

They Write...

RAYMOND CHANDLER

"Born in Chicago, of an American Quaker father and an Irish Quaker mother. To England at an early age, where I attended Dulwich College, completing my education in France and Germany. Since then I've followed many professions: teacher, book-reviewer, poet, paragraph writer, essayist, soldier in a Canadian infantry regiment, student pilot, accountant, oil executive, fiction writer. A resident of the United States since 1919, now living in Southern California."



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A
CLASSIC
Reprint

Professor Bingo's Snuff



A NOVEL BY

RAYMOND CHANDLER



PROFESSOR BINGO'S SNUFF

We don't have to tell you who Raymond Chandler is, or what he has written. The man who, back in the Thirties, almost single-handedly lifted detective fiction out of the post-Van Dine doldrums, has a secure and lofty place in American literature. More than anyone else he brought the hardboiled "private eye" story to popularity — and kept it there despite the swarm of imitators who have done their worst to wreck the genre.

To our knowledge, Professor Bingo's Snuff is Mr. Chandler's second — and longest — fantasy. It will not at all surprise you that his talent brings added luster to that field.

AT TEN o'clock in the morning already the dance music. Loud. Boom, boom. Boom, boom, boom. The tone control way down in the bass. It almost made the floor vibrate. Behind the purring of the electric razor that Joe Pettigrew was running up and down his face it vibrated in the floors and walls. He seemed to feel it with his toes. It seemed to run up his legs.

The neighbors must love it.

Already at ten o'clock in the morning the ice cubes in the glass, the flushed cheek, the slightly glazed eye, the silly smile, the loud laughter about nothing at all.

He pulled the plug loose and the purring of the razor stopped. As he ran his fingertips along the angle of his jaw his eyes met the eyes in the mirror with a somber stare.

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"Washed up," he said between his teeth. "At fifty-two you're senile. I'm surprised you're there at all. I'm surprised I can see you."

He blew the fluff out of the shaving head of the razor, put the protective cap back on it, wound the cord around it carefully, and put it away in the drawer. He got out the after-shaving lotion, rubbed it into his face, dusted it with powder, and carefully wiped the powder off with a hand towel.

He scowled at the rather gaunt face in the glass and turned and looked out of the bathroom window. Not much smog this morning. Quite sunny and clear. You could see the city hall. Who wants to see the city hall? The hell with the city hall. He went out of the bathroom, putting his coat on as he started down the stairs. Boom, boom. Boom, boom, boom. Like back in a cheap dive where you could smell smoke and sweat, and perfume of a sort. The living room door was half open. He moved in through it and stood looking at the two of them, cheek-to-cheek, drifting slowly around the room. They danced close together, dreamy-eyed, in a world of their own. Not drunk. Just lit enough to like the music loud. He stood there and watched them. As they turned and saw him they hardly looked at him. Gladys' lips curled a little in a faint sneer, very faint. Porter Green had a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, and his

eyes half-closed against the smoke. A tall, dark fellow, with a sprinkling of gray in his hair. Well dressed. A bit shifty-eyed. Might be a used car salesman. Might be anything that didn't take too much work or too much honesty. The music stopped and somebody started to spiel a commercial. The dancing couple broke apart. Porter Green stepped over and turned the volume control down. Gladys stood in the middle of the floor looking at Joe Pettigrew.

"Any little thing we can do for you, sweetheart?" she asked him in a clear, contemptuous voice.

He shook his head without answering.

"Then you can do something for me. Drop dead." She opened her mouth wide and went off into a peal of laughter.

"Cut it," Porter Green said. "Stop picking on him, Glad. So he doesn't like dance music. So what? There are things you don't like, aren't there?"

"Sure there are," Gladys said. "Him."

Porter Green moved over and picked up a whiskey bottle, began to load the two tall highball glasses on the coffee table.

"How about a drink, Joe?" he asked, without looking up.

Joe Pettigrew again shook his head slightly and said nothing.

"He can do tricks," Gladys said. "He's almost human. But he can't talk."

"Aw, shut up," Porter Green said, wearily. He stood up with the two full glasses in his hand. "Listen, Joe, I'm buying the liquor. You're not worrying about that, are you? No? Well, that's fine." He handed a glass to Gladys. They both drank, looking across the glasses at Joe Pettigrew standing silent in the doorway.

"You know, I married that," Gladys said thoughtfully. "I really did. I wonder what kind of sleep medicine I'd been taking."

Joe Pettigrew stepped back into the hallway and half closed the door. Gladys stared at it. In a changed tone, she said, "Just the same, he scares me. He just stands there and don't say anything. Never complains. Never gets mad. What do you suppose goes on inside his head?"

The commercial spieles ended. His stint and put on a new record. Porter Green stepped across and turned the volume up again, then turned it down. "I think I could guess," he said. "After all it's a pretty old story." He turned the volume up again and held his arms out.

II

Joe Pettigrew stepped out on the front porch, put the heavy old-fashioned front door on the latch, and closed it behind him to muffle the boom of the radio. Looking along the front of the house he saw

that the front windows were closed. It wasn't so loud out here. These old frame houses were pretty solidly built. He was just starting to think whether the grass needed cutting when a funny looking man turned up the concrete walk toward him. Once in a while you see a man in an opera cloak. But not on Lexington Avenue in that block. Not in the middle of the morning. And not wearing a top hat. Joe Pettigrew stared at the top hat. It was definitely not new, definitely on the rusty side. A bit rough in the nap like a cat's fur when the cat isn't feeling too well. And the opera cloak wasn't anything Adrian would have wanted to autograph. The man had a sharp nose and deep-set black eyes. He was pale but he didn't look sick. He stopped at the foot of the steps and looked up at Joe Pettigrew.

"Good morning," he said, touching the edge of the topper.

"Morning," Joe Pettigrew said. "What are you selling today?"

"I'm not selling magazines," the man in the opera cloak said.

"Not at this address, friend."

"Nor am I about to inquire if you have a photograph of yourself that would tint up in beautiful watercolors as transparent as moonlight on the Matterhorn." The man put a hand under his opera cloak.

"Don't tell me you've got a vacuum cleaner under that cloak,"

Joe Pettigrew said wryly.

"Nor," went on the man in the opera cloak, "do I have an all-stainless-steel kitchen in my hip pocket. Not that I couldn't have, if I chose."

"But you *are* selling something," Joe Pettigrew said dryly.

"I am bestowing something," the man in the opera cloak said. "On the right persons. A carefully selected —"

"A suit club," Joe Pettigrew said disgustedly. "I didn't know they had them any more."

The tall skinny man brought his hand out from under the cloak with a card in it.

"A carefully selected few," he repeated. "I don't know. I'm lazy this morning. Perhaps I shall only select one."

"The jackpot," Joe Pettigrew said. "Me."

The man held the card out. Joe Pettigrew took it and read "Professor Augustus Bingo." Then in smaller letters in the corner, "White Eagle Depilatory Powder." There was a telephone number and an address on North Wilcox. Joe Pettigrew flicked the card with a fingernail and shook his head. "Never use it, friend."

Professor Augustus Bingo smiled very faintly. Or rather his lips pulled back a fraction of an inch and his eyes crinkled at the corners. Call it a smile. It wasn't big enough to argue about. He put his

hand under his cloak again, came out with a small round box about the size of a typewriter ribbon box. He held it up and sure enough it said on it "White Eagle Depilatory Powder."

"I presume you know what depilatory powder is, Mister —"

"Pettigrew," Joe Pettigrew said amiably. "Joe Pettigrew."

"Ah, my instinct was right," Professor Bingo remarked. "You are in trouble." He tapped on the round box with his long pointed finger. "This, Mr. Pettigrew, is not depilatory powder."

"Wait a minute," Joe Pettigrew said. "First it's depilatory powder, then it isn't. And I'm in trouble. Why? Because my name is Pettigrew?"

"All in good time, Mr. Pettigrew. Let me establish the background. This is a run-down neighborhood. No longer desirable. But your house is not run-down. It is old but well-kept. Therefore, you own it."

"Say I own a piece of it," Joe Pettigrew said.

The Professor held up his left hand, palm outwards. "Quiet, please. I continue with my analysis. The taxes are high and you own the house. If you were able, you would have moved away. Why have you not? Because you can't sell this property. But it is a large house. Therefore you have roomers."

"One roomer," Joe Pettigrew

said. "Just one." He sighed.

"You are about forty-eight years of age," the Professor suggested.

"Give or take four years," Joe Pettigrew said.

"You are shaved and neatly dressed. Yet you have an unhappy expression. Therefore I postulate a young wife. Spoiled, exacting. I also postulate —" He broke off abruptly and began to pull the lid off the box of something that was not depilatory powder. "I have ceased to postulate," he said calmly. "This," he held out the uncovered box, and Joe Pettigrew could see that it was half-full of a white powder, "is not Copenhagen snuff."

"I'm a patient man," Joe Pettigrew said. "But just lay off telling me what it isn't and tell me what it is."

"It is snuff," the Professor said coldly. "Professor Bingo's snuff. *My snuff.*"

"Never use snuff either," Joe Pettigrew said. "But I'll tell you. Down the end of the street there's a Tudor court called the Lexington Towers. Full of bit players and extras and so on. When they're not working, which is most of the time, and when they're not hitting the sixty-five per cent neutral spirits, which is hardly any of the time, a sniff of what you have there might be right down the middle for them. If you can collect for it, that is. And that's a

point you want to watch."

"Professor Bingo's snuff," the Professor said with icy dignity, "is not cocaine." He folded his cloak around him with a gesture and touched the brim of his hat. He was still holding the small box in his left hand as he turned away.

"Cocaine, my friend?" he said. "Bah! Compared with Bingo's snuff, cocaine is baby powder."

