adams's body out of the rug and then began to dig.

The earth was hard and the digging was difficult. Turkel began to work up a perspiration.

"You're putting me to a lot of trouble, pal. But this is the last time."

He kept digging. It was almost two hours before he was satisfied, but when he was through, he had dug a hole big enough to contain Donald Adams's body. He shoved the body into the grave and threw the gun in beside it.

"No one will ever find you or the gun," Pete Turkel said aloud. "Well, maybe in a hundred years or so. By then I guess it won't make any difference."

He covered the body with dirt. Then he picked up the shovel and scrambled up to the top of the ravine. He looked down and was satisfied. From up above, nothing showed. His partner would remain there for eternity. Pete Turkel got back into his car and drove along for several miles. Then he stopped and threw out the rug, deep into the woods. A mile farther, he threw out the shovel. He had disposed of all the evidence. Now all he had to do was to go home and clean up. Amy would be asleep by this time, so he could undress, shower and hide his dirty suit in a closet until he could take it to the cleaners.

On the ride home, he thought about how clever he had been. He went over it in his mind. The police can never trace the rug, the rope, the shovel or the gun back to me. And even if they could, why would they want to? Donald Adams simply disappeared. When they ask me if my partner said anything about leaving, I'll say "no". I'll just tell them that Donald has been acting pretty strangely lately. He seemed kind of restless. I don't know what his problem was. He didn't discuss it with me. When he came back from Rome, he said he had met someone there. Maybe he decided to go back to her.

Since Donald Adams had no wife and no family, there would be no one to question Pete Turkel's taking over the business. Yes, he was smart, all right.

How many men, he thought, were smart enough to commit the perfect crime?

Everything went exactly as Pete Turkel had predicted. When Donald Adams failed to show up at the office and missed several appointments, it was Pete Turkel himself who informed the police.

"He hasn't been to the office, and we can't reach him at his home. I'm getting concerned about him."

The police had investigated and of course had found nothing. Pete Turkel was too clever for them.

"It's not like Donald Adams to just disappear like that. I hope nothing's happened to him."

"Oh, if it has, we'll find out," the police assured him.

No you won't, Pete Turkel thought. It was his company now, and his alone. He could take all the money he wanted and there would be no Donald Adams to catch him. Life was beautiful.

In the fall, the hunting season opened in New York. Hundreds of hunters wearing red jackets and caps so that they would not be mistaken for deer by other hunters walked into the woods of upper New York

State looking for game. One hunter was passing along a trail when something caught his eye. In a deep ravine the sun was reflecting on something bright and shiny. Curious, the hunter stopped and looked down. He was too far away from the object to see what it was.

Probably a bottle cap someone threw down there, he thought.

But there was no sign of a bottle anywhere, and this was not an area that people usually walked through.

On an impulse, he decided to investigate. He slid down the ravine toward the shiny object and picked it up. It was a quarter, a bright, new shiny quarter.

That's strange, he thought. I wonder how that got down here?

And as he started to turn away, his eyes caught sight of something else. It was a hand sticking up from the dirt.

That evening Pete Turkel and Amy were having dinner in their apartment when there was a knock at the door.

"I'll get it." She went to the door and came back a moment later. "There's a detective here who'd like to talk to you."

"A detective?" Turkel's heart skipped a beat. Why would a detective come looking for him? And then he realized that it was probably only routine. Since his partner was missing, they would naturally want to ask him questions. Well, he was ready for them.

He rose from the table smiling and went to the door. A big, burly, middle-aged man stood there. He had a clipped mustache and a tanned face.

"Mr. Turkel?"

"Yes."

"I'm Detective Roger Benson. I wonder if I might have a few minutes of your time?"

"Certainly. What's it all about?"

"It's about your former partner, Donald Adams."

"Really. What about him?"

"I'm afraid we have some bad news for you, Mr. Turkel. We found his body. He was murdered."

Turkel looked at the detective in shock. How could they have found his body so soon? It was supposed to have lain in the earth for years until there was nothing but a skeleton. The detective was staring at him.

Turkel said, "How terrible! Do you know who shot him?"

Detective Benson said, "How did you know he was shot?"

Turkel stammered. "I — you said he was shot."

"No. I said he was murdered. We found the gun that killed him. There are fingerprints on it. The gun was buried with the body. When we talked to Mr. Adams's secretary a little while ago, she said that she had heard you and Mr. Adams quarreling, and that he had threatened to cut you out of the business."

"That's ridiculous. We were good friends."

"Yes, sir. I understand. But, just for the record, Mr. Turkel, I'm sure you wouldn't mind if we checked your fingerprints."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

"So you caught Pete Turkel because of a quarter?"

"Yes, sir."

Detective Roger Benson felt the quarter in his pocket. He was going to keep it as a good luck piece. He was talking to Chief of Detectives Gomez, his superior officer.

"Nice work. Did you get a confession from him?"

"Oh, yes. He never had a chance. He left his fingerprints all over the gun."

"It's always the ones who think they're so clever that are the easiest to catch."

Detective Roger Benson had been a member of the New York Police Department for twenty years. In the beginning he had enjoyed his work, but as time went on, it began to bore him, just like his wife and children began to bore him. His wife, Susie, was a pale, scrawny little thing. She was always complaining and whining, and his two daughters took after her. In the last few years, Detective Benson had reached the point where he hated to go to work and he hated to go home. His only refuge was his hobby: photography. He loved taking pictures of the city late at night and early in the morning when the misty light clung to the skyscrapers and hugged the rivers of Manhattan. He was getting to be quite good. He had entered photographs in a few shows and while he had not won any prizes, people seemed to enjoy his work.

It was at one of these shows that he had met Kate Du Roux, a Canadian photographer. He had seen her work hanging in the gallery and Benson had said to the owner, "Whoever took these pictures is really great."

"Would you like to meet her?" the owner of the gallery asked.

He turned to present an attractive young woman standing by his side. "This is Kete Du Roux."

She was in her thirties, well-built, with an intelligent face and sparkling black eyes.

"I'm really impressed."

"Thank you. I've seen some of your work, and I'm impressed."

Benson was flattered. "I really appreciate that."

That was how it had begun.

They went to a coffee shop and sat around discussing photography. It was a passion with both of them. There was a tough, mature quality about Roger Benson that Kate Du Roux found attractive.

"I'm staying at the Plaza Hotel. If you want to stop by there tonight, I'll show you some of my portraits."

Detective Benson did not hesitate. "Sure. I'd love to."

"Are you married?" Kate Du Roux asked.

For an instant he almost blurted out the truth. "No."

"Why not?"

"I guess I never found the right woman."

That was certainly the truth.

"Shall we say 8:00 o'clock?"

Detective Roger Benson had never cheated on his wife in all their years of marriage, although he had been tempted more than once. Now, without hesitation he murmured, "I'll be there."

He telephoned home. "I have to work an extra shift tonight, Susie. I'm not going to make it for dinner."

"But I've already fixed swiss steak for you."

That same complaining whine that he hated.

"What do you want me to do with it, throw it out?"

He was tempted to tell her what she could do with it, but he restrained himself. "Look, I work for the city. They tell me what to do and I do it."

"What time will you be home?"

"When I get there." And he slammed down the receiver.

He stopped to get a haircut and to buy some roses for Kate. Walking over to the hotel, he began to feel awkward. It was his first experience at this kind of thing and he was not quite sure how to handle himself.

When he knocked at the door of her hotel room, she greeted him with a big smile. "Come in, Roger." She saw the flowers. "Oh, how sweet. Thank you."

The suite was impressive, and along the walls Kate had placed her photographs. Detective Roger Benson was awed.

"These are fantastic. You're really marvelous."

He walked around the room studying each picture, admiring the composition and clarity. There were photographs of the Canadian wilderness and hard-faced pioneers and bright-eyed children.

"I wish I had one half this much talent."

"You have a great deal of talent, you just need to have more confidence in yourself." How can I, Benson thought bitterly, with my wife and kids tearing me down all the time. Nothing I ever do is good enough.

In the beginning when he had first started to take photographs he had shown some of them to Susie.

"How do you like these?" he had asked eagerly.

She had glanced at them and said, "They're okay, I guess. But it's the kind of thing sissies do, isn't it?"

He had never discussed his work with her again. On weekends he spent his time off taking photographs around the city and in the countryside.

Susie complained bitterly. "I wish you spent as much time with the kids and me as you do with that darned camera. Maybe you should have married that instead of me."

I wish I could have, Detective Benson thought. But he kept taking pictures, and the more time he spent on photography, the more he loved it.

Now, looking at the photographs of Kate Du Roux, he thought: This is what I would like to do the rest of my life.

She was watching him as he studied her pictures. "You really like them, don't you?"

He turned around. "I love them."

And he meant it. The sheer artistry of the pictures brought tears to his eyes. He had never felt quite like this before — so vulnerable, so needing. He wanted to take this beautiful young woman in his arms, but he was afraid that she would laugh at him.

“Would you like a drink?”

“Sure. Thank you.”

She fixed a drink for both of them and they sat down on the couch.

“Tell me about your life. Do you like being a detective?”

“Not any more.”

He was surprised by his own words. He had never confessed that to anyone before. Not to Susie, not to anybody, and yet here he was telling it to a stranger.

“I hate the Force.”

“Why don't you leave it?”

“What would I do? I have to make a living.”

“You could be a photographer.”

“I couldn't make a living at it.”

“I have a photography business in Quebec. I do very well. In fact, I have more business than I can handle. I could use someone like you.”

He was staring at her. “Are you serious?”

“Yes. Are you interested?”

“Very.”

She raised her glass. “Let's drink to that.”

They drank a toast.

Kate Du Roux spent the next hour telling Benson about her shop and how it had grown through the years. Benson listened, fascinated, but all the time he was thinking: this is crazy, I have to tell her the truth. I can't go to Quebec. I'm a married man with two little daughters.

But the more Kate talked, the more entranced Benson became with the idea.