Joe Pettigrew watched him move down the concrete walk and turn along the sidewalk. Old streets have old trees along them. Lexington Avenue was lined with camphor trees. They had their new coats of leaves and the leaves were still tinged with pink here and there. The Professor moved off under the trees. From the house the boom-boom still sounded. They would be on their third or fourth drink by now. They would be humming the music; cheek-to-cheek. After awhile they would start flopping around on the furniture. Mauling each other. Well, what difference did it make? He wondered what Gladys would be like when she was fifty-two years old. The way she was going now she wouldn't look like she sang in the choir.

He stopped thinking about this and watched Professor Bingo, who had now stopped under one of the camphor trees and turned to look back. He put his hand up to the

brim of his rusty topper and lifted the hat clear off his head and bowed. Joe Pettigrew waved at him politely. The Professor put the hat back on and very slowly, so that Joe Pettigrew could see exactly what he was doing, he took a pinch of powder from the still-open small round box and pushed it against his nostrils. Joe Pettigrew could almost hear him sniff it up with that long indrawn breath snuff takers use in order to get the stuff high up on the membranes.

He didn't actually hear this, of course, he just imagined it. But he saw it clearly enough. The hat, the opera cloak, the long thin legs, the white indoor face, the deep dark eyes, the arm raised, the round box in the left hand. He couldn't have been more than fifty feet away at most. Right in front of the fourth camphor tree from the foot of the walk.

But that couldn't have been right because if he had been standing in front of the tree Joe Pettigrew wouldn't have been able to see the entire trunk of the tree, the grass, the edge of the curbing, the street. Some of this would have been hidden behind the lean, fantastic body of Professor Bingo. Only it wasn't. Because Professor Augustus Bingo wasn't there any more. Nobody was there. Nobody at all.

Joe Pettigrew put his head on one side, staring down the street.

He stood very still. He hardly heard the radio inside the house. A car turned the corner and went by along the block. Dust rose behind it. The leaves of the trees didn't quite rustle but they made a faint, barely audible sound. Then something else rustled.

Slow steps were coming towards Joe Pettigrew. No sound of heels. Just shoe leather slithering along the concrete of the walk. The muscles in the back of his neck began to ache. He could feel his teeth biting hard together. The steps came on slowly. They came very close. Then there was a moment of complete silence. Then the rustling steps moved away from Joe Pettigrew again. And the voice of Professor Bingo said out of nowhere:

"A free sample with my compliments, Mr. Pettigrew. But, of course, I shall be available for further supplies on a more professional basis."

The steps rustled again, going away. In a little while Joe Pettigrew didn't hear them at all. Exactly why he looked down at the top of the steps he was not quite clear; but he did. And there, where no hand had put it, beside the toe of his right shoe, was a small round box like a typewriter ribbon box. On the cover of it was written in ink, in a clear Spencerian hand, "Professor Bingo's Snuff."

Very slowly, like a man very

old or in a dream, Joe Pettigrew leaned down and picked up the box, covered it with his hand and put it in his pocket.

Boom, boom. Boom, boom, boom, went the radio. Gladys and Porter Green were not paying any attention to it. They were locked in each other's arms in a corner of the davenport, lips on lips. With a long sigh, Gladys opened her eyes and looked across the room. Then she stiffened and jerked away. Very slowly the door of the room was opening.

"What's the matter, baby?"

"The door. What's he up to now?"

Porter Green turned his head. The door was wide open now. But nobody stood in it. "O.K., the door's open," he said a little thickly. "So what?"

"It's Joe."

"It's Joe and still so what." Porter Green said irritably.

"He's hiding out there. He's up to something."

"Phooey," Porter Green said. He stood up and walked across the room. He put his head out into the hall. "Nobody here," he said over his shoulder. "Must have been the draft."

"There isn't any draft," Gladys said. Porter Green shut the door, felt that it was firmly closed, shook it. It was closed all right. He started back across the room. When he was half way to the

davenport the door clicked behind him and slowly swung open again. Shrilly, against the heavy beat of the radio, Gladys yelled.

Porter Green lunged across and snapped off the radio, then turned angrily.

"Don't go loopy on me," he said between his teeth. "I don't like loopy dames."

Gladys just sat there with her mouth open, staring at the open door. Porter Green went across to it and stepped out into the hall. There was nobody there. There was no sound. For a long moment the house was perfectly still.

Then, upstairs from the back of the house, somebody began to whistle.

When Porter Green again shut the door he fixed it so that it was not on the latch. He would have been wiser to turn the knob of the bolt as well. He might just possibly have saved a lot of trouble. But he was not a very sensitive man and he had other things on his mind.

It might not have made any difference anyway. . . .

III

There were things to think about carefully. The noise — but that could be blanketed by turning up the radio. Wouldn't have to turn it up much either. Maybe not at all. Darn near shook the floor the way it was. Joe Pettigrew

sneered at his reflection in the bathroom mirror.

"You and me spend such a lot of time together," he said to his reflection. "We're such little pals. From now on you ought to have a name. I'll call you Joseph."

"Don't go whimsical on me," Joseph said. "I don't go for the light touch. I'm the moody type."

"I need your advice," Joe said. "Not that it ever was worth anything. I'm serious enough. Take the question of the snuff the Professor gave me. It works. Gladys and her boy friend didn't see me. Twice I stood right in the open door and they looked straight at me. They didn't see a thing. That's why she yelled. Seeing me wouldn't have scared her worth a nickel."

"It would have made her laugh," Joseph said.

But I can see you, Joseph. And you can see me. So suppose the effect of the snuff wears off after awhile? It's got to, because otherwise how would the Professor make any money? So I need to know how long."

"You'll know all right," Joseph said, "if anyone is looking your way when it wears off."

"That," Joe Pettigrew said, "could be very inconvenient, if you know what I'm thinking."

Joseph nodded. He knew that all right. "Maybe it doesn't wear off," he suggested. "Maybe the Professor has another powder that

cancels this one out. Maybe that's the hook. He gives you what takes you out but when you want back in again you have to see him with folding money."

Joe Pettigrew thought about it, but he said no, he didn't think that could be right, because the Professor's card gave an address on Wilcox which would be in an office building. It would have elevators, and if the Professor was waiting around for customers that nobody could see, but that presumably they could feel if they touched them — well, having his place of business in an office building wouldn't be practical unless the effect did wear off.

"All right," Joseph said a little sourly. "I won't be stubborn."

"The next point," Joe Pettigrew said, "is where this being invisible leaves off. What I mean is, Gladys and Porter Green can't see me. Therefore they can't see the clothes I'm wearing because an empty suit of clothes standing in the doorway would scare them a lot worse than nothing standing there. But there's got to be some kind of system to it. Is it anything I touch?"

"That could be it," Joseph said. "Why not? Anything you touch fades out just the same as you do."

"But I touched the door," Joe said. "And I don't think that faded out. And I don't touch — I mean, actually touch — all of

my clothes. My feet touch my socks and my socks touch my shoes. I touch my shirt and I don't touch my jacket. And what about the things in pockets?"

"Maybe it's your aura," Joseph said. "Or your magnetic field or just your personality — what there is of it — anything that falls in that field goes with you. Cigarettes, money, anything that's properly yours, but not things like doors and walls and floors."

"I don't think that's very logical," Joe Pettigrew said severely.

"Would a logical guy be where you are?" Joseph inquired coldly. "Would that screwy Professor want to do business with a logical guy? What's logical about any part of this deal? He picks a complete stranger, a guy he never saw or heard of before, and gives him a batch of that stuff for free, and the guy he gives it to is maybe the one guy in the whole block that has a good quick use for it. Is any of that logical? In a pig's eye it's logical."

"So that," Joe Pettigrew said slowly, "brings me to what I'll be taking downstairs with me. They won't see that either. Chances are they won't even hear it."

"Of course you could try out with a highball glass," Joseph said. "You could pick one up just as somebody started to reach for it. You'd know quick enough whether it disappeared when you touched it."

"I could do that," Joe Pettigrew said. He paused and looked very thoughtful. "I wonder if you come back gradually," he added, "or all of a sudden. Bang."

"I vote for bang," Joseph said. "The old gentleman doesn't call himself Bingo for nothing. I say it's fast both ways — out and in. The thing you have to find out is when."

"I'll do that," Joe Pettigrew said. "I'll be very careful about it. It's important." He nodded at his reflection and Joseph nodded back. As he moved to turn away he added:

"I'm just a little sorry for Porter Green. All the time and money he's spent on her. And if I know a club chair from a catcher's mitt, all he's got out of it is a tease."

"That's something you can't be sure about," Joseph said. "He looks to me like a type that gets what he pays for or else."

That ended that. Joe Pettigrew went into the bedroom and got an old suitcase off a closet shelf. Inside was a scuffed briefcase with a broken strap. He unlocked it with a small key. There was a hard bundle in the briefcase, wrapped in a flannel duster. Inside the duster was an old woolen sock. And inside the sock, well oiled and clean, was a loaded .32 caliber automatic. Joe Pettigrew put this in his right hip pocket.

where it felt heavier than sin. He replaced the briefcase in the closet and went downstairs, walking softly and stepping on the treads towards the side. Then he thought that was silly because if they creaked nobody could hear such a small sound with the radio going.

He reached the bottom of the stairs and moved across to the door of the living room. He tried the knob gently. The door was locked. It was a spring lock which had been put on when most of the lower floor had been converted into a bachelor apartment for renting purposes. Joe got his keyholder out and pushed a key slowly into the lock. He turned it. He could feel the bolt coming back. The deadlatch wasn't on. Why should it be? You only do that at night, when you're the nervous type. He held the door knob with his left hand and gently eased the door open enough for the lock to clear. This was the tricky bit — one of the tricky bits. When the bolt was clear he let the knob return to its original position and withdrew the key. Holding the knob tightly he pushed the door open until he could look around it. There was no sound from inside except the booming radio. Nobody yelled. Therefore nobody was looking at the door. So far, so good.

Joe Pettigrew put his head around the door and looked in.