They were seated on the couch together, and afterward when he tried to remember, Detective Benson could not recall which one made the first move. All he knew was that suddenly they were in each other's arms kissing and moments later they were in bed. He spent the night with Kate, and it was one of the most wonderful experiences of his life.

While Kate was in the kitchen making breakfast for the two of them, Benson called home.

“Where were you? I've been up all night waiting for you.”

“I told you I didn't know when I would be home. I had an emergency.”

“The next time you —”

He heard Kate coming in from the kitchen. “I'll talk to you later,” he said hastily, and hung up.

She brought him a glass of orange juice. “How soon can you quit your job and come up to Quebec, darling?”

Now was the time to tell her the truth, to tell her that he could not go to Quebec, that he could not quit

his job, and that he was married.

Instead, he looked at her and said, "Well, I have to turn in my notice to the department."

"How much notice do you have to give them?"

Why am I going on with this? He asked himself. Why don't I tell her the truth now and get it over with?

But he remembered how wonderful she had felt in his arms, and he knew he never wanted to give her up. He had trapped himself. The minute she found out he was married, he would lose her. And just as important, he would lose the chance to spend the rest of his life doing the work he loved. He would be trapped forever in the police department with his dreadful wife and their horrible children. He thought quickly. "I guess about two weeks."

"That's wonderful, Roger. I have to go back to Quebec this afternoon, but two weeks are not so long. You'll love it up there. We'll have such a good time."

This was his last chance. His last chance to tell her the truth.

He said, "I can't wait, honey."

That was when his plan was born.

There are thousands of disappearances in the United States every year, and very few of them are solved. Detective Roger Benson had handled a good many disappearance cases during his years on the force. Many of them involved unhappy husbands or wives running away from their spouses, but they were usually caught. Detective Benson intended to run away, but he had no intention of being caught. He was a detective, and he knew exactly how to work out everything so that he could safely spend the rest of his life with Kate Du Roux, without anyone looking for him.

He had no intention of turning in his notice. He had something much more clever in mind. He started to work out his plan the following morning.

His first step was to buy a used car, using a false name. He rented a garage and stored the car there. He went home early that afternoon.

"What are you doing home at this hour?" Susie asked.

He grimaced and said, "I haven't been feeling very well lately."

"Probably something you ate," she said unsympathetically. "You insist on eating that junk food all day long."

He kept his temper.

"Maybe. I think perhaps I'll go in and have a check-up."

"Should I make an appointment for you with Dr. Lyons?"

"No. to tell you the truth, I don't think he's all that good. One of the fellas mentioned another doctor. I think I'll see him."

The following night when Susie saved dinner, Roger Benson said, "I don't think I can eat anything."

"But it's your favorite dinner."

"I know, Susie. Thanks. I just feel kind of sick. I'm going to go to bed."

"Did you make an appointment with that doctor?"

"Yes. I'm seeing him Friday."

In the morning when it was time to go to work, Detective Benson said, "Call in for me, will you, Susie. I don't feel well enough to go into the office today."

And so it went. Each day Detective Benson complained about his health.

On Friday, Susie walked into the bedroom and said, "Are you feeling any better?"

"No. I feel worse. I've got to go see the doctor."

She was getting concerned. "You call me and tell me what he says, all right?"

"Sure."

Roger Benson got dressed, moving very slowly, while his wife watched him, her eyes filled with concern.

"You sure you can make it alone? I'll see you tonight. I've got to go out and do some shopping."

He waited until she had left. The minute she was out of sight, he moved quickly. He went to the closet and took out a suit, some shirts, ties, underwear, shoes and socks and gathered them together. He carried them down to the garage where he had stored the used car and put them in the trunk. He hurried to his office, closed the door and sat down to write a suicide note.

"Dear Susie: When I went in for a check-up, I got some terrible news from the doctor. He says I have an incurable illness. It's going to get worse and worse, and I can't face the thought of being a hopeless cripple, so I have decided to take my own life. You'll find our insurance policies in my desk drawer at home. Please explain to the children. Forgive me. Love, Roger."

When he left the office, he picked up the used car and drove out of Manhattan to the beach at Coney Island. This time of year it was deserted, as he had known it would be. He took his clothes out of the truck and laid them on the sand next to a lifeguard stand. In one of the pockets of his jacket he left the suicide note, along with his wallet, identification papers and police badge. Then Detective Roger Benson got into the car and headed for Canada, to his new life.

The distance between Manhattan and Quebec, Canada is 411 miles. It was a long drive, but it was the happiest drive of Detective Benson's life. He was leaving his old life behind. When they found his suicide note and all his clothes on the beach, everyone would think he was dead. There would be no point in looking for him. They could not question the doctor who had pronounced his death sentence because he had never mentioned the doctor's name.

"When I get to Quebec," he said aloud, "Kate and I will be married. I'll be a bigamist, but no one will ever know. As far as the world is concerned, I'm a dead man."

He smiled as he thought about the wonderful new life that lay ahead of him. He would be with the woman he loved, doing the work he loved. What could be sweeter? He had planned everything to perfection. He would be reaching Canada's border soon. He had left all his identification behind, but since he was an American, he would not need identification to cross the border.

He looked at his map. It showed that there was only one more toll bridge to cross before his freedom. Then he would be in Canada and safe.

He saw the toll bridge ahead of him. I feel like I'm getting out of prison, Detective Benson thought.

It was late at night and his was the only car on the road. He arrived at the bridge. The sign said "TOLL 25 CENTS." Detective Benson reached in his pocket for change. He pulled out a quarter. It was the shining new quarter from the Pete Tukel case.



Here goes my lucky quarter, Detective Benson thought.

He tossed it into the coin basket, the gate opened, and he drove across the bridge. As he approached the other side, huge floodlights suddenly came on, and in the glow he saw several police cars and a crowd of people.

There must have been some kind of accident, he thought.

He slowed down, wondering what was happening. As he reached the other side, a uniformed policeman waved him to a stop. Detective Roger Benson leaned his head out of the window. "What's going on, officer?"

"Would you step out of the car, sir?"

Puzzled, Detective Benson got out of the car and stood facing the crowd of people. Newspaper photographers started snapping his picture.

"What's this all about?" Detective Benson demanded.

A civilian walked up to him and said, "Congratulations, sir. You're the five millionth person to cross this bridge."

The photographers kept flashing their cameras in his bewildered face.

"You've won a two-week vacation at the Hilton Hotel. You're a celebrity now. Tomorrow your photograph will be in every newspaper in the country."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

All the coins collected from the toll bridge were deposited in the local bank every day. The quarter dropped in by Detective Roger Benson went to a storekeeper who made a withdrawal from the bank.

The shopkeeper gave the quarter to a customer as part of his change.

The customer used it in paying his bus fare to Chicago.

In Chicago, the quarter passed through the hands of a department store clerk.

The secretary of James Madison received it in change for a purchase she made for her employer.

"I found the necklace you wanted, Mr. Madison. Here's your change."

James Madison took the bills and the change and pocketed them without a word of thanks. James Madison was one of the richest men in the world. He expected perfect service from his employees and he felt that their salaries were thanks enough. He saw no reason to pamper them.

Madison was in his early sixties, a tough, hard-bitten tycoon who headed a conglomerate with branches all over the world. He was widower, and the only sentiment in his life was the love he had for his 23 year old daughter, Elizabeth. She was like her mother — blonde and beautiful and warm.

Elizabeth had had many suitors, but her father managed to frighten them all off.

"They're only after our money," he would tell Elizabeth.

James Madison did not want his daughter to get married because he was afraid he would lose her. It seemed to him a miracle that he had such a lovely child, and he did not want anything to happen to that miracle. She lived at home with him and saw to it that the servants took care of him and his house was run properly.

This particular day was Elizabeth's birthday, and Madison had sent his secretaries out shopping for perfume, antique Battersea boxes that Elizabeth collected, a mink coat, a double strand of opera length pearls, and some novels by her favorite author.

"I'll be leaving early," Madison told his secretary.

"Excuse me, Mr. Madison, but there's a board meeting at 6:00 o'clock and —"

"Cancel it."

He had promised Elizabeth that he would pick her up at 6:00 o'clock. He was eager to see her face when he brought all her presents to her. He knew the mink coat would not impress her. She was not really interested in expensive things. But she would love the Battersea boxes and the books.

"Tell Lipton to bring the car around." Lipton was his chauffeur.

"You sent him on an errand, Mr. Madison. He won't be back until —"

"Never mind. I'll take a taxi."

As he spoke, he collected all the gaily-wrapped packages that he was taking to his daughter. They would have champagne together and then go out to dinner and the theater. It was James Madison's idea of a perfect evening.

Five minutes later he was standing on the corner of State and Wabash, his arms filled with packages, trying to flag down a cruising taxi. The Chicago traffic in the Loop was heavy at this hour of the afternoon, and all the taxis were occupied. James Madison stood there fuming and cursing his chauffeur. Madison

was not a man who was accustomed to being frustrated. All his life he had gotten what he wanted, when he wanted it, and now the lack of transportation was going to make him late for the appointment with his daughter.

Half-way down the block a taxi pulled up to the curb and started to unload some passengers. Two people stood nearby waiting to get into the taxi. Madison hurried toward it and as the passengers got out, Madison shoved the two waiting people aside and said, "This is an emergency."

As they watched in astonishment, he got into the taxi and slammed the door. He gave his address to the driver.

"Hurry it up."

"Yes, sir."

James Madison's palatial home was in Evanston, on the northern outskirts of Chicago. When they arrived, Madison got out of the taxi, his arms filled with packages, and fumbled in his pockets for some money. He paid the driver, and as he did so, one of the packages fell to the ground. Madison bent down to pick it up, not noticing that his wallet and a shiny quarter had fallen out of his pocket. He hurried into the house, eager to give his daughter her birthday presents.

Five minutes later, a pedestrian walked by. Something shining on the sidewalk under the reflection of a street lamp caught his eye. Curious, he walked over to examine it. It was a quarter.