The room was warm and smelled of cigarette smoke and humanity and ever so lightly of liquor. But there was nobody in it. Joe pushed the door wide open and stepped inside, a frown of disappointment on his face. Then the frown of disappointment changed to a grimace of disgust.

At the back of the living room, sliding doors had once given onto the dining room. The dining room was now a bedroom, but the sliding doors had been left much as they had always been. Now they were closed tight together. Joe Pettigrew stood quite motionless, staring at the sliding doors. His hand went up aimlessly and smoothed his thinning hair back. His face was completely expressionless for a long moment, then a faint smile that might have meant anything lifted the corners of his mouth. He turned back and closed the door. He moved across to the davenport and looked down at half-melted ice in the bottoms of two tall striped glasses, and the ice cubes swimming in water in a glass bowl beside the uncorked whiskey bottle, at the smeared cigarette stubs in a tray, one of them still wisping a tiny thread of smoke into the still air.

Joe sat down quietly on the corner of the davenport and looked at his watch. It seemed like a long, long time since he had made the acquaintance of Professor Bingo. A long, long time and a world

away. Now if he could only remember at exactly what time he had taken the pinch of snuff. It would be about ten twenty, he thought. It would be better to be sure, better to wait, better to experiment. Much better. But when had he ever done the better thing?

Not ever that he could recall. And certainly not since he had met Gladys.

He took the automatic out of his hip pocket and laid it down on the cocktail table in front of him. He sat looking at it absently, listening to the growl of the radio. Then he reached down and almost daintily he released the safety catch. That done he leaned back again and waited. And as he waited, with no particular emotion his mind remembered. It was the sort of thing many minds have had to remember. Behind the closed double doors he half-heard a series of noises which never quite registered on his mind, partly because of the radio and partly because of the intensity of his remembering . . .

IV

When the sliding doors began to open Joe Pettigrew reached his hand out and took the gun off the cocktail table. He rested it on his knee. That was the only movement he made. He didn't even look at the doors.

When the doors were open

enough for a man's body to pass through, Porter Green's body appeared in the opening. His hands held on to the doors high up, the fingers glistening with strain. He swayed a little holding on to the doors like a man very drunk. But he was not drunk. His eyes were wide open in a fixed stare and his mouth had the beginnings of a silly grin on it. Sweat glistened on his face and on his puffy white belly. He was naked except for a pair of slacks. His feet were bare, his head was dank with sweat and tousled. On his face was something else that Joe Pettigrew didn't see because Joe Pettigrew kept on staring at the carpet between his feet, holding the gun on his knee, sideways, pointing at nothing.

Porter Green took a deep hard breath and let it out in a long sigh. He let go of the doors and took a couple of ragged steps forward into the room. His eyes came around to the whiskey bottle on the table in front of the davenport, in front of Joe Pettigrew. They focused on the bottle and his body turned a little and he leaned towards it even before he was near enough to reach it. The bottle rattled on the glass top of the cocktail table. Even then Joe Pettigrew didn't look up. He smelled the man so near him, so unaware of him, and his gaunt face twisted suddenly with pain.

The bottle went up, the hand

with the fine black hairs on the back of it disappeared from Joe Pettigrew's field of vision. The gurgling of the liquid was audible even against the radio.

"Bitch!" Porter Green said harshly between his teeth. "God damn rotten lousy filthy bitch." There was a puking horror and disgust in his voice.

Joe Pettigrew moved his head slightly and tensed. There was just room for him to stand up between the davenport and the cocktail table without squirming around. He stood up. The gun came up in his hand. As it came up, his eyes came with it slowly, slowly. He saw the naked soft flesh above the waistband of Porter Green's slacks. He saw the sweat glistening on the bulge above his navel. His eyes moved to the right and crawled up the ribs. His hand steadied. The heart is higher up than most people think it is. Joe Pettigrew knew that. The muzzle of the automatic knew it also. The muzzle pointed straight at that heart and with a steady squeeze that was almost indifferent Joe Pettigrew pulled the trigger.

It was louder than the radio and a different kind of sound. There was a feeling of concussion about it, a hint of power. If you haven't fired a gun for a long time that always takes you by surprise—the sudden pulsing life in the instrument of death, the swift way

it moves in your hand like a lizard on a rock.

Shot men fall in all sorts of ways. Porter Green fell sideways, one knee giving way before the other. He fell with a boneless leisure, as if his knees were hinged in all directions. In the second it took him to fall Joe Pettigrew remembered a vaudeville act he had seen long ago when he was in show business himself. An act with a tall thin boneless man and a girl. In the middle of their foolishness the tall man would start to fall sideways very slowly, his body curving like a hoop so that at no moment could you say he hit the floor of the stage. He seemed to melt into it without effort or shock. He did this six times. The first time it was just funny, the second time it was exciting to watch him do it and wonder how he did it. The fourth time women in the audience began to scream: "Don't let him do it! Don't let him do it!" He did it. And by the end of the act he had all the impressionable people in rags, dreading what he was going to do, because it was inhuman and unnatural, and no man built along the usual lines could possibly have done it.

Joe Pettigrew stopped remembering this and came back to where he was, and there was Porter Green lying on the floor with his head against the carpet and no blood at all, and for the first time

Joe Pettigrew looked at his face and saw that it was ripped and torn with deep scratches from a woman's long sharp frantic fingernails. That did it. Joe Pettigrew opened his mouth and screamed like a gored horse. . . .

V

In his own ears the scream sounded far off, like something in another house. A thin tearing sound that had nothing to do with him. Perhaps he hadn't screamed at all. It might have been tires taking a corner too fast. Or a lost soul on its headlong rush down to hell. He had no physical sensation at all. He seemed to float around the end of the table and around the cadaver of Porter Green. But his floating, or whatever it was, had a purpose. He was at the door now. He turned the dead latch. He was at the windows. They were closed, but one was not locked; he locked it. He was at the radio. He twisted that off. No more boom-boom. A silence like interstellar space swathed him in a long white shroud. He moved back across the room to the sliding doors.

He moved through them into Porter Green's bedroom which had been the dining room of the house long ago, when Los Angeles was young and hot and dry and dusty and still belonged to the desert and the rustling lines of eucalyptus trees and the fat palm

trees that lined its streets.

All that remained of the dining room was a built-in china closet between the two north windows. There were books behind its fretted doors. Not many books. Porter Green wasn't what you would call a reading man. The bed was against the east wall, beyond which was the breakfast room and kitchen. It was very untidy, the bed was, and there was something on it, but Joe Pettigrew wasn't in the mood to look at what was on it. Beyond the bed was what had been a swing door but that had been changed for a solid door, that fitted tightly in its frame and had a turn-bolt on it. The bolt was shot. Joe Pettigrew thought he could see dust in the cracks of the door. He knew it was seldom opened. But the bolt was shot, that was the important thing. He passed on into a short hall that passed across the main hall under the stairs. This had been necessary to give access to the bathroom, once a sewing room, on the other side of the house. There was a closet under the stairs. Joe Pettigrew opened the door and switched on the light. A couple of suitcases in the corners, suits on hangers, an overcoat and a raincoat. A pair of dingy-white buck shoes tossed in the corner. He switched the light off again and closed the door. He went on into the bathroom. It was pretty large for a bathroom and the tub was old-fashioned. Joe

Pettigrew passed the mirror over the wash basin without looking into it. He didn't feel like talking to Joseph just now. Detail, that was the main thing, careful attention to detail. The bathroom windows were open and the gauze curtains fluttered. He shut them tight and turned the catches in the side of the frame. There was no door out of the bathroom except the one by which he had entered. There had been one towards the front of the house, but it had been filled in and papered over with waterproof paper, like the rest of the wall. The room in front was practically a junk room. It had some old furniture and stuff and a roll-top desk in that hideous light oak people used to like. Joe Pettigrew never used it, never went in there at all. So that was that.

He turned back and stopped in front of the bathroom mirror. He didn't want to at all. But Joseph might have thought of something he ought to know, so he looked at Joseph. Joseph looked back at him with an unpleasant fixed stare.

"Radio," Joseph said curtly. "You turned it off. Wrong. Turn it down, yes. Off, no."

"Oh," Joe Pettigrew said to Joseph. "Yes, I guess you're right. Then there's the gun. But I hadn't forgotten that." He patted his pocket.

"And the bedroom windows," Joseph said, almost contemptuous. "And you're going to have to look at Gladys."

"The bedroom windows, check," Joe Pettigrew said and paused. "I don't want to look at her. She's dead. She's got to be dead. All you had to do was see him."

"Teased the wrong guy this time, didn't she?" Joseph said coldly. "Or were you expecting something like that?"

"I don't know," Joe said. "No, I don't think I went that far. But I messed it up good. I didn't have to shoot him at all."

Joseph looked at him with a peculiar expression. "And waste the Professor's time and material? You don't think he came by here just for the exercise, do you?"

"Goodbye, Joseph," Joe Pettigrew said.

"What for are you saying goodbye?" Joseph snapped.

"I have a feeling that way," Joe Pettigrew replied. He went out of the bathroom.

He went around the bed and closed and locked the windows. He did finally look at Gladys, although he didn't want to. He needn't have. His hunch had been right. If ever a bed looked like a battlefield this was it. If ever a face looked livid and twisted and dead, it was the face of Gladys. There were a few shreds of clothing on her, that's all. Just a few shreds. She looked battered. She

looked awful.

Joe Pettigrew's diaphragm convulsed and his mouth tasted bile. He went out of there quickly and leaned against the doors on the other side, but was careful not to touch them with his hands.

"Radio on but not loud," he said in the silence, when he had his stomach back in place. "Gun in his hand. I'm not going to like doing that." His eyes went towards the outer door. "I'd better use the upstairs phone. Plenty of time to come back."

He let out a slow sigh and went about it. But when it came time to fix the gun in Porter Green's hand he found he couldn't look at Porter Green's face. He had a feeling, a certainty that Porter Green's eyes were open and looking at him, but he couldn't meet them, even dead. He felt that Porter Green would forgive him and hadn't really minded being shot. It was quick and probably much less unpleasant than what he had coming in the legal way.

It wasn't that which made him ashamed. And he wasn't ashamed because Porter Green had taken Gladys from him, for that would be silly. Porter Green hadn't done anything that hadn't been done already, years ago. He guessed maybe it was the awful bloody-looking scratches that made him ashamed. Up to then Porter Green had at least looked like a man. The scratches somehow or other

made a damn fool out of him. Even dead. A man who looked and acted like Porter Green, who had been around as much as he must have been, known women too often and too well, and all the rest of it — a man like that ought to be above getting into a cat fight with a slut like Gladys, an empty paper bag of a woman who had nothing to give any man.

Joe Pettigrew didn't think very highly of himself as a dominating male. But at least he had never had his face clawed.

He arranged the gun very neatly in Porter Green's hand, without once looking at his face. A shade too neatly, perhaps. With the same neatness and with no undue haste he arranged what other matters required to be arranged . . .

VI

The black-and-white radio car turned the corner and coasted down the block. There was no fuss or urgency about it. It stopped quietly in front of the house and for a moment both the uniformed officers looked up at the deep porch and the closed door and windows without saying anything, hearing the steady stream of talk from the squawk box and sorting it out in their minds without conscientiously paying any attention to it.

The one nearest the curb said. "I don't hear anybody screaming

and I don't see any neighbors out front. Looks like somebody shot a blank."

The policeman behind the wheel nodded and said absently: "Better ring the bell anyway." He made a note of the time on his report sheet, reported the car out of service to the dispatcher. The one next to the curb got out and went up the concrete walk and onto the porch. He rang the bell. He could hear it ring somewhere in the house. He could also hear a radio or record player going quietly but distinctly to his left in the room with the closed windows. He rang again. No answer. He walked along the porch and tapped on the window glass above the screen. Then harder. The music went on but that was all. He went down off the porch and around the side of the house to the back door. The screen was hooked, the door inside shut. There was another bell here. He rang that. It buzzed close to him, quite loud, but no one answered it. He banged hard on the screen and then gave it a yank. The hook held. He went around the house the other way. The windows on the north side were too high to look into from the ground. He reached the front lawn and walked diagonally back across the lawn to the radio car. It was a well-kept lawn and had been watered the night before. At one point he looked back to see if his heels had marked it. They hadn't.

He was glad they hadn't. He was just a young policeman and not tough at all.

"No answer, but there's music going," he told his partner, leaning into the car.

The driver listened to the squawk box a moment and then got out of the car. "You take that side," he answered, pointing south with his thumb. "I'll try the other house. Maybe the neighbors heard something."

"Couldn't have been much or they'd be breathing down our necks by now," the first policeman said.

"Better ask just the same."

An elderly man was cultivating with a one-prong cultivator around some rose bushes behind the house south of the Pettigrew house. The young cop asked him what he knew to cause a police call about next door. Nothing. See the people go out? No, he hadn't noticed anyone leave. Pettigrews had no car. Roomer had a car, but garage looked locked. You could see the padlock. What kind of people? Ordinary. Never bothered anybody. Radio seemed a bit loud lately? Like now? The old man shook his head. Wasn't loud now. Had been earlier. What time they turn it down? He didn't know. Heck, why would he? An hour, half an hour. Nothing been happening around here, officer. I been out pottering all morning. Somebody called in, the officer said.

Must be a mistake, the old man said. Anybody else in his house? His house? The old man shook his head. Nope, not now. The wife had gone to the beauty parlor. She went for that purple stuff they were putting on white hair nowadays. He chuckled. The young cop hadn't thought he had a chuckle in him, the way he kept pecking at those roses, kind of short and cross.

On the other side of the Pettigrew house, where the driver of the radio car went, nobody answered the front door. The policeman went around back and saw a child of indeterminate age and sex trying to kick the slats out of a play pen. The child needed its nose wiped and looked as if it preferred it that way. The officer banged at the back door and got a lank-haired slattern of a woman. When she opened the door some damn-fool soap opera poured out of the kitchen and he could see that she was listening to it with the passionate attention of an engineer squad clearing a mine field. She hadn't heard a darn thing, she screamed at him, timing her answer neatly between two lines of dopey dialogue. She didn't have no time to bother with what went on anywheres else. Radio next door? Yes, she guessed they had one. Might have heard it once in a while. Could she turn that thing down a little, the cop asked her,

scowling at the table radio on the kitchen sink. She said she could, but didn't aim to. A thin dark girl with hair as lank as her mother's appeared suddenly from nowhere and stood about six inches from the officer's stomach and stared up his shirt front at him. He moved back and she stayed right with him. He decided he was going to get mad in a minute. Didn't hear anything at all, huh? he yelled at the woman. She held up her hand for silence, listened to a brief interchange of sparkling slop from the radio, and then shook her head. She started to close the door before he was half through it. The little girl speeded him on his way with a short, sharp, and efficient raspberry.

His face felt a little hot when he met the other policeman beside the radio car. They both looked across the street, and then looked at each other and shrugged. The driver started around the back of the car to get back in, then changed his mind and went back up the walk to the front porch of Pettigrew's house. He listened to the radio and noted that there was lamplight around the blinds. He stopped and angled himself from window to window until he found a small chink he could see through.

After straining this way and that, he finally saw what looked like a man's body lying on its back on the floor beside the leg of a low table. He straightened and made



Illustrator: L. R. Summers

a sharp gesture to the other cop. The other came running.

"We go in," the driver said. "You don't see so good this shift. There's a guy in there and he ain't dancing. Radio on, lights on, all doors and windows locked, nobody answers the door, and a guy is lying on the carpet. Don't that add to anything in your book?"

It was at that moment that Joe Pettigrew took his second pinch of Professor Bingo's snuff. . . .

They got into the kitchen by forcing a window up with a screwdriver, without breaking the glass. The old man next door saw them and went right on pecking at his roses. It was a clean neat kitchen, because Joe Pettigrew kept it that way. Being in the kitchen they found they could as easily have stayed outside. There was no possible way into the lighted front room without breaking down a door. Which finally brought them back to the front porch. The driver of the radio car cracked a window with the heavy screwdriver, unlatched it, pulled it up far enough to lean in and knock the screen hook loose with the end of the screwdriver. They got both sashes of the window up and so got into the room without touching anything with their hands except the window catch.

The room was warm and oppressive. With a brief glance at Porter Green the driver went to-

wards the bedroom, unbuttoning the flap of his holster as he went.

"Better put your hands in your pockets," he told the young policeman over his shoulder. "Could be this isn't your day." He said it without sarcasm or anything in his voice but the meaning of the words, but the young officer flushed just the same and bit his lip. He stood looking down at Porter Green. He had no need to touch him or even bend down. He had seen far more dead men than his partner. He stood perfectly still because he knew there was nothing for him to do and that anything he did, even walking around on the carpet, might happen to spoil something the lab boys could use.

Standing there quietly, and even with the radio still going in the corner, he seemed to hear a sound like a faint clink and then the rustle of a step outside on the porch. He turned swiftly and went to the window. He pushed the glass curtain aside and looked out.

No. Nothing. He looked faintly puzzled because he had very keen hearing. Then he looked disgusted.

"Watch yourself, kid," he told himself. "No Japs near this fox-hole."

VII

You could stand in a recessed doorway and take a wallet out of your pocket and a card from the

wallet and read it and nobody could see the wallet or the card or the hand holding it. People passed up and down the street idly or busily, the usual early afternoon mob, and nobody even glanced toward you. If they did, all they would see would be an empty doorway. In other circumstances it might have been amusing. It wasn't amusing now, for obvious reasons. Joe Pettigrew's feet were tired. He hadn't done so much walking in ten years. He pretty well had to walk. He couldn't very well have got Porter Green's car out. The sight of a perfectly empty car driving along in traffic would be apt to unhinge the traffic police. Somebody would start yelling.

He might have risked crowding on to a bus or street car in a group of people. It looked feasible. They probably wouldn't look around to see who was jostling them but there was always the chance that some big strong character might make a grab at nothing and get hold of an arm and be just stubborn enough to hang on even if he couldn't see what it was he was hanging on to. No; much better to walk. Joseph would certainly approve of that.

"Wouldn't you, Joseph?" he asked, looking into the dusty glass of the doorway behind him.

Joseph didn't say. He was there all right, but he wasn't sharp and well-defined. He was foggy. He

didn't have the clean-cut personality you expected from Joseph.

"All right, Joseph. Some other time." Joe Pettigrew looked down at the card he was still holding. He would be about eight blocks to the building where, in Room 311, Professor Augustus Bingo maintained an office. There was a telephone number too. Joe Pettigrew wondered if it would be wiser to make an appointment. Yes, it would be wiser. There was probably an elevator and once in that he would be too much at the mercy of chance. A lot of these old buildings — and he knew Professor Bingo would be almost certain to have his office in a building that went with his rusty old hat — didn't have any fire stairs. They had outside fire escapes and a freight elevator you couldn't get to from the lobby. Much better to make an appointment. There was also the question of payment. Joe Pettigrew had thirty-seven dollars in his wallet, but he didn't suppose that thirty-seven dollars would cause Professor Bingo's heart to bulge with excitement. Professor Bingo undoubtedly selected his prospects with care and would be apt to demand a large slice of their available funds. This was not easy to manage. You could hardly cash a check if nobody could see the check. Even if the teller could see the check, which Joe Pettigrew supposed would be possible if he put it down

on the counter and took his hand away — after all there would be a check — the teller would hardly hold the money out to empty space. The bank was out. Of course, he might wait around for someone else to cash a check and then grab the money. But a bank was a bad place for that kind of operation. The person grabbed from would probably make a great deal of fuss and noise and Joe Pettigrew knew that the first thing a bank did in a case like that was block the doors and ring an alarm bell. It would be better to let the person with the money leave the bank first. But this had disadvantages. If it was a man, he would put the money where it would be difficult for an inexperienced pickpocket to lift it, even if he had a certain technical advantage over the most experienced pickpocket. It would have to be a woman. But women very seldom cashed large checks and Joe Pettigrew had scruples about snatching a woman's bag. Even if she could spare the money, the loss of her bag would make her so helpless.