That's about all the good luck I've had today, Richard Stevens thought unhappily.

He bent down to pick it up, and next to it he saw a flat, black object. It was a wallet. He did not have time to examine it, for he was hurrying to catch his bus.

I'll look at it later, he thought. It's probably empty.

During the bus ride home, Richard Stevens thought about the bad luck he had run into lately. He had been the copywriter for one of the largest advertising firms in Chicago, and he was very good at his job. But two months ago the firm had been taken over by Eastern Investors Corporation, a large conglomerate. The new bosses had fired everyone, including Stevens, and had brought in their own people. He had not been concerned in the beginning, for he knew he was capable, and he had a good reputation. He was sure it would be easy to find another job. But it had turned out to be more difficult than he had anticipated. Business was slow and advertising agencies were not hiring anyone.

He walked into the tiny apartment where he lived alone, feeling depressed. He remembered the wallet he had picked up, and took it out of his pocket and opened it. To his astonishment, it was filled with money. There were hundred dollar bills, fifty dollar bills, twenties and tens. There must be \$2,000.00 here, he thought.

There was a card in the wallet. "James Madison, President, Eastern Investors Corporation." Richard Stevens stared at it in disbelief. It was the man who had had him fired. Well, he didn't have me fired, Richard Stevens thought. But his company sure did.

He looked at the money again. It would take care of the rent and food for the next few months. It was a

big temptation, but Richard Stevens was not a thief.

At 10:00 o'clock the following morning, he took the bus down to the address on the business card and went up to the offices of the Eastern Investors Corporation. They occupied one whole floor of the building. Stevens asked for James Madison's office and he was directed down a long corridor to a beautifully decorated waiting room.

A stern-faced, middle-aged lady sat behind a desk.

"Yes. May I help you?"

"My name is Richard Stevens. I want to see Mr. Madison."

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No — but I'm sure he —"

"I'm sorry. No one sees Mr. Madison without an appointment."

"I found a wallet of his. I just wanted to return it."

She studied him for a moment. "Wait right here."

She got up from behind her desk and walked into Madison's office. James Madison was speaking to Elizabeth.

"Excuse me for interrupting, Mr. Madison, but there is a man here who says he found your wallet."

"Found my wallet! My pocket was picked. Call the police."

Elizabeth started to object.

"Father, how do you know he picked your pocket? Ah, He, he could have —"

"I don't go around losing things. I tell you the man is a thief."

Five minutes later, as Richard Stevens was waiting beside the desk, a guard came up to him and said, "Are you the man who has Mr. Madison's wallet?"

"Yes, I —"

"You are under arrest."

Stevens could not believe his ears. "I am what?"

"You are under arrest. Come along quietly."

"You must be crazy! This whole place is madhouse."

Elizabeth Madison came out in time to see the officer lead the struggling young man away.

He certainly does not look like a thief. She felt sorry for him. She went back into her father's office.

"If that man is a pickpocket, why did he return your wallet?"

"It's an old trick. He brought it back here thinking I would give him a big reward."

But Elizabeth was not satisfied. She was sure that the young man was innocent. But she knew how stubborn her father could be. I will have to do something about it myself, she decided.

That afternoon, Elizabeth Madison went down to the prison and asked to see Richard Stevens. He was pacing up and down in his cell like an angry animal. "They can't do this to me! I'm an innocent man. James Madison is a maniac. I'm going to get even with him if it's the last thing I ever do."

"Mr. Stevens —"

Richard Stevens turned and saw Elizabeth.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

She started to tell him her name and thought better of it. This was not the time, not in the mood the young man was in.

"My name is — er — Butterfield. Elizabeth Butterfield."

"What do you want?" He was snarling.

She thought fast.

"I am with the public defender's office. We heard about what happened to you, and we will put up the bail to get you out of here."

"Good! I want James Madison arrested. I want him boiled in oil. I want him —"

"Mr. Stevens, would you please calm down."

"I won't calm down. I am going to sue him for everything he has. I am going to ruin him and ruin his family."

"Let's discuss it over lunch."

She posted money for his bail, and they went to a Japanese restaurant for lunch.

Elizabeth thought that Richard Stevens was one of the most attractive man she had ever met.

He explained how he had found James Madison's wallet. "I was stunned when I saw all that money. To tell the truth, I really could have used it, but I am not a thief."

"I know you are not."

"I'm sorry I yelled at you. But I really hate that man."

"Well, after what he did to you —"

"It isn't just me. A lot of people are out of work because of James Madison."

"What are you talking about?"

"The advertising agency I worked for, Davers & Cooper, was taken over by Eastern Investors Corporation, Madison's company. Instead of trying to protect our jobs, they brought in their own people and threw us all out on the street. I haven't been able to find a job since."

There was no self-pity in what he was saying. He was just stating facts. There was a strength about him that Elizabeth liked very much. He seemed honest and determined. She wanted to help him. After all, what had happened to him was her father's fault.

They talked for hours, and the more they talked, the more Elizabeth liked him. Richard Stevens was taken with her, too. He thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"Tell me about your other cases."

"What cases?"

"With the public defender's office."

She had forgotten her lie.

"Oh, it's not very exciting."

"Are you free for dinner tonight?"

"Yes."

"Good. I'll pick you up at seven o'clock. Where do you live?"

"I — er —" She could not tell him where she lived. "Why don't we meet somewhere?"

"All right."

They had dinner that evening and went to the theater. Elizabeth found his company enchanting.

"I'll take you home," Richard Stevens said.

Elizabeth knew she could not let him take her home. Once he found out who she was, she would never see him again.

"I can get home by myself."

"I would be happy to —"

"No, no, it's really all right." She could see that he was puzzled.

"If you say so. Are you free for lunch tomorrow?"

"Yes." Elizabeth knew she would be free any time he wanted her to be.

When Elizabeth got home that evening, her father was waiting up for her.

"Did you have a good time?"

"I had a wonderful time."

"Who did you have dinner with?"

"A copy writer for Davers & Cooper."

He stared at her. "Who?"

"At least he used to be. You're going to get him his job back."

"What are you talking about?"

Elizabeth explained the situation to him.

"He didn't steal your wallet. He found it. And you had him thrown in jail. Well, you're going to make it up to him."

"Elizabeth —"

"No arguments." She could be as stubborn as her father. "But he mustn't know that it was you who got him his job back."

There was nothing James Madison would not do for his daughter. And so it was that the following morning, Richard Stevens got a call from Davers & Cooper asking him if he would like to come back to work.

"I certainly would!" Stevens exclaimed.

When he met Elizabeth for lunch later that day, he told her the good news.

"You brought me luck."

"I'm glad."

They were together every evening after that. Elizabeth realized that she was falling in love with him. She was also sure that he was falling in love with her. But she had a problem. She had lied to him from the beginning. If he learned the truth, he would feel that she had been making a fool of him.

He took her to dinner and movies and for walks in the park, but it did not matter to Elizabeth where they went. She just enjoyed being with him. One evening he seemed depressed.

"Is anything wrong?" Elizabeth asked.

Richard Stevens sighed. "They're going to choose a new head of my department next week. It's between me and a man named Encott, but I just learned that he's a friend of James Madison's, so he'll get it. I was kind of counting on it."

"Don't give up yet," Elizabeth told him.

That evening when she arrived home, she said to her father, "Richard Stevens is up for promotion. I would like him to get it."

James Madison saw the look in his daughter's eyes, and he did not even argue with her.

"All right," he said.

"I want to marry you, Elizabeth."

They were seated in "Chez Nous", a cozy restaurant on the north side. She felt her heart swell.

"Oh, yes, darling."

At that moment a well-dressed couple passed by the table. The woman saw Elizabeth and said, "Darling, I haven't seen you in ages."

She turned to her companion. "You know Elizabeth Madison, James Madison's daughter."

Richard Stevens's eyes were wide with disbelief. Elizabeth was frantically signalling the woman, trying to get her to shut up, but was too late. The damage was done. Richard Stevens got to his feet. His face was filled with fury.

"If you will excuse me, Miss Madison. I have some packing to do." And he started out of the restaurant.

Richard Stevens was throwing his clothes into his suitcase. He was filled with humiliation and anger. She had made a complete fool of him. What an idiot I was. I even proposed to her. He slammed the last of his things into his suitcase and locked it. There was a knock at the door. He went to it and opened it. A uniformed police stood there.

"Are you Richard Stevens?"

Stevens looked at him, puzzled.

"Yes."

"You're under arrest."

"What?"

"I have a warrant here."

"A warrant for what? What are you talking about?"

"A woman named Elizabeth Madison claims you stole her wallet."

Richard Stevens was in jail again.

"It's a nightmare. None of this is happening to me. The whole Madison family is going to keep me in jail for the rest of my life. What have I done to deserve this?" He heard footsteps coming down the hall, and a moment later Elizabeth appeared, accompanied by a guard.

"This is the man, officer. I would like to talk to him alone."

"Don't let her in here! Don't let her near me."

The guard opened the door and Elizabeth entered the cell.

"What are you going to do to me next? Have them hang me?"

"I couldn't let you leave town. I had to stop you."

"Why?"

She stood in front of him and said, "It's very simple. I love you."

"You lied to me from the beginning."

"I'm sorry about that, darling. All I wanted to do was help you. Let's go back to where we left off at the restaurant."

"Where was that?"

"You asked me to marry you. I said 'yes'." She put her arms around him. "Aren't you going to do something about that?"

At that moment a lawyer hurried up to Richard Stevens's cell.

"Mr. Stevens, you're free to go now. I've paid your bail."

"Go away. Can't you see I'm busy."

He held Elizabeth close in his arms and suddenly laughed aloud.

"What's so funny?"

"I was just thinking. Do you know how all this happened? It was all because of a quarter shining in the gutter."