"I'm not the right type," Joe Pettigrew said more or less out loud, still standing in the doorway, "to really get the value out of a situation like this."

That was the truth and the whole trouble. In spite of having put a neat slug into Porter Green, Joe Pettigrew was fundamentally a decent man. He had been a little

carried away at first, but he could see now that being invisible had its drawbacks. Well, perhaps he didn't need any more snuff. There was a way to find out. But if he did need it, he would need it awfully fast.

There was nothing sensible except to telephone Professor Bingo and make an appointment.

He left the doorway and edged along the outside of the sidewalk to the next intersection. There was a dim-looking bar across the way. It might well have a secluded telephone booth. Of course, even a secluded telephone booth could be a rat trap now. Suppose somebody came along and saw it was apparently empty and came in — no, better not think of that.

He went into the bar. It was secluded enough. There were two men on the stools and a couple in a booth. It was that time of day when almost no one drinks except a few loafers and alcoholics and an occasional pair of clandestine lovers. The pair in the booth looked like that. They were very close together and had eyes for themselves and no one else. The woman had an awful hat and a dirty-white baby-lamb jacket, and she looked puffy and spoiled. The man looked a bit like Porter Green. He had that same sharp, competent, unscrupulous air. Joe Pettigrew stopped beside the booth and looked down at them with

distaste. There was a pony of whiskey in front of the man with a chaser beside it. The woman had some godawful mess in layers of different colors. Joe Pettigrew looked down at the whiskey.

It probably wasn't wise, but he felt like it. He reached quickly for the small glass and poured the whiskey down his throat. It had an awful taste. He choked violently. The man in the booth straightened up and swung his head around. He stared straight at Joe Pettigrew.

"What the hell—" he said sharply.

Joe Pettigrew was frozen. He stood there holding the glass and the man looked him straight in the eye. The man's eye went down, down to the empty glass Joe Pettigrew was holding. The man put his hands on the edge of the table and started to move sideways. He didn't say another word, but Joe Pettigrew didn't have to be told. He turned and ran towards the back of the bar. The bartender and the two men on the stools both turned to look. The man from the booth was standing up now.

Just in time Joe Pettigrew found it. It said *Men* on the door. He went in quickly and swung around. There was no lock on the door. His hand gripped frantically for the box in his pocket and he was only just getting it out when the door started to open. He stepped

behind it and wrenched the lid off the box and grabbed a big pinch. He got it to his nose a mere second before the man in the booth was in the Men's Room with him.

Joe Pettigrew's hand shook so violently that he dropped half the snuff on the floor. He also dropped the cover of the box. With a diabolical precision the cover rolled straight along the concrete floor and came to rest practically touching the tip of the right shoe of the man from the booth.

The man stood inside the door and looked around. He really looked around. And he looked straight at Joe Pettigrew. But his expression was quite different this time. He looked away. He stepped across to the two stalls. He pushed first one door open, then another. Both stalls were empty. The man stood there looking into them. A peculiar sound came from his throat. With an absent gesture he got out a pack of cigarettes and stuck a cigarette in his mouth. A neat small silver lighter came out next and snapped a neat small flame to the cigarette.

The man blew a long plume of smoke. He turned slowly and moved towards the door like a man in a dream. He went out. Then with appalling suddenness he came back in again hurling the door in front of him. Joe Pettigrew got out of the way just in time. The man gave the room

another raking glance. Here was a badly puzzled man, Joe Pettigrew thought. A very annoyed man, a man into whose afternoon a large drop of gall had been dropped. The man went out again.

Joe Pettigrew moved once more. There was a frosted window in the wall, small, but adequate. He unlatched it and tried to push it up. It stuck. He tried harder. The wrench of the effort hurt his back. The window came free at last and slid up jerkily as far as it would go.

As he dropped his hands and wiped them on his pants a voice behind him said: "That wasn't open."

Another voice said: "What wasn't open, Mister?"

"The window, chump."

Joe looked around carefully. He sidled away from the window. The barkeep and the man from the booth were both looking at the window.

"Must of been," the barkeep said tersely. "And skip the chump."

"I say it wasn't." The man from the booth was more than emphatic, and less than polite.

"You callin' me a liar?" the barkeep inquired.

"How would you know whether it was open?" The man from the booth started to get aggressive again.

"Why you come back in here, if you was so sure?"

"Because I couldn't believe my eyes," the man from the booth almost yelled.

The barkeep grinned. "But you expect me to believe 'em. That the picture?"

"Oh, go to hell," the man from the booth said. He turned and banged out of the Men's Room. In so doing he stepped square on the top of Professor Bingo's snuff box. It crunched flat under his shoe. Nobody looked at it, except Joe Pettigrew. He looked at it all right.

The barkeep went across to the window and shut it and turned the catch.

"That takes care of that jerk," he said, and went on out. Joe Pettigrew moved carefully to the crushed box-top and stooped for it. He straightened it out as best he could and put it back on the bottom half. It didn't look very safe any more. He wrapped it in a paper towel just to be a little safer.

Another man came into the Men's Room, but he was on business. Joe Pettigrew caught the door as it swung shut and slipped out. The barkeep was behind the bar again. The man from the booth and the woman with the dirty-white lambs-wool were starting out.

"Come again soon," the barkeep said, in a voice that meant exactly the opposite. The man from the booth almost stopped but the woman said something to

him and they went on out.

"What's the beef?" the man on the stool asked, the one who had not gone to the Men's Room.

"I could pick a better looking skirt than that over on North Broadway at one in the a.m.," the barkeep said contemptuously. "The guy not only ain't got no manners and no brains, he ain't got no taste."

"But we know what he has got," the man on the stool said laconically, as Joe Pettigrew went quietly out of the door.

VIII

The bus station on Cahuenga was the place. People coming and going all the time, people intent on one thing, people who would never look to see who jostled them, people with no time to think and most of them nothing to think with if they had the time. There was plenty of noise. Dialing in an empty phone booth would attract no attention. He reached up and loosened the bulb so the light would not go on when he closed the door. He was a little worried now. The snuff couldn't be trusted for much more than an hour. He figured back from the time he had left the young policeman in the living room at the house to when the man in the booth had looked up and seen him.

Just about an hour. This took thought. Much thought. He peered

at the telephone number. Gladstone 7-4963. He dropped his nickel and dialed it. At first it didn't ring, then a wavy high pitched whine reached his ears, then a click, and then he heard his nickel drop down into the return slot. Then an operator's voice said: "What number are you calling, please?"

Joe Pettigrew told her. She said: "One moment, please." There was a pause. Joe Pettigrew kept looking out through the glass panel of the booth. He wondered how long it would be before somebody tried the door of the booth and how much longer before someone noticed what would seem to him or her a very curious position for the telephone receiver — at the ear of someone who wasn't there. He supposed it was that way. The whole damn telephone system could hardly disappear just because he was using one instrument.

The operator's voice came back, "I'm sorry, sir, but there is no such telephone number listed."

"There must be," Joe Pettigrew said violently, and repeated the number. The operator also repeated her remark, and added: "One moment, please, I will give you Information." The booth was hot and Joe Pettigrew was beginning to sweat. Information came and heard and went away and came back.

"I'm sorry, sir. There is no telephone listed under that name."

Joe Pettigrew stepped out of the booth just in time to avoid a woman with a string bag and an appearance of great hurry. He just slid away from her in time. He got out of there fast.

It could be an unlisted number. He should have thought of that long ago. The way Professor Bingo operated, he would certainly have an unlisted phone. Joe Pettigrew stopped dead and somebody kicked his heel. He skipped out of the way just in time.

No, he was being silly. He had dialed the number. And even if it was an unlisted number, the operator, knowing he had the number and that it was a correct number, would simply have told him to dial it again. She would think he had made a mistake in dialing. So Bingo had no telephone at all.

"All right," Joe Pettigrew said. "All right, Bingo. Maybe I'll just drop over and tell you about it. Maybe I won't need any money at all. A man your age ought to have more sense than to put a phony telephone number on a business card. How can you expect to sell the product if the customer can't get to talk to you?"

He said all this in his mind. Then he told himself he was probably doing Professor Bingo an injustice. The Professor looked like a pretty smooth operator. He would have a reason for what he did. Joe Pettigrew got the card

out and looked at it again. 311 Blankey Building, on North Wilcox. Joe Pettigrew had never heard of the Blankey Building, but that didn't mean anything. Any big city is full of ratholes like that. It couldn't be more than half a mile. That would be about all there would be to the business part of Wilcox.

He walked south. The building had an even number which would put it on the east side. He ought to have asked the telephone operator to check the address when she couldn't find the name. Maybe she would and maybe she would tell him to go fishing.

He found the block easily enough and he found the number not quite so easily, but by a process of elimination. It wasn't called the Blankey Building, though. He read the card again and made sure. No, he hadn't made a mistake. That was the right address, but it wasn't an office building. Nor was it a private home, nor a store.

Quite a sense of humor, Professor Augustus Bingo had. His business address turned out to be the Hollywood Police Station.