## CHAPTER NINE

Fernando Gonzales was a dreamer. What he dreamed about was being very rich. Gonzales's problem was that he was an accountant in his fifties, making a small salary, with little chance that he would ever make more. He worked for James Madison and the Eastern Investors Corporation. He hated James Madison. He had worked for him for ten years, and in that period of time had only gotten two raises.

That last time he had gone in to see Madison, Fernando Gonzales had said, "I'm sorry to bother you, Mr. Madison, but it's been several years since I've had a raise and I really think I deserve one."

Madison had sat back in his chair and stared at him, "What makes you think so?"

"Well, sir, accountants at other firms are making —"

"You're not working for another firm, Gonzales. You're working for this firm. How old are you?"

"Fifty-six, sir."

"You're only four years from retirement age. Who do you think would hire you if I fired you?"

Gonzales's eyes opened wide with fear. "Fire me?"

"That's right. You're not indispensable around here. Nobody is. If you're not happy, you can quit."

Fernando Gonzales was almost trembling. "I didn't say I wasn't happy, Mr. Madison."

"Then stop complaining. I don't want to hear any more nonsense about raises. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now get back to work. You're not paid to sit around talking."

"No, sir."

And Fernando Gonzales had hurried out of the office. Later when he thought about that conversation, he was filled with humiliation. He had gone into Madison's office knowing that he deserved a raise and he had come out a quivering coward in fear of losing his job. James Madison was right. No one else would hire him. He was too old. His working life was almost over and what did he have to show for it? Nothing. His savings were pitifully small. He did not even have a house. He lived in a tiny apartment and his only possession was a car that was almost ten years old. He could not even afford a new car. Oh, yes, he had good reason to hate James Madison.

In the beginning, Fernando Gonzales had thought that James Madison treated him badly because Gonzales was Mexican. But he soon learned that Madison treated everyone badly. It did not, however, make Fernando Gonzales feel any better about it. He came from a proud race, and Madison's insults cut deeply.

All the cash from the company flowed through Fernando Gonzales's hands. He handled millions of dollars every month, and every day the temptation to steal some of that money grew stronger. Finally the day came when Gonzales could resist no longer.

What have I got to lose? He thought. My life is practically over. When I'm sixty, Madison will fire me and I'll have nothing, anyway.

Fernando Gonzales had the combination to the private safe in James Madison's office, where enormous amounts of money were kept. Friday afternoons cash came in from branches all over the country, and it was kept in the safe until Monday morning when it could be deposited in the bank.

I can steal the money, Fernando Gonzales thought. But where could I hide?

And then he knew. Mexico. His parents lived in the remote village of Oaxa, deep in the Mexican desert.

"No one will ever find me there. It's off the beaten track. Visitors never go there. I'll be the richest man in the village. I'll give money to my mother and father and buy a beautiful bride for myself. In Oaxa I can live like a king."

The more Gonzales thought about the idea, the more excited he became. He had not visited his home town since he was fifteen years old. Every month he sent his parents small amounts of money, but now he would be able to do something big. He could prove to everybody back home what an important man he was.

Fernando Gonzales decided he would steal the money at the end of the week he made his plans very carefully.

When he went to work on Monday, he thought: This is the last Monday I will ever work for that terrible man.

He was having trouble with his car. The mechanic said to him, "If I were you, I'd have a new transmission put in. this one is shot."

"How much would that cost?"

"Two thousand dollars."

Gonzales was shocked. "I don't have \$2,000."

The mechanic shrugged. "It's up to you."

"The car will run, won't it?"

"Oh, yeah. But I won't guarantee anything. The old transmission could hold out for another year or two, or it could give way any minute. You're taking a gamble."

Gonzales had no choice. He thought: When I get to Mexico, I will buy a new car — a shiny new Cadillac, and I will take all my friends in the village for a ride. The very thought of it made him feel warm and happy. Only a few more days! He could not wait.

The days seemed to pass slowly. Tuesday took forever. And the rest of the week took even longer. But Friday finally came. Working at this place had been hell, but it was going to be worth it. For the rest of his life, he was going to live like a millionaire.

On Saturday morning, Fernando Gonzales walked into a luggage store and bought a cheap second-hand suitcase. He brought it back to his small apartment. He already had a suitcase, but that one was for his clothes. The suitcase he had just bought was for something more important.

He rested all day Saturday, preparing himself for the adventure he was about to get into. He did not think of what he was about to do as stealing.

I'm not stealing, he told himself. I'm being paid off for a debt. They owe it to me.

It was his recompense for all the years of humiliation he had endured at the hands of his employer. Tomorrow was going to be the big day.

In the late afternoon, he took his car to a filling station and had it filled with gas. It seemed to be

running fine.

It doesn't need a new transmission, Gonzales thought. The mechanic was just trying to make money off me.

Early Sunday morning Gonzales packed his old suitcase with his clothes and put it in the trunk of his car, along with the new suitcase. He drove to the Madison building where the company's headquarters was located. He took the empty suitcase out of the trunk and carried it to the front door. The door was locked, as he had known it would be.

He knocked on the glass door and a uniformed guard appeared, when he saw who it was, he opened the door.

"Good morning, Mr. Gonzales. What are you doing here on a Sunday?"

Fernando Gonzales smiled and said, "I'm on my way to the mountains for a vacation, but I remembered that I had to finish up a report." He looked down at the suitcase. "I'm taking my clothes inside because I don't want them to be stolen from the car."

The guard nodded. "I don't blame you. The crime rate in this city is terrible. Just sign in and go on up."

Gonzales signed the register at the desk and got into the elevator, carrying the empty suitcase. He rode up to the top floor, where James Madison's office was located and let himself in with his key. He walked over to the huge safe that stood in the corner. He knelt down in front of it and slowly twirled the knob. "Thirty-two to the left, four to the right, seven to the left, nineteen to the right." He turned the handle and pulled the safe open.

The inside of the safe was crammed with cash and negotiable bonds — bonds that could be turned into money just by taking them to a bank. Fernando Gonzales knelt there for a long time, dazzled by all that wealth.

"It's all mine," he said in awe. "It's all mine."

Using both hands, he began pulling the money out of the safe, placing it into the suitcase in neat piles. It took almost fifteen minutes before the suitcase was filled, and when Gonzales closed it and locked it, the suitcase was so heavy that he could hardly lift it. It was a fortune beyond anyone's wildest dreams. Live like a king? He could live like ten kings! James Madison would go crazy when he came in Monday morning and found the safe empty. The thought of it gave Fernando Gonzales extra pleasure. Perhaps it would even give Madison a heart attack. What a joy that would be!

Madison would immediately set the police searching for him, of course. But they would not have a clue. His personnel card in the file read: "Place of Birth — Mexico City." When Gonzales had come to work for the company, he had thought that Mexico City would sound more impressive than Oaxa, so the police would have no reason to look for him in Oaxa. No, all he had to do was get out of this building with his suitcase full of riches and he was home free!

On a last minute impulse, Gonzales opened the desk drawer of James Madison and looked through it. There was nothing of any value there. Something in the top drawer caught his eye. It was a shiny quarter. He had heard the story of that quarter. It was a good luck coin that Richard Stevens, Madison's son-in-law, had given the old man when Stevens had married Madison's daughter. Well, if it's a god luck coin for

them, Gonzales thought, it will be a good luck coin for me. He put it in his pocket.

He lifted the heavy suitcase, took it to the elevator and pressed the down button. A few moments later, he was on the ground floor.

"Finished already, Mr. Gonzales?"

"Yes."

"Now you can enjoy your vacation, huh?"

"That's right."

"Where're you headed?"

"Up north. I'm going to do a little fishing."

"Well, have a good time."

The guard unlocked the front door for him. Gonzales picked up the suitcase and walked out to his car.

"Can I help you with that?"

"No. I'm fine."

The guard watched as Gonzales put the suitcase filled with money into the trunk.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Gonzales.

I've done it! Gonzales thought gleefully. He turned and headed the car south. He was on his way home.

When Fernando Gonzales reached the border at El Paso, he crossed into Mexico without any trouble. Mexicans were not questioned when they drove into Mexico. It was only when they drove out of Mexico that they were stopped.

Gonzales drove for half the night before he turned off the main road and began taking small dusty side roads. If James Madison had alerted the Mexican police to look for him, they would be seeking him on the main highways.

Every mile he drove brought him closer to his village. A few more hours and I'll be there, he thought. He could see the expressions on the faces of his family and friends as he opened the suitcase and threw the money up into the air.

"Where did you get all that money?" they would ask him.

"I invested my savings," he would tell them.

And the pretty young señoritas would look at him and say admiringly, "What a clever man you are, Fernando Gonzales."

Yes, indeed he was.

There was nothing in sight now but an endless desert of sand. He looked at his road map. There were no villages between where he was and Oaxa. Gonzales's heart beat faster at the thought that the next village he came to would be his home.

He watched the sun come up over the desert, bathing everything in its rosy glow. The road was getting more and more rugged, pitted with deep holes and ruts. He slowed the car down until he was driving no more than ten miles an hours.

Suddenly, there was a loud noise from underneath the car, and the car came to a grinding stop. Gonzales pressed on the starter, but nothing happened.

What could have gone wrong? And then he suddenly realized. The transmission! The mechanic had told him the truth. The transmission had gone out.

He looked around. He was in the middle of a vast, empty desert. There was not a thing in sight. Not a house, not a tree, not a bush. And the sun was beginning to grow hot.

Fernando Gonzales sat there thinking, wondering what to do.

"What can I do? I must walk home."

He took the heavy suitcase out of the trunk and began carrying it in the direction of Oaxa. He walked along, stumbling through the sand, clutching tightly to the handle of the suitcase. After thirty minutes he was soaked with perspiration. He took off his jacket and tie and dropped them in the sand and walked on. The sun was becoming unbearable, a giant red ball in the sky that was burning him up. The suitcase seemed to weigh a ton. He could no longer lift it. He began dragging it through the sand.

I can make it to Oaxa, he thought. I've got to make it.

He dragged himself through the hot desert, hanging onto the suitcase for dear life. He felt feverish and hot, and the sun was blinding him. He forced himself to go on, hour after hour, until finally he was consumed by such an unbearable thirst that he did not think he could stand it. He tried to speak aloud, but his mouth was dry. No sound would come out.

I can't die here in the desert, Gonzales thought. I'm too rich.

And so he kept walking, dreaming about being home in Oaxa, drinking from a cool fountain. Many men had died in the desert before him, and he knew that if he did not get water soon, he would join them. The suitcase full of money would lie in the desert sand lost forever.

And then suddenly as he lifted his eyes Gonzales saw a building in the distance, its shape flickering in the heatwaves.

It doesn't fool me, Gonzales thought. It's not really there. It's a mirage. A trick of the light.

He kept walking, dragging the suitcase along, and the closer he got to the apparition, the more real it appeared. He was only 40 yards from it when he realized it was a gas station.

It's real! He thought. It's there!

He fell to his knees, unable to walk any farther. His whole body was dry and burnt from the relentless sun. he began to crawl on his hands and knees through the hot desert sand.

"Gas and Oil," a sign said. There was a pump in front of the building.

"Help," Gonzales yelled. But no sound came out.

With his last bit of strength, he managed to crawl up to the building. There was a sign on the door. He could barely read it through his half blind eyes. It read: "Closed."

He turned his head. On the right was a small shed. To the left was a machine of some kind. He squinted his eyes and looked harder. It was a soft drink machine. Gonzales could not believe his good luck.

He crawled to the machine and pulled himself up. There, behind the thick glass case, were bottles of soft drinks. He was saved!

A sign read: "25 Cents."

He remembered the good luck quarter he had taken from James Madison's desk. Did he still have it?

He reached in his pants pockets, and there it was. He was going to make it now! Oaxa was only ten miles away. A cool drink would revive him, give him strength to go on.

He was so weak that he had to hold onto the machine to stand up. He raised his hand to put the quarter in the slot and the coin slipped from his hand into the sand. He stood there, disbelievingly. He pounded on the glass with his fists, but his efforts were feeble. He fell to his knees searching in the sand for the quarter. He could not find it. He started digging furiously. The coin had disappeared.

Oh, God, no he thought. I have a suitcase filled with money, but without that quarter, I'm going to die.

He kept digging until he had no more strength left. He lowered his head to the burning sand and thought: I'll just rest here for a little while.

And then he remembered nothing more.

## CHAPTER TEN

At 6:00 o'clock the following morning , a Mexican farmer named Pedro who was riding to Oaxa on his mule approached the gas station. He stopped as he saw the body of Fernando Gonzales lying in the sand. Pedro got off his mule to inspect the body. He walked around it carefully.

"You're dead. How could anyone try to walk across this desert without transportation or water? You must have been crazy."

Pedro was not sure what to do about the dead man. If he reported the body to the police, they might suspect him of having killed him.

"I'm sorry," Pedro said to the body. "I can't get involved. When they open the gas station, they'll find you and report it to the police. Bad luck, my friend."

He started to get back on his mule, when he noticed a suitcase lying about twenty feet away from the body.

"Why would a man carry a suitcase into the desert?" Pedro asked aloud. "Water, yes. Food, yes. A suitcase, no."

He walked over to the suitcase and looked down at it. It looked cheap and ordinary.

"It's probably filled with your old clothes."

Still, who knew? There might be something of value in it.

Pedro bent down and unstrapped the suitcase and opened it. He stared at its contents for a full five minutes without moving. He had never dreamed of so much money in his life. There must be a million dollars there, he thought. And it was undoubtedly stolen money. No one tried to cross the desert with a suitcase full of cash unless he was running away.

"You're dead now, so who does the money belong to?" He thought about it for a long time, and then he said, "I found it, so I think it belongs to me. It's only fair. Finders, keepers. I will buy my Rosita a new dress. She will be very happy. And I will buy me a new mule. This one is very tired."

He carefully closed and locked the suitcase and strapped it on the back of the mule. The sun had risen and the sands were beginning to get hot. Pedro felt thirsty. He looked with longing at the soft drink machine, but he had no coins.

I could break into the machine, he thought. But that would not be honest.

Suddenly, his attention was caught by the sun reflecting on a metal object in the sand. He reached down and picked it up. It was a quarter.

"This is really my lucky day!" Pedro exclaimed.

He put the quarter in the soft drink machine and pressed a button. Out came an ice cold Coca Cola. He took the cap off the bottle and drank long, soothing swallows. When he had finished the bottle, he tossed it onto the sand.

"That's the way it goes, my friend," he said to the body lying at his feet. "Some of us have lucky days; some of us have unlucky days."

He climbed up on his mule and headed across the desert toward Oaxa.

The body of Fernando Gonzales was found an hour later when the owner of the gas station arrived.

There was no identification on the corpse. The owner of the station telephoned the police at Oaxa, and they arrived a short time later.

“What is a man doing alone in the desert without food or water or transportation?” they asked.

They took the body back to Oaxa and placed it in the funeral parlor. Fernando Gonzales had arrived home, but no one knew it. Since the police had no idea who the corpse was, they did not ask any of the towns-people to identify it. Gonzales was given a simple burial.

When James Madison walked into his office on Monday morning and found that he had been robbed, he went into a towering rage. All employees were questioned. When Fernando Gonzales failed to show up for work, it immediately became obvious who the thief was.

“I want him!” James Madison roared. “I want him put in jail for the rest of his miserable life. And I want my money back.”

The manhunt began. But in spite of the intensive search, the police were unable to find the slightest trace of the culprit. He had disappeared from the face of the earth.

Two days after Fernando Gonzales was buried, a man arrived at the gas station to empty the coins from the soft drink machine. The coins were shipped to a bank in Mexico City.

A tourist received the quarter in change at a restaurant in Acapulco.

It was next in the hands of an attorney flying to New York.

The quarter was part of his tip to a barber, who gave it to a customer, who went to Vermont.

There was a country fair in Vermont, and it was there that a young man named Jennings Lang gave a hot dog vendor a dollar and received the quarter in change.

Jennings Lang was twenty-one years old. He had just gotten out of college and he was about to spend the rest of his life in prison. Not in a prison with bars, but in a place that seemed far worse to Jennings. For generations his family had owned a large furniture factory in South Carolina. Ever since Jennings was a small boy, his father had told him, “The business will be all yours some day, my boy.”

Jennings hated the idea with all his soul. He had absolutely no interest in business. He had only one passion in life, and that was writing.

He wanted desperately to be an author. “I want to write novels,” he told his father.

His father, who had never gone past the third grade, laughed.

“Writing novels is for sissies, son. Why your grandfather couldn't read or write and he became the richest man in this state.”

“I'm not interested in becoming rich. I want to write things that will entertain people — make them laugh and make them cry.”

“That's the most foolish thing I've ever heard,” his father yelled. “You just get those fancy ideas out of your head. You're going to be running the Lang Furniture Company. That's what you were born to do.”

Jennings had appealed to his mother.

“I can't spend my life running a factory. I'd hate every minute of it. Please talk to father.”

“I'm sorry, you know how stubborn your father is. From the day you were born, he had his heart set on



your taking over the business when he retires. Well, he's almost ready to retire, Jennings. You have no choice."

Jennings had entered college, and he dreaded each succeeding year because it was bringing him closer to the time when he would have to take over the factory. In his spare time he wrote feverishly and sent his stories to publishers in New York. Each time they were rejected.

"I know I have talent. I just have to prove it to somebody."

Jennings's English teacher at college was Professor Charteris. He had been teaching for many years and was highly respected in the academic community. Jennings Lang was his prize pupil. When he read the first class assignment that Jennings had written, he summoned him to his office.

"You have the gift, my boy. You're going to be a great writer."

Jennings was thrilled. "Thank you, sir."

"You have much to learn, of course. You're still very young. But no one can deny your talent."

Jennings felt twelve feet tall.

"Writing is not easy. It is a demanding task-master. There is one basic rule: You must never be satisfied. To a great writer, whatever he writes is never good enough. You must make it better. And then when you have worked on it and polished it and refined it — you must make it better! Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir."

He went home fired with enthusiasm. He was so excited that he telephoned his mother to tell her what Professor Charteris had said.

Jennings's father got on the phone. "Just because one old man tells you that he thinks you have talent doesn't make you a writer. Do you know what will make you a writer? Selling something. Making money. Then you're a writer. Otherwise, you're just a bum. Do you hear me?"

Jennings heard him, but he did not believe him.

"I'm going to prove myself to him," Jennings said.

He worked harder than ever. Writing was sheer joy to him. When he wrote, he was in another world, and the hours would happily slip away.

"I could never spend my life in a furniture factory," he told himself.

Finally the day came when he was graduated from college. His mother and father were there.

"It's a great day, my boy," Jennings's father said. "Now you're ready to go to work."

"Let's go some place where we can talk," Jennings suggested.

He led his mother and father to a bench under some trees on the lovely campus.

Jennings said, "Father, I know you're going to be disappointed, but I'd rather die than spend the rest of my life making tables and chairs. That's not what I want. When my life is over, I want to feel that I've accomplished something, that I've left my mark on the world. There are billions of people on this earth, and when they die, they become anonymous. It's as though they never lived. I want people to remember my name. And I can't do that by making furniture."

His father turned white. "Is that the gratitude your mother and I get for bringing you up, for sending you to college and feeding and clothing you?"

The old man was yelling, and Jennings was afraid he was going to have a heart attack.

"You say you want to be a writer. But you haven't been able to sell anything, have you? What kind of writer is that? How do you expect to make a living?"

"I don't know."

"Your father has a point, Jennings. If no one wants to buy what you write, then you're not really a writer, are you? And if you can't make a living at it, you're going to starve."

"I won't give you one cent," Jennings's father exploded.

"I don't want any money from you. All I want is a chance to prove what I can do."

"How do you expect to do that?"