IX

Besides the lab men and photographers and the fellow who did the block sketch to scale, showing the position of the furniture and windows and things, there was a

lieutenant of detectives and a sergeant. Being from the Hollywood division they both looked a bit more sporty than you expect plain clothes cops to look. One had his sport-shirt collar outside the collar of his shepherd's-plaid jacket. He wore sky-blue slacks and shoes with gilt buckles on them. His argyle socks gleamed in the darkness of the clothes closet that opened under the stairs between the bedroom and the bathroom. He had the square of carpet rolled back. Underneath was a trap door with a sunken ring in it. The man in the blue slacks — he happened to be the sergeant although he looked older than the lieutenant — pulled at the ring and got the trap door up against the back wall of the closet. The space down below was half-lit from the ventilating screens in the foundation walls. There was a rough wooden ladder leaning against the concrete wall of the basement. The sergeant, whose name was Rehder, got the ladder into position and back down far enough to see what was under the floor.

"Big place," he said speaking up. "Must have been stairs down here once before they floored the space in hardwood to make the closet. They put the trap in to get at the gas and water pipes and the outfall. Think it's worth looking in the trunks?"

The lieutenant was a big handsome man built like a blocking

back. He had sad dark eyes. His name was Waldman. He nodded vaguely.

"There's the bottom of the floor furnace," Rehder said. He reached out and rapped on it. The sheet iron rang. "That's all the furnace there is. And that would be installed from the top. Anybody check the air vents?"

"Yes," Waldman said. "They're big enough all right, but three of them are nailed shut and painted over. The one in back of the house is loose but the gas meter is just inside it. Nobody could get past that."

Rehder came back up the ladder and lowered the trap to the closet floor. "Also there's this carpet," he said. "Pretty hard to get that to fall in place without a wrinkle."

He dusted his hands off on the piece of carpet and they went out of the closet and shut the door. They went into the living room and watched the lab men fussing around.

"Prints aren't going to mean anything," the lieutenant said, moving a finger along the edge of his chin against the dark close-shaven bristles. "Unless we happen to get a clear overlay. Or something on a door or window. Even that wouldn't be too conclusive. After all, Pettigrew lives here. It's his house."

"I'd sure like to know who reported that shot," Rehder said.

"Pettigrew. Who else?" Waldman kept on rubbing his chin. His eyes were sad and sleepy. "I can't go for suicide. I've seen too many and I never once saw one where a guy shot himself through the heart from a distance of not less than three feet and more likely four or five."

Rehder nodded. He was looking down at the floor furnace. It had a big grating partly in the floor, partly in the wall.

"But assume it *could* be suicide," Waldman went on. "The place is locked up tight — all except the window the prowls boys got in at, and one of them stayed right beside it until we got here. The door's not only locked but bolted with a deadlatch that is not connected with the lock. Every window is locked and the only other door, the one that connects with the breakfast room at the back of the house, has a deadlatch on this side which can't be opened from the breakfast room and a spring lock on the other side which can't be opened from in here. So the physical evidence proves Pettigrew couldn't have had access to these rooms when the shot was fired."

"So far," Rehder said.

"So far, sure. But somebody heard that shot and somebody reported it. None of the neighbors heard it."

"They say," Rehder put in.

"But why lie about it *after* we

found the bodies? Before that maybe, just not to be involved. You could say whoever heard it doesn't want to be a witness at an inquest or a trial. Some people don't, sure. But they're likely to be bothered a lot more, if they didn't hear anything — or think they didn't — than if they did. The investigators are going to keep trying to make them remember something they think they've forgotten. You know how often that works out."

Rehder said: "Let's get back to Pettigrew." His eyes were on his partner now, very watchful and faintly triumphant, as if at some secret thought.

"We have to suspect him," Waldman said. "We always have to suspect the husband. He must have known wife was playing around with this Porter Green. Pettigrew's not out of town or anything. The mailman saw him this morning. He either left before or after the shot. If he left before, he's clear. If he left after, he still might not have heard it. But I'm saying he did because he had a better chance than anyone else. And if he did, what would he do?"

Rehder frowned. "They never do the obvious thing, do they? No. You'd say he'd try to get in, and he'd find out he couldn't without breaking in. Then he'd call the law. But this guy is living right in the house where his wife is play-

ing footie with the roomer. Either he's an awful cold fish and doesn't give a damn—"

"That's happened," Waldman put in.

"— or he'd be humiliated and pretty savage inside. When he hears that shot, he knows damn well he'd like to have fired it. And he knows we're likely to think the same. So he goes out and calls us from a pay station and then disappears. When he comes home he'll be the most surprised guy in the world."

Waldman nodded. "But still we get a chance to size him up, it doesn't mean a thing. It was pure chance nobody saw him leave, pure chance nobody else reported the shot. He couldn't rely on any of that, therefore he couldn't rely on pretending not to know. If it's suicide, I say he didn't hear the shot, and didn't call in. He left either before or after, and he doesn't know a thing about anybody being dead."

"So again it's not suicide," Rehder said. "So he had to get out of here and leave the place locked up. Fine. How did he do it?"

"Yes. How?"

"Floor furnace. It heats the hall too. Didn't you notice?" Rehder asked triumphantly.

Waldman's eyes went to the floor furnace and back to Rehder. "What size man is he?" he asked.

"One of the boys looked at his

clothes upstairs. Five-ten, one-sixty, wears an eight-and-a-half shoe, a thirty-eight shirt, a thirty-nine suit. Just small enough. That piece behind the upright grating just hangs on a rod. We'll print it and then try it out."

"Not trying to make a chump out of me, are you, Max?"

"You know better than that, Lieutenant. If it's homicide, the guy had to get out of the room. There's no such thing as a locked room murder. Never has been."

Waldman sighed and looked towards the stain on the carpet by the corner of the cocktail table.

"I suppose not," he said. "But it does seem a pity we can't have just one."

X

At sixteen minutes to three Joe Pettigrew walked down a path in a quiet part of Hollywood Cemetery. Not that it wasn't all quiet. But here it was remote and forgotten. The grass was green and cool. There was a small stone bench. He sat down on it and looked across at a marble monument with angels on it. It looked expensive. He could see that the lettering had once been in gold. He read the name. It went back a long time, to a lost glamor, to the days when a star of the flickering screen lived like an Eastern caliph and died like a prince of the blood. It was a simple place for a

man who had once been so famous. Not much like that hoked-up demi-paradise over on the far side of the river.

A long time ago, in a lost and dingy world. Bathtub gin, gang wars, ten per cent margin accounts, parties where everyone got paralyzed as a matter of course. Cigar smoke in the theater. Everybody smoked cigars in those days. A heavy pall of it always hung over the mezzanine boxes. The draft sucked it across on to the stage. He could smell it as he teetered fifteen feet in the air on a bike with wheels like watermelons. Joe Meredith-Clown Cyclist. Good too. Never quite a headliner — you couldn't be with that kind of act — but a hell of a long way from the acrobats. A solo. One of the best falls in the business. Looks easy, doesn't it? Try it some time and find out how easy — fifteen feet and land on the back of your neck on a hard stage and roll gently to your feet with the hat still on your head and nine inches of lighted cigar stuck in the corner of a huge painted mouth.

He wondered what would happen if he tried it now. Probably break four ribs and get a punctured lung.

A man came along the path. One of these young hard-looking kids that go coatless in any kind of weather. About twenty or twenty-one, too much black hair

not clean enough, narrow flat black eyes, dark olive skin, shirt open on a hard hairless chest.

He stopped in front of the bench and measured Joe Pettigrew with a quick sweep of the eyes.

"Got a match?"

Joe Pettigrew stood up. It was time to go home now. He took a paper match-folder out of his pocket and held it out.

"Thanks." The kid picked a loose cigarette out of his shirt pocket and lit the cigarette slowly, moving his eyes this way and that. As he handed the matches back with his left hand he looked over his shoulder, a quick glance. Joe Pettigrew reached for the matches. The kid dropped his right hand swiftly inside the shirt and jerked out a short gun.

"Now the wallet, chum, and take its ——"

Joe Pettigrew kicked him in the groin. The kid doubled over and began to sweat. Not a sound came from him. His hand still held the gun, but not pointed. Tough kid, all right. Joe Pettigrew took a step and kicked the gun out of his hand. He had it before the kid moved.

The kid was breathing in harsh gasps now. He looked pretty sick. Joe Pettigrew felt a little sad. He had the floor. He could say anything he liked. He had nothing to say. The world was full of tough kids. It was their world, the world of Porter Green.

Time to go home now. He walked away along the sunlit path and didn't look back. When he came to a neat green trash barrel he dropped the gun into it. He looked back then, but the kid was nowhere in sight. Probably walking fast to get away and groaning as he walked. Perhaps even running. Where do you run to when you have killed a man? Nowhere. You go home. Running away is a very complicated business. It takes thought and preparation. It takes time, money, and clothes.

His legs ached. He was tired. But he could buy coffee now and take the bus. He ought to have waited and thought it out. That was Professor Augustus Bingo's fault. He made it much too easy, like a short cut that wasn't on the map. You took it, and then you found that the short cut didn't go anywhere, just ended in a yard with a vicious dog. So, if you were very quick and very lucky, you kicked the vicious dog in the right place and went back the way you came.

His hand went into his pocket and his fingers touched the packet of Professor Bingo's product --- a little crumpled and partly spilled, but still usable, if he could think of any use for it, which was now unlikely.

Too bad Professor Bingo didn't have a real address on his card. Joe Pettigrew would have liked to call on him and twist his neck. A

fellow like that could do a lot of harm in the world. More harm than a hundred Porter Greens.

But a character as resourceful as Professor Bingo would know all that in advance. Even if he had an office, you wouldn't find him there unless he wanted you to.

Joe Pettigrew walked.

XI

Lieutenant Waldman saw him and knew him three houses away, long before he turned up the walk. He looked exactly like what Waldman had expected, gaunt face, neat gray suit, precise and exact way of moving. Right weight, height, and build.

"Okay," he said, standing up from a chair by the window. "Nothing rough, Max. Feel him out slow."