Jennings thought for a moment. "I'll tell you what. Give me six months. I'll go somewhere and write. If I don't sell anything in the next six months, I'll come back to South Carolina and spend the rest of my life running the factory."

"You have a deal," his father said. "Six months..."

And now, as Jennings Lang wandered around the Vermont fair, he thought: The six months will be up next week. And I haven't sold a thing.

He had come to the mountains of Vermont because it was quiet and peaceful there, and he could work uninterrupted. He had rented a tiny cabin here he wrote from early morning until late at night. He had sent his writing to New York publishers, praying that something would be accepted. Most of the rejections were encouraging. They came with personal notes that said:

"Your story shows great promise, but it does not fit into our needs."

"We enjoyed reading your manuscript, but it is too similar to a book we are about to publish."

"We have a policy of not publishing new authors, but if that ever changes, you will hear from us again."

It was like dangling a carrot before him. All of them said he had promise, but none of them would buy what he had written. And now his time was up. His father had given him \$2,000.

"You'll have to make this last for six months," he had told Jennings. "If you run out of money before the six months is up, you come back to work."

Jennings had tried to be as frugal as possible. He avoided restaurants and ate at hamburger stands. He had rented the cheapest cabin he could find. He bought no new clothes. But as careful as he was, he found that his money was running out. He began to skip meals, and he felt light-headed. But nothing could stop him from spending each day at his desk writing.

When he had finished a manuscript, he would put it in an envelope, take it into town and deposit it in the post office. Now he had run out of money and out of time. He had made a promise to his father, and he would keep it. He pictured the long years ahead of him doing a job that he hated, knowing he could never quit.

Yes, he thought, it's a trap worse than prison.

He wandered around the fair, looking at all the people enjoying themselves, happy and laughing.

They're free, Jennings Lang thought. They can go where they like and work where they like. I'm finished.

Filled with unhappiness, he returned to his lonely cabin.

Two weeks before, Jennings had had an idea for a novel. He had worked it out in his mind and was excited by it. The plot seemed to him to be fresh and original.

But I've been enthusiastic about other ideas, he thought, and nothing happened. Why should this be any different?

He would have liked to have finished the whole novel before sending it to a publisher, but there was no time.

I'll send them two chapters and an outline of the rest of the book. If they like it, he thought, they'll buy it.

He dreamed about what would happen if they bought it. He would no longer be under obligation to work at the factory. He would have proved that he was a writer and that he could make a living at it.

I would be free, Jennings thought. Free to do what I want for the rest of my life.

If someone buys it.

He spent the following day finishing up his outline, and at 5:00 o'clock he put it in an envelope and sealed it. He typed in the address of the McCormick & Company Publishers, the biggest and best publisher in New York.

Jennings put on a jacket and hurried into town. The post office closed at 6:00. he wanted this to get in the day's mail so that it would reach the publisher in New York the following day.

My last day here, Jennings thought. If I don't hear from them by then, I'll telephone to see if they're interested. When he reached the village, he walked into the post office.

"I see you have another manuscript," the postmaster said. They had become friends.

"Yes, sir. Is it in time to go out with this evening's mail?"

"You've just made it."

The postmaster put the envelope on the small scale to weigh it. It was at that moment that Jennings Lang realized he had spent his last dollar on the hot dog. He did not have enough money to pay for the postage on the manuscript! There was no way he could charge it. He was dealing with the United States Postal Service.

How could I have been so stupid, he thought. I should have saved the dollar for postage.

The postmaster was saying, "That will be twenty-five cents."

"I'm afraid I don't have —"

And suddenly Jennings remembered the quarter in his pocket that he had been given as change. He hastily pulled it out and handed it to the postmaster. It was bright and shiny.

"Here it is."

The postmaster took it, stamped the envelope and tossed it onto a pile of envelopes and packages.

"Good luck."

"Thank you."

Jennings watched as the postmaster handed the pile of envelopes and packages to a mail truck driver.

"It'll be in New York tomorrow," the postmaster told Jennings.

Jennings stood there silently praying: "Please, God, let them buy this one. It's my last chance."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

When the postmaster turned in his receipts for the day, it went to the main post office in Vermont, where the quarter was given out in change to a tourist from Brooklyn.

He returned to New York that afternoon and gave the quarter to a street beggar in Manhattan.

The beggar went into a liquor store and handed the clerk eight quarters for a bottle of cheap wine.

The shiny quarter was given in change to a man who bought a bottle of champagne. The man's name was Teruo Kobayashi, and he was the senior editor for the publishing firm of McCormick and Company.

Teruo was celebrating his tenth anniversary and he wanted to surprise his wife, Akiko, with the champagne. He bought it on his lunch hour, had it gift wrapped, and then returned to his office.

Teruo had planned to go home early, but when he returned from lunch he found a newly arrived batch of manuscripts on his desk. Forty thousand books are published in the United States every year — more than eight hundred books a week — and it seemed to the harassed Teruo that every one of them eventually reached his desk.

Most of the manuscripts Teruo received were dreadful. The stories were bad, the characters were dull, and even the spelling was often wrong. Teruo had learned long ago that when he received badly typed manuscripts with misspelled words, it was going to be amateurish.

“Why does everyone think he can write a book?” he asked Rod, a junior editor who was training under him. “Can't these people see that they have no talent for writing?”

Teruo had started at McCormick and Company when it was a small firm. He had begun as a copy editor, proofing and correcting manuscripts. But he had a keen sense of story and characterization, and within a year he was promoted to junior editor. Three years later he was promoted to senior editor. He kept finding manuscripts that became best sellers, and McCormick and Company started to prosper and grow, until they became the most successful publishing house in America. A large share of credit for that went to Teruo Kobayashi. His predictions were uncanny. He had the ability to read a manuscript and say: “This one will sell no copies. This one will sell 15,000 copies. And this one will be a blockbuster.” He was almost always right.

He enjoyed discovering new young writers and helping them develop their talent. He was fiercely loyal to them and saw to it that their books received proper attention. He fought to get them a good advertising budget, and publicity, and he loved to have their books reviewed in the major newspapers and magazines. Everyone agreed that Teruo Kobayashi was the best book editor in the business.

Now, as Teruo sat at his desk after lunch, he looked at the clock, wishing that it were time to go home. Akiko was preparing his favorite dinner for him — sushi, teriyaki steak and tempura shrimp. He would surprise her with the champagne.

In the ten years they had been married, Teruo had grown to love his wife more and more. Akiko was a beautiful woman, sweet-faced and sweet-tempered. Sometimes he had to work long hours, seven days a week, but she never complained. She was always there waiting for him when he came home.

"I must stop daydreaming," Teruo told himself. "I have work to do."

He rang for his young assistant, Rod, whom he was teaching to become an editor.

"Sit down next to me," Teruo said.

The young man obeyed.

Teruo looked at the pile of manuscripts on his desk.

"All of these have been submitted by literary agents. McCormick and Company has a rule that we accept nothing 'over the transom' —"

"What is 'over the transom'?"

"That means we accept no unsolicited manuscripts."

Teruo separated the scripts in front of him according to which agency had submitted it.

"I'm dividing the scripts into two piles. The first pile is manuscripts that are submitted by agents who send out material that they think is really good. They handle only authors whom they believe have talent. The second pile is manuscripts sent in by agents who are out to make a quick dollar. They'll send us anything, hoping to make a sale. I read those scripts last."

An envelope at the bottom of the pile caught Teruo's eye. It had no agency's name on it. There was a Vermont address on the envelope and the name of a writer he had never heard of, Jennings Lang.

"Now look at this envelope. It has no agency's name on the envelope. That means it came in 'over the transom.' We have to send that one back, unread."

Teruo opened one of the other manuscripts sent by one of the good agents and began to read it. By the time he had read three pages, he knew that he would not be interested in publishing it. He put it aside.

"This story's been done before. Often. She's a good writer, but she's getting stale."

The next manuscript was a war story. It was about Vietnam. Vietnam stories were not popular, but this one was exceptionally well done.

As Teruo put it in a separate pile, he said, "I want you to read this manuscript, Rod. I think we're going to buy it."

And so the rest of the afternoon went.

There were war stories and horror stories and romances. There were biographies and autobiographies. There were manuscripts by Hollywood stars, telling all about their love affairs, and books by generals telling how they had won the war. There were memoirs of politicians telling everyone how the world should be run, and scripts by prisoners proclaiming their innocence.

Teruo could tell at a glance whether he wanted to read past the first few sentences or the first few pages. Most of the manuscripts were put in the rejected pile, but every once in a while he would say to his assistant, "I think this one has possibilities."

By the time they came to the end of the pile, it was 6:00 o'clock. Both men were exhausted, for the work required a great deal of concentration.

Teruo leaned back in his chair and stretched. "I've got to get home. Akiko's waiting for me."

Rod took the manuscripts that had been given to him and said, "I'll start on these in the morning." He noticed the Vermont envelope on the desk. "What do you want me to do with that, Teruo?"

"I'll give it to my secretary and have her send it back."

"See you in the morning. Happy anniversary." He left the office.

It's been a good day, Teruo thought happily. No great books had come across his desk that day, but there were several that had good possibilities.

Where are the great writers today? Teruo wondered. In the past, we had Ernest Hemingway and Thomas Wolfe. There was Sinclair Lewis and Somerset Maugham. Where was the next George Bernard Shaw or Oscar Wilde? All the modern writers seemed ordinary and uninspired.

He glanced at the envelope with the Vermont postmark, and picked it up, turning it over in his hand. Jennings Lang.

Some poor amateur without an agent who had probably spent weeks, maybe even months writing whatever was inside the envelope. And it would never even get read. It was probably full of misspellings and typographical errors.

Out of idle curiosity, Teruo ripped open the manila envelope and took out the manuscript. It consisted of two chapters and the outline of a novel. The title on the front page read: "The Mountain."

That's ambiguous enough, Teruo thought. It could mean anything.

He turned to the first page and began to skim through it, and a cold chill began to go through his body. He felt the hair on his arms begin to rise. He was in the presence of genius, and he knew it instantly. He returned to the first page and began to read slowly, savoring every word. It was the most gripping story he had read in years. The writing was brilliant, and the characters were so real that Teruo felt he knew them. He felt their pain and their hunger and their joy.

It was two hours later when Teruo put the manuscript down. He had no idea of the time. All he knew was that he had been transported to another world — a world made magical by an exciting new talent. As he closed the manuscript, Teruo's heart was pounding. He looked at the name on the outside of the envelope. Jennings Lang.

He rang for his secretary, but she had left Teruo dialed information.

"I would like the telephone number of Jennings Lang." He gave her the address in Vermont.

When he had the number, he dialed and heard the echo of the ringing far away. He let it ring and ring. There was no answer.

He's not home, Teruo thought. I'll call him tomorrow.

In Vermont, Jennings Lang was outside his cabin sitting alone in the dark, wondering what was going to happen to him. His future looked bleak. The manuscript he had sent off was his last hope.

It's crazy to bet everything on one manuscript, Jennings thought. But my father gave me no choice.

From inside the cabin he heard the ringing of the phone. It was probably his father calling to check on him, to remind him that his time was over in a few days. Jennings did not feel like talking to his father. As a matter of fact, he felt like talking to no one.

The phone continued ringing.

All right, he thought wearily. I might as well get it over with.

He turned and went into his cabin, hoping that the phone would stop ringing before he reached it. It gave one final ring as he approached it and picked it up.

"Hello," Jennings said.

At the other end Teruo Kobayashi was about hang up. He heard Jennings's voice and eagerly put the phone back to his ear. "Hello, Mr. Lang?"

"Yes."

"This is Teruo Kobayashi."

Jennings had heard of the famous editor. Teruo Kobayashi was a legend among writers.

Someone's playing a practical joke on me, Jennings thought. And it's a mean joke. Kobayashi would never telephone me.

"What do you want?" Jennings Lang demanded rudely.

"I want to talk to you. I just finished reading your outline for *The Mountain*."

And Jennings Lang suddenly realized that it was the great man himself to whom he was speaking. He felt a sudden rush of blood to his head.

"Is it — is it really Teruo Kobayashi?"

"Yes, it is, Mr. Lang."

"I'm overwhelmed."

"No, Mr. Lang. It is I who am overwhelmed. You are a genius."

Jennings Lang could not believe his ears. This coming from the great man himself.

"You liked it?"

"Liked it? I was stunned by it. McCormick and Company wants to publish it."

He could not believe his ears. "Would you say that again, please?"

"McCormick and Company wants to publish your manuscript."

Jennings Lang could not contain his excitement. "Mr. Kobayashi, that's the best news I've ever heard. You know what you've done? You've saved my life."

"Well, I am pleased, young man. Do you have an agent?"

"No, sir."

Jennings was suddenly worried. "Do I need one?"

"Our rule here is that we do not buy any manuscripts that are not submitted by agents. But in your case, I am very happy to make an exception. We will make the deal directly with you. I think you will be happy with the advance we will give you. How soon could you come to New York?"

"Tonight?"

Teruo Kobayashi laughed. "That won't be necessary. What about tomorrow?"

"I'll be here."

"Good. Let's have lunch. We can spend the afternoon together discussing all the details. Will you be able to do that?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm looking forward to meeting you."

"Not as much as I'm looking forward to meeting you, sir. I'll see you tomorrow."

Jennings Lang hung up, his mind spinning. He could not believe his good fortune. The best editor in the world loved his manuscript, and the best publishing company in the world was going to publish it. They

were going to give him a big advance. He was a writer! Even his father would not be able to deny that now. He could say good-bye to the prison of the furniture factory. From now on, he would be free to live his life as he wished, to work at the thing he loved most.

Our fate depends on so many little things, he thought. If I hadn't sent the manuscript in, this would not have happened. If I did not have the quarter for the stamp, I would not have sent the manuscript in.

Yes, Jennings Lang thought, our fate depends on so many little things.

When Teruo Kobayashi replaced the receiver, he sat back and said aloud, "Mr. Lang, in a few months everyone in America is going to know your name. In a few years, everyone in the world is going to know your name."

Teruo was filled with an excitement that had only happened to him two or three times in his whole career. He could not wait to tell Akiko about his discovery.

And as he thought of Akiko, he looked at the clock. Eight o'clock. He was late! And he had not even called her. He had lost all sense of time. He had to hurry.

Teruo picked up the champagne bottle, turned off the lights and hurried out of the office. Everyone had long since gone.

Outside, Teruo looked for a taxi. But there were none to be had.

I'll have to take a bus, he thought. It will make me even later, but I have no choice.

He stood on a cold, windy corner for ten minutes before a bus came along and he boarded it, crowded amid the busload of passengers. He thought about the wonderful manuscript he had just read, and he wondered about Jennings Lang.

Teruo looked out the window of the bus. He had arrived at his stop.

Teruo lived on the west side of New York, downtown. It had once been a nice neighborhood, but now it was dangerous, filled with wild gangs and the streets were poorly lighted.

"I think we should move away from here," he had said more than once to Akiko.

But she had replied, "All my friends are here, Teruo. I don't want to move."

And so they had stayed on, year after year. Now, as Teruo got off the bus carrying his bottle of champagne, he decided to take a shortcut through the alley because he was so late. He passed an old, deserted building that was being abandoned. He had gone no more than ten feet when a voice called out, "Hey, you!"

A figure stepped out of the shadows.

"Where you going?"

Teruo felt suddenly frightened. "Home."

"What are you carrying?"

"Nothing. It's a present for my wife."

A second voice out of the darkness said, "Hey, he brings presents to his wife. That's nice. What kind of present is it?"

"Look, I don't want any trouble. Please get out of my way."



The first voice said, "How much money you got, mister?"

Teruo turned to look for help, but there was none. He was alone in the alley with these two hoodlums. He could see the glint of a knife in the hands of one of them. He knew it would be foolish to try to fight them.

"I have \$20.00 in my pocket I'll give it to you."

"That's nice of you, pal. Give us the present, too."

And Teruo suddenly got angry. The present belonged to Akiko. He was not going to give it to these hoodlums. He did not care about the money, but Akiko's gift was something else.

"No."

He turned and started to run back toward the mouth of the alley.

"Get him," the first man cried.

They were hard on his heels, and Teruo knew that he could never reach the mouth of the alley in time. As he passed the deserted building, he turned and ran through the door, locking it behind him. The two men were pounding on it, and he knew that they would break through, but meanwhile he had a chance to escape.

He heard one of them call, "Okay. The smart guy asked for it, now let's give it to him. Break the door down!"

Teruo ran down the long, empty corridor. At the end of it he saw something that made his heart beat faster. It was a telephone booth. He raced up to it and reached in his pocket for a coin. He had none. The pounding on the door was growing louder. Teruo's mind was racing. He remembered buying the champagne and the clerk handing him a quarter in change. Where was it? He had lost it somewhere.

He searched frantically through his pockets again. There was no coin. He could hear the door begin to splinter and the yelling of the two men who were after him. Suddenly Teruo remembered something Akiko had said to him that morning.

"There's a hole in your pants pocket, Teruo. Remind me to sew it up when you come home tonight."

His fingers found the hole and there, trapped in the lining, was the precious quarter. Quickly, Teruo fished it out and pushed it in the phone slot with trembling fingers. He dialed 911, the police emergency number.

He could hear the door breaking. The two men were racing toward him with drawn knives.

"Help!" Teruo yelled into the phone. "I'm being murdered."

And then the two men were at the phone booth.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Teruo Kobayashi's only weapon was the champagne bottle. As the first hoodlum raised his knife to stab him, Teruo struck him with the heavy bottle.

There was a cry of pain as the knife fell out of the man's hand. "You get him," he yelled to his companion.

Teruo raised the bottle again. His heart was pounding wildly and he was filled with fear, but some stubbornness in him made him keep resisting.

This is crazy. I could have given them the money and the champagne bottle.

But the champagne was a gift to his wife, and he would not let anyone take it from him.

I'm going to die for a silly gift, Teruo thought.

The second hoodlum was rushing at him with a knife, and Teruo tried to twist to the side, but he felt a sharp pain as the knife cut into his arm. His attacker raised his knife to strike again. And at that instant, Teruo heard the wail of an approaching police siren. The two hoodlums heard it also. They listened as it came closer, and one of them said, "Let's get out of here."

The other one turned to Teruo. "We'll get you next time."

Then they both turned and ran.

Teruo stood there, shaken, breathing heavily. He heard a voice coming from somewhere saying, "Hello? Hello?"

He realized that he was still holding the telephone in one hand. He put the receiver to his ear. "Hello."

"This is police headquarters. We've dispatched a radio car to your location. Are you all right?"

"I'm fine." He looked up as two policemen hurried into the building and came toward the phone booth. "Thank you." Teruo replaced the receiver.

The operator had returned the quarter Teruo had deposited in the phone, and almost automatically, he reached for it and put it in his pocket.

It's a lucky quarter, Teruo thought. Without it, I would have died.

As the policemen approached the phone booth, one of them saw blood dripping down Teruo's hand.

"Call for an ambulance," he told his partner.

"You can't call for an ambulance. I'm fine. I've got to get home. It's my anniversary."

And he fainted.

When Teruo Kobayashi woke up in St. Luke's Hospital, Akiko was at his bedside. Teruo opened his eyes and saw her.

"I'm sorry I'm late. Where's the champagne?"

Akiko reached over and hugged him, careful not to hurt his bandaged arm. "The policemen brought it. We'll celebrate here. They caught the two men who hurt you."

"Good."

"What happened?" Akiko asked.

He was almost ashamed to tell her, afraid that she would think he had acted foolishly.

"They tried to take something from me."

She looked at him, puzzled. "What?"