They had sent the police car off around the corner. The street was quiet again. Nothing looked sensational. Joe Pettigrew turned into the walk and came towards the porch. He stopped halfway, stepped over on the lawn, and got out a pocket knife. He bent down and cut a dandelion off just below the surface. He folded the knife carefully after wiping it off on the grass and put it back in his pocket. He threw the dandelion off towards the corner of the house out of sight of the men watching.

"I don't buy it," Rehder said in a harsh whisper. "It just ain't

possible that guy cooled anybody today."

"He sees the window," Waldman said, pulling back into shadow without moving too quickly. The lights were off in the room now and the radio had long since been stilled. Joe Pettigrew was looking up at the broken window right in front of him from where he stood on the lawn. He moved a little more quickly up on the porch and stopped. His hand went out and pulled at the screen enough to show that it was loose. He let go of the screen and straightened up. His face had an odd expression. Then he turned quickly towards the door.

The door opened as he reached it. Waldman stood inside looking out gravely.

"I think you would be Mr. Pettigrew," he said politely.

"Yes, I'm Pettigrew," the gaunt expressionless face told him. "Who are you?"

"A police officer, Mr. Pettigrew. The name is Waldman, Lieutenant Waldman. Come in, please."

"Police? Somebody break in here? The window —"

"No, it's not a burglary, Mr. Pettigrew. We'll explain it all to you." He stood back from the door and Joe Pettigrew stepped in past him. He took off his hat and hung it up, just as he always did.

Waldman stepped close to him

and ran his hands rapidly over his body.

"Sorry, Mr. Pettigrew. Part of my job. This is Sergeant Rehder. We're from the Hollywood Division. Let's go into the living room."

"That's not our living room," Joe Pettigrew said. "This part of the house is rented."

"We know that, Mr. Pettigrew. Just sit down and take it easy."

Joe Pettigrew sat down and leaned back. His eyes searched the room. They saw the chalk marks and the dusting powder. He leaned forward again.

"What's that?" he asked sharply.

Waldman and Rehder looked at him with level unsmiling expressions. "What time did you go out today?" Waldman asked, and leaned back casually and lit a cigarette. Rehder sat hunched forward on the front half of a chair, his right hand loose on his knee. His gun was in a short leather holster inside his right hip pocket. He'd never liked an underarm clip. This guy Pettigrew didn't look like it would take a gun to knock him over, but you never know.

"What time? I don't remember. Somewhere around noon."

"To go where?"

"Just walking. I went over to Hollywood Cemetery for a while. My first wife is buried there."

"Oh, your first wife," Waldman said easily. "Any idea where



your present wife is?"

"Probably out with the roomer. Fellow named Porter Green," Joe Pettigrew said calmly.

"Like that, eh?" Waldman said.

"Just like that." Pettigrew's eyes went to the floor again, over where the chalk marks were and the dark stain in the carpet. "Suppose you men tell me —"

"In a moment," Waldman cut in, rather more sharply. "Did you have any reason to call the police? From here or while you were out?"

Joe Pettigrew shook his head. "As long as the neighbors didn't complain, why should I?"

"I don't get it," Rehder said. "What's he talking about?"

"Pretty noisy, were they?" Waldman asked. He got it all right.

Pettigrew nodded again. "But they had every one of the windows shut."

"And locked?" Waldman asked casually.

"When a cop starts being subtle," Joe Pettigrew answered just as casually, "it's for laughs. How would I know if the windows were locked?"

"I'll stop being subtle, if it bothers you, Mr. Pettigrew." Waldman had a sweet sad smile on his face now. "The windows *were* locked. That's why the radio officers had to break the glass to get in. Now ask me why they had to get in, Mr. Pettigrew?"

Joe Pettigrew just looked at him steadily. Don't answer them, he thought, and they'll start telling you. One thing they won't do — they won't stop talking. They love to hear themselves talk. He didn't speak. Waldman went on:

"Somebody called in and said he had heard a shot in this house. We thought it might have been you. We don't know who it was. The neighbors deny having heard anything."

Now is when you can make the mistake, Joe Pettigrew said in his mind. I wish I had Joseph to talk to. I feel clear in my mind. I feel okay, but these boys are not **dumb**. Especially the one with the soft voice and the wise eyes. Nothing less dumb ever carried a badge. Nice guy, but he won't fool. I come home and the cops have the house and somebody's called in about a gun and the front window's broken and the room's been gone over until it looks all tired out. And there's a stain there that could be blood. And those chalk marks could be the outline of a body. And Gladys isn't around and Porter Green isn't around. Well, how would I act if I didn't know anything about it? Perhaps I don't care. I guess that's it. I just don't care what these birds think. Because any time I change my mind about being here I don't have to be here. Wait a minute, though. That doesn't settle anything. It's mur-

der and suicide. It has to be, because it couldn't be anything else. I'm not going to throw that away. If it's murder and suicide, then I don't mind being here. I'm fine.

"A suicide pact," he said out loud, a little thoughtfully. "Porter Green didn't seem the type. Nor my wife — Gladys. Too shallow and too selfish."

"Nobody said anything about anybody being dead," Rehder said harshly.

That's a real cop, Joe Pettigrew thought. Like in the movies. Him I don't mind. Doesn't like anybody to have an idea or make an obvious deduction. That's a fat-headed remark he made, if ever I heard one. Out loud he said:

"How obvious does it have to get?"

Waldman smiled faintly. "Only one shot was heard, Mr. Pettigrew. If the informant heard correctly. And frankly, since we don't know the informant, we haven't been able to question him. But it was not a suicide pact. I can assure you of that. And since I have stopped being subtle — although I don't think you have — let me say at once that the radio officers found Porter Green dead where you see those marks. His chest was where you see the bloodstain. He bled very little. He was shot through the heart — quite accurately — at a distance that makes suicide very unlikely. Pre-

vious to that he had strangled your wife, after a rather violent struggle."

"He didn't know women as well as he thought he did," Joe Pettigrew said.

"This guy is shaking with excitement," Rehder put in nastily. "Just like an iron deer on somebody's front lawn."

Waldman waved his hand and kept the smile on his face. "This isn't a performance, Max," he said, without looking at his partner. "Although I know you give a very good one. Mr. Pettigrew is a very intelligent, level-headed man. We don't know too much about his home life, but we know enough to suspect that it was not happy. He pretends to no false grief. Right, Mr. Pettigrew?"

"Exact."

"I thought so. Also, not being an idiot, Max, Mr. Pettigrew knows perfectly well from the appearance of this room, from our being here, and from our manner, that something serious has happened. He may even have expected something of the sort to happen."

Joe Pettigrew shook his head. "One of her boy friends beat her up once," he said calmly. "She disappointed him. She disappointed all of them. He even wanted to beat me up."

"Why didn't he?" Waldman asked, as if the situation was the most natural thing in the world — a wife like Gladys, a husband like

Joe Pettigrew, and a roomer like Porter Green or a reasonable facsimile of Porter Green.

Joe Pettigrew smiled even more faintly than Waldman had smiled. This was something they were not going to know. His physical skills, which he seldom used, and then only at climactic moments. Something in reserve, like what was left of Professor Bingo's sample of snuff.

"Probably didn't think it worth while," he answered.

"Quite a man, ain't you, Pettigrew?" Rehder sneered. A little taste of male disgust was rising in him, like bile.

"As I said," Waldman went on peacefully, "from the appearance of things when we got here we could assume a rather violent scene. The man's face was badly scratched and the woman was badly bruised up — in addition to the usual signs of strangulation — never too pleasant to a sensitive man. Are you a sensitive man, Mr. Pettigrew? You'll have to identify her body, even if you are."

"That's the first snide remark you've made, Lieutenant."

Waldman flushed. He bit his lip. He was himself a very sensitive man. Pettigrew was right. "I'm sorry," he said and as if he meant it sincerely. "You now understand what we found here. Since you're the husband — and since so far as we know now it's

uncertain when you left the house — you would normally be a suspect for one of these deaths, and possibly both."

"Both?" Joe Pettigrew asked. He showed real surprise this time, and he instantly knew it was a mistake. He tried to retrieve it. "Oh, I see what you mean. The scratches on Porter Green and the blows — on my wife's body like you said — don't prove he strangled her. I might have shot him and then strangled her — while she was unconscious or helpless from the beating."

"This guy's got no emotions at all," Rehder said with a kind of wonder.

Waldman said gently: "He has emotions, Max. But he has lived with them a long time. They are pretty deep. Right, Mr. Pettigrew?"

Joe Pettigrew said he was right. He didn't think he had quite retrieved the mistake, but he might have.

"The wound on Porter Green was definitely not a typical suicide wound," Waldman went on. "It wouldn't be, even if you picture a man coolly and quietly deciding to kill himself for what seem to him good reasons — if a suicide ever is cool and quiet. Some of them do seem to be. But a man who had just passed through a violent scene — for such a man in such a mental state to hold a gun as far from his body as he could reach

and deliberately and accurately aim it at his heart and pull the trigger — nobody could really believe that, Mr. Pettigrew. Nobody."

"So I did it," Pettigrew said and looked straight at Waldman's eyes.

Waldman stared at him and then turned to put his cigarette out in an amber glass tray. He ground it back and forth until the stub was shapeless. He spoke without looking at Pettigrew, a man thinking out loud, perfectly relaxed in his thinking.

"There are two objections to that. That is, there were. First, the windows were locked — all the windows. The door of this room was locked and although you would have a key, being the landlord — oh, by the way, I suppose you are the landlord?"

"I own the house," Pettigrew said.

"Your key would not open this door because of a dead-latch which is separate from the lock. The door into your kitchen can't be opened from the other side until a bolt on this side is turned. There's a trap door to the cellar, but it leads nowhere outside the house. We've determined that. So we thought at first that no one but himself could have killed Porter Green, because no one could have left the room after killing him and left it locked up as

it *was* locked up. We found an answer to that."