"The champagne."

"Teruo! You could have bought another bottle."

"No," he said stubbornly. "It was your gift."

He waited for her to laugh. Instead, he saw her eyes fill with tears. "Oh, Teruo. No wonder I love you so much. You're a crazy man."

"Maybe so," he said smugly, "but I have the champagne."

He held his wife's hand with his good arm. "When can I go home?"

"Tomorrow. The doctor says you must spend the night here."

Teruo's face lit up as he remembered something. "I have another present for you, Akiko. I found a new writer. Tomorrow I will read you some of his work. Now let's open the champagne."

In the room next door to Teruo's, Dr. Wallace was examining a young woman patient who had tried to commit suicide. She had been pulled from the Hudson River, unconscious. They had revived her in the ambulance on the way to the hospital, but she could not remember what had happened or who she was. It was a classic case of amnesia. There was nothing to identify her.

The hospital superintendent said, "See if you can get me Dr. Wallace."

Dr. Wallace was an expert in hypnosis and he had used the technique successfully in the past in similar cases.

When Dr. Wallace arrived at the hospital, he examined the patient. She was in her twenties, very attractive, and wore a wedding ring that looked new.

"She probably hasn't been married very long," Dr. Wallace guessed.

He pulled up a chair next to the bed and said gently, "I'm Dr. Wallace. I'd like to ask you a few questions. Can you tell me your name?"

"I don't remember."

"Is New York your home, or are you visiting here?"

"I don't remember."

"Are you married?"

She looked at the wedding ring on her finger. "I suppose so. I don't really know. I'm sorry. I don't remember anything. I don't know who I am. I'm frightened."

Dr. Wallace took her hand. "There's no need to be afraid. I'm going to try something that I think will help you. Have you ever been hypnotized?"

"I don't know."

"Well, we're going to try it. Your conscious mind is suppressing information. If we can reach your subconscious mind, it will give us the information we want. Will you try it with me?"

She nodded.

"Good girl." He turned to his nurse. "I need a shiny object."

The nurse remembered that when they had brought in the Japanese publisher, a coin had fallen from his pocket. She had meant to return it to him, but in all the excitement she had forgotten. She took it out now. It was a shiny quarter.

"Will this do, doctor?"

"It's perfect," Dr. Wallace said.

He helped the patient sit up. She looked at him nervously.

"I don't want you to be frightened," Dr. Wallace said. "All you have to do is listen to my voice and relax. Now just look at this quarter." He help it up so that the ceiling light made it shine and sparkle. "You're going to sleep," Dr. Wallace said softly. "By the time I count to ten, you're going to be deep asleep."

The woman focused her eyes on the quarter.

"That's right. Just keep looking at the quarter; concentrate. You are going deep asleep." He counted slowly: "One ... Two ... deeper and deeper asleep ... Three ... four ... you're completely relaxed. Just empty your mind and completely relax. Five ... six ... your eyes feel heavy. They're beginning to close. Deeper and deeper asleep ... seven ... eight ... you'll hear the sound of my voice, but you'll be deep asleep ... Nine ... ten ... you're deep asleep now. You hear only my voice. You're not afraid. You're completely relaxed ... your eyes are too heavy to keep open..." He watched as her eyes closed. "You're floating on a cloud."

A smile appeared on the young woman's face.

"I want you to remember what happened. You're going to remember it but it won't frighten you any more. Something bad happened that made you try to kill yourself. Can you remember that?"

Her eyes were tightly closed. Her voice was a whisper, "Yes."

"What did you do?"

"I jumped off a bridge."

"Why did you do that?"

"My husband — I was running away from my husband."

"Did he try to hurt you?"

"No. We had a quarrel. We were just married. He said he didn't want me any more, and I didn't want to live. I ran away." The words were coming faster now as her memory returned, and with it the pain.

"It's all right," the doctor said. "Just relax."

"I don't want to live without him."

"What is your name?"

"Dona. Dona Garner."

"And your husband's name?"

"Brian Garner."

Dr. Wallace nodded, satisfied. "That's very good. Now you're going to sleep and rest. And when you wake up, you'll remember everything that happened."

He turned to his nurse. "She'll be all right now," He handed her the shiny quarter. "Thanks. I'll go call her husband."

"I wish Dr. Wallace weren't married," the nurse said as she walked into the nurse's lounge. "He's really a miracle worker." She held up the quarter. "He solved an amnesia case with this quarter."

A seventeen-year old black boy walked in with a bag full of sandwiches and soft drinks.

"Delivery. Who gets the corned beef and who gets the tuna?" He started handing out the sandwiches. He was a bright-faced youngster, cheerful and smiling, as he passed out the sandwiches to the nurses. "There you go, ladies. Enjoy your lunch."

Each one paid him. Dr. Wallace's nurse paid for her sandwich with a dollar bill and the quarter.

"Thank you," the boy said.

His name was Clyde Harrison, and the nurses enjoyed having him deliver their lunches every day. He was always cheerful.

Clyde loaned the quarter to a friend that afternoon.

The friend spent it on a chocolate soda.

During the following week, the quarter passed through the hands of a politician, a courtesan, a baker, a dressmaker, a cashier at a theater, and into the hands of someone in show business.

Clyde Harrison had left school when he was fourteen in order to go to work to help support his mother. His father had abandoned the family long ago. Clyde lived in a ghetto and most of his friends had also quit school. Many of them had become thieves and pimps and prostitutes, but Clyde intended to see that that did not happen to him. He had ambition.

"I'm going to be famous one day," he told his mother. "Just you wait, Mama. One day I'm going to take you into the biggest department store in New York and buy out the whole place."

Clyde was a natural-born dancer. He had an easy, fluid rhythm that showed even in his walk. He moved with an animal grace.

"I'm going to be the biggest dancer on Broadway," Clyde told all his friends.

"Sure you are. I suppose Bob Fosse is going to send for you and say, 'Clyde Harrison, I'm doing a new Broadway show and I want you to star in it because you're the greatest dancer in the world.'"

"You can laugh. Maybe it won't be Bob Fosse, but it'll be somebody."

Fosse was the most successful dance director in America. Clyde knew that he would never get to meet the great man. But he would meet someone. Someone who could give him a job and start him on his way to stardom.

Clyde had never taken a dance lesson. But there was a dance school near the delicatessen where Clyde worked as a delivery boy. He would always manage to get the deliveries that went to that school, and after he had delivered their food, he would hang around watching the dance classes. He was bright and he easily picked up the steps that the kids were being taught. At home in his room he practiced dancing. It was as natural as breathing to him. He tried the old steps he had learned and new steps, graceful moves that he invented, things that he did with his body that no one had ever done before.

"But what good does it do me," he asked himself, "if no one ever sees me? What's the use of having talent if there's no audience to appreciate it?"

But Clyde Harrison refused to give up. One day, he thought, one day.

Break dancing was the sudden new rage. The youngsters would go out on the sidewalks of New York and dance on the streets, swaying to a wonderful rhythm, lowering themselves to the ground, spinning on

their heads. It was an exciting, exhilarating thing to watch.

Clyde Harrison found himself caught up in it. He began going out with the others. Their favorite spot was on Broadway in the theater district. They would stand in front of a theater and dance during intermission to entertain the customers between acts. Clyde was shy about joining them at first, but finally he could not resist. The beat of the music that played on their portable radios was too inviting. He jumped into the center of the group and began to dance. He was wonderful, and the audience grew larger.

Clyde Harrison would have danced if there had been no audience at all. He danced for the sheer pleasure of it. His body was alive with the rhythm and the music and the movements of his body. He and the music were one.

Clyde was completely lost in the fever of the dance that he was doing when suddenly a bell rang in the theater and a voice said, "Second act, curtain going up." The crowd applauded and started to go inside the theater. The music stopped. The performance was over.

Clyde slowly got to his feet. It was fun, he thought sadly. But is that what I'm going to do the rest of my life? Stand in front of theaters dancing for a few people, instead of being on a stage where I can entertain the world?

He picked up the jacket he had taken off and put it on. As he did so, he noticed that all of the audience had not gone. There was one lone man standing there watching him. He was short, with sandy, balding hair.

"You're wonderful," the man said.

"Thank you," Clyde Harrison smiled.

The man tossed him a quarter, and Clyde neatly caught it.

"Use that to telephone me. My name is Bob Fosse."

In Las Vegas, Nevada, Danny Collins was serving time in prison for using a stolen credit card. He was busily figuring out a way to escape.

In Venice, Italy, Alice Zimmer was having a cozy dinner with Mark Whitney, the attractive man she had met at the wishing fountain in Rome.

In New York, Alice's son-in-law Sam was cursing the traffic as his old cab stalled in a traffic jam on Fifth Avenue.

In Upstate New York, Pete Turkel was being strapped into the electric chair for the murder of Donald Adams.

In Manhattan, Detective Roger Benson was back with his wife, who was more difficult than ever. She had made him give up photography.

In Chicago, Elizabeth Madison Stevens and her husband Richard were telling James Madison that he was going to be a grandfather.

In Oaxa, Pedro was staring in wonder at the beautiful new church that his suitcase full of money had built.

In Hollywood, Jennings Lang was at Twentieth-Century Fox Studios writing the screenplay of his best selling novel, which the studio had purchased.

On the stage of the Palace Theater on Broadway, Clyde Harrison was in rehearsal, starring in the new

Bob Fosse musical.

All of these events had occurred, and all of these lives had been changed, because of a shiny new quarter. And what happened to the quarter after that? It went through the hands of school children and bus drivers, ticket takers and lonely windows and powerful tycoons, until finally it became so worn that the words on it could not be read, and it was returned to the mint in Denver, where it was melted down. It came out shining and new again. And one day, although she had no idea it was the very same coin, the quarter came back into the possession of Rosemary Murphy, the waitress who had married Dr. Charles Wilson after he had rescued her in the park. She gave the quarter to their beautiful young daughter, and the adventure of the quarter started all over again.

THE END