Joe Pettigrew felt a slight tingling on the skin of his temples. His mouth seemed to feel dry and his tongue seemed large and stiff in it. He almost lost control. He almost said, There isn't any way. There just isn't. If there was, the whole thing would be a laugh. Professor Bingo would be a laugh. Why the hell would I stand inside the window and wait for the cop to break the glass and climb in and then right behind his back, not ten feet from him, step out onto that porch and softshoe away and away and away? Why would I bother with all that and the rest of it and the dodging people on the streets and the not having any coffee or any way to get anywhere and not being able to speak to anybody, why would I do all that if there was a way out of the room that a couple of flatfeet would find?

He didn't say it. But his saying it in his mind did something to his face. Rehder leaned forward a little further and his tongue showed its tip between his lips. Waldman sighed. Funny neither he nor Max had thought of the killer having killed both of them.

"The furnace," he said in a cool detached voice.

Pettigrew stared and slowly his head went around and he was looking at the grating of the floor furnace, the two gratings, one

horizontal and one upright where it cut into the wall between this room and the hall. "The furnace," he said and looked back at Waldman. "Why the furnace?"

"It was intended to send heat into the hall as well as this room, probably with the idea the heat would rise to the upper part of the house. Between the two parts of the furnace — that is, between the two rooms, there is a sheet-iron screen hanging on a rod. It is intended to divert the heat where you want it. It will blank either of the upright gratings and put most of the heat into one outlet, or if it hangs straight up and down as we found it, the heat goes in both directions."

"A man could get through that?" Pettigrew asked wonderingly.

"Not every man. You could. The screen moves easily. We've tried it. One of our technical men went through. The available space is about twelve by twenty inches. Ample for you, Mr. Pettigrew."

"So I killed them and got out that way," Joe Pettigrew said. "I'm brilliant. Really brilliant. And put the gratings back afterwards."

"Nothing to that. They are not screwed down, just held in position by their weight. We tried it, Mr. Pettigrew. We know." He ruffled his dark wavy hair. "Unfortunately that's not a complete solution."

"No?" A pulse was beating in Joe Pettigrew's temple. A hard little angry hammer of a pulse. He was tired. The long accumulated tiredness of many small tirednesses. Yes, he was very tired now. He put his hand in his pocket and felt the crumpled box of snuff wrapped in the paper towel.

Both the detectives tensed. Rehder's hand went to his hip. He leaned his weight forward on his feet.

"Just snuff," Joe Pettigrew said.

Waldman stood up. "I'll take that," he said sharply, and stood over Joe Pettigrew.

"Just snuff. Quite harmless." Joe Pettigrew opened the package and dropped the piece of paper towel on the floor. He lifted off the crumpled lid of the box. He touched his finger to the spoonful of white powder that was all that was left. Two good pinches, no more. Two reprieves.

He turned his hand and emptied the powder on to the floor.

"I never saw snuff that color," Waldman said. He took the emptied box. The writing on the smashed cover was blurred with dirt. It could be read, but not quickly.

"It's snuff all right," Joe Pettigrew said. "It's not poison. At least not the kind you're thinking of. I don't want it any more. What's the rest of your analysis,

Lieutenant? There must be more."

Waldman moved back and away from him, but he didn't sit down again.

"The other objection to the idea of murder is that there was no point in it — if it was Green that strangled your wife. Until you mentioned it, I hadn't thought of anything else. That makes you a reasonably sharp man, Mr. Pettigrew. If the finger marks on her throat — which are very clear and will be clearer still — come from your hands, there's no more to say."

"They didn't," Joe Pettigrew said. He held his hands out, palms up. "You ought to be able to tell. Porter Green's hands are twice as big as mine."

"If that is so, Mr. Pettigrew," and Waldman's voice began to rise in tone and volume as he spoke, "and your wife was already dead and you shot Porter Green, not only was it silly of you to run away and make an anonymous telephone call, because even if this could have been a deliberate murder on your part, no jury would convict you of as much as manslaughter — you had a perfect defense — self-defense —" Waldman was now speaking very loudly and clearly, although not shouting, and Rehder was watching him with a reluctant admiration. "If you had simply picked up the telephone and called the police and said you shot him be-

cause you had heard a scream and had come downstairs with a gun and this man was half-naked and had blood all over his face from the scratches and he had rushed at you and you —" Waldman's voice faded, "shot at him, by pure instinct," he ended quietly. "Anybody would believe that," he said softly.

"I didn't see the scratches until after I shot him," Joe Pettigrew said.

A dead silence fell into the room. Waldman stood with his mouth open, the final words hanging on his lips. Rehder laughed. He reached his hand back again and took the gun from his hip holster.

"I was ashamed," Joe Pettigrew said. "Ashamed to look at his face. Ashamed for him. You wouldn't understand. You hadn't lived with her."

Waldman stood silent, his chin down, his eyes brooding. He moved forward. "I'm afraid that's all, Mr. Pettigrew," he said quietly. "It's been interesting, and a little painful. Now we'll go where we have to go."

Joe Pettigrew laughed sharply. Just for a moment Waldman masked Rehder with his body. Joe Pettigrew went sideways out of the chair and seemed to twist in midair like a dropped cat. He was in the doorway.

Rehder yelled at him to stop.

Then, too quickly, he fired. The shot knocked Joe Pettigrew clear across the hall. He hit the far wall, flopped his arms, and half-turned. He sat down with his back against the wall, and his mouth and eyes open.

"Some boy," Rehder said, walking stiff-legged out past Waldman. "Betcha he did them both in, Lieutenant."

He bent down, then straightened and turned, putting his gun away. "No ambulance," he said tersely. "Not that I meant it that way. You made it tough for me."

Waldman stood in the doorway. He lit another cigarette. His hand shook a little. He looked at it waving the match out.

"Ever occur to you that he might be perfectly innocent after all?"

"Not a chance, Lieutenant. Not a shadow. I've seen too many."

"Too many of something," Waldman said distantly. His dark eyes were cold and angry. "You saw me frisk him. You knew he was not armed. How far could he have run? So you killed him — because you like to show off. For no other reason."

He went past Rehder into the hall and bent down over Joe Pettigrew. He put a hand inside his jacket and felt his heart. He straightened and turned.

Rehder was sweating. His eyes were narrow and his whole face looked unnatural. He still had the

gun in his hand.

"I didn't see you frisk him," he said thickly.

"So you think I'm a damn fool," Waldman said coldly. "Even if you're not lying — and you *are* lying."

"You rank me," Rehder said with a harsh rustle in his voice, "but you can't call me a liar, bud." He lifted the gun a little. Waldman's lip curled with contempt. He didn't say anything. After a moment, slowly, Rehder swung the gate of his gun out and blew through the barrel, and then put the gun away. "I made a mistake," he said, in a strained voice. "You tell it any way you like. And you better get you another partner. Yeah — I shot too quick. And the guy could of been innocent like you say. Crazy, anyway. Most they'd have done would be to commit him. Say a year, nine months. And he comes out to a happy life without Gladys. I spoiled all that."

Waldman said almost gently, "Crazy in a sense, no doubt. But he meant to kill both of them. The whole setup points to that. We both know it. And he didn't get out through the floor furnace."

"Huh," Rehder's eyes jumped and his mouth fell open.

"I was watching him when I told him about it. That, Max, was the only thing we told him that really surprised him."

"He had to. No other way."

Waldman nodded, then shrugged. "Say we haven't found any other way — and we don't have to now. I'll call in."

He went past Rehder into the living room and sat down at the telephone.

The front door bell rang. Rehder looked down at Joe Pettigrew and then at the door. He stepped softly along the hall. He stepped to the door and opened it about six inches, holding it that way. He looked out at a tall angular wasted-looking man who wore a top hat and an opera cloak, although Rehder didn't know exactly what an opera cloak was. The man was pale and had deepset black eyes. He took the hat off and bowed a little.

"Mr. Pettigrew?"

"He's busy. Who wants him?"

"I left him a small sample of a new kind of snuff this morning. I wondered if he liked it."

"He don't want no snuff," Rehder said. Funny-looking bird. Where did they dig them up? Better test that powder for coke, maybe.

"Well, if he does, he knows where to reach me," Professor Bingo said politely. "Good afternoon to you." He touched the brim of the hat, and turned away. He walked slowly, with great dignity. When he had taken three steps Rehder said in his harsh cop voice, which he didn't use as much

as he had once: "Come here a minute, Doc. We might want to talk to you about that snuff. It don't look like no snuff to me."

Professor Bingo stopped and turned. His arms were under his opera cloak now. "And just who are you?" he asked Rehder with detached insolence.

"Police officer. There's been a homicide in this house. It could be that snuff —"

Professor Bingo smiled. "My business is with Mr. Pettigrew, Officer."

"You come back here!" Rehder barked, jerking the door wide. Professor Bingo looked into the hall. He pursed his lips. Otherwise he didn't move.

"Why that looks like Mr. Pettigrew on the floor," he said. "Is he ill?"

"Worse. He's dead. And like I said. You come back here!"

Professor Bingo took a hand out from under his cloak. There was no weapon in it. Rehder had made a motion towards his hip. He relaxed and let his hand drop.

"Dead, eh?" Professor Bingo smiled almost gaily. "Well, you mustn't let that disturb you, Officer. I presume someone shot him as he tried to escape?"

"Come here, you!" Rehder started down the steps.

Professor Bingo waved a long white left hand. "Poor Mr. Pettigrew, he has really been dead for all of ten years. He just didn't

know it, Officer.”

Rehder was at the bottom of the steps now. His hand was itching to go for his gun again. Something in Professor Bingo's eyes made him feel cold all over.

“I imagine you had quite a problem in there,” Professor Bingo said politely. “Quite a

problem. But it's very simple really.”

His right hand came delicately out from under his cloak. His thumb and forefinger were pressed together. They went up towards his face.

Professor Bingo took a pinch of snuff.