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BOOKS

DAY KEENE

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THE

BIG KISS-OFF

A two-timing blonde, a half-naked brunette and a bullet-riddled corpse were his welcome home party



Drops Trickled from the Squid's Mouth

as he recognized Cade. "So you came back, eh? Tocko, he's smart. He said you'd be back." The Squid reached out a big clammy hand. "You shouldn't have done it, Cade. You shouldn't have killed Joe. Tocko tol' me if I found you I could have all the fun I wanted." The big man's eyes gleamed wetly. "Go on, hit me with the gun. Then I can hit you back."

Cade fought the desire to be sick as the Squid's clammy fingers caressed his face, insistent, demanding.

"Go on, hit me," the Squid whispered again

**THE
BIG KISS-OFF**

Day Keene

MB

A MACFADDEN-BARTELL BOOK

THIS IS THE COMPLETE TEXT
OF THE ORIGINAL EDITION

A MACFADDEN BOOK.....1969

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**THE
BIG KISS-OFF**

1 *The Mud Lump*

The six men, so much clay on the tide-swept mud lump, were dead. They had been dead some days, Cade imagined, dead of thirst and starvation.

Cade raised his eyes to a low-lying fringe of green, misty in the brightening dawn; the mainland, less than eighteen miles away. But so far as the men on the barren mud lump were concerned, it might have been eighteen hundred miles! Few boats ever came here. Now and then a fisherman taking a short cut to Grande Terre or Baratavia Bay, or an occasional guided party of sports down from New Orleans after tarpon or ducks.

A small man, compactly built, barefooted, wearing only a pair of old dungarees, Cade lighted the pressure stove in the galley and put a pot of coffee to boil. Then, sucking at his first cigarette of the day, he returned to the open cockpit of the cruiser and resumed his study of the bodies. Morning was warm. Day was going to be hot. It was so still on the motionless water that the hollow silence subtly disturbed him. As closely as Cade could ascertain without breaking out the dinghy and rowing ashore, two of the dead had been Chinese. The other four could have been nationals of any country.

Cade spat on the glasslike surface of the water. Some of the boys, it would seem, were still in business. He wished he'd picked another anchorage last night, when it had been far too dark to make out the bodies. He wished he'd

stood further out in the Gulf. If he had known, he wouldn't have come within forty miles of the south mud lump.

When the coffee had boiled, he forced himself to drain a cup of it black, smoking a second cigarette, sitting in one of the fancy fishing chairs bolted to the deck plates. He tried to concentrate on admiring the trim lines of his new thirty-eight-foot cruiser. He tried to think of how nice it was to sit in the sun, to feel the sea air on his face, how nice to be able to come and go as he pleased. Yalu, Pyongyang, Panmunjom were fast becoming just names, names of far places out of a bitter dream.

But his mind kept returning to windward. After two years of millet and rice and fish heads and dysentery, his stomach was queasy enough without this. It was surprising that the men caught in the tangle of grass and dead trees and driftwood had stayed on the flat as long as they had. The next flood tide would sweep them out to sea and there would be nothing on the green surface of the Gulf but mud and dead trees and silence.

Cade poured a second cup of coffee but before he could raise it to his lips he lost the first cup he'd drunk.

When the retching ceased, he swore softly under his breath. Always one bad oyster in a barrel. So a government cutter had gotten too close and some of the boys had almost been caught with a hot cargo. They'd been well paid to take that chance.

Depressed, he tinkered with the misfiring engine which had caused him to anchor the night before. The trouble proved to be minor. When the engine was running to suit him, he cut in its twin to make sure he wouldn't drift onto the flat, then up-anchored and felt his way back through the shallows. Out in the blue water again, he pushed the throttle wide open, holding for South Pass. Cade fingered his pencil-line mustache. He should have stayed in blue water.

He should have done a lot of things.

The day fulfilled its promise of heat, and he began to cheer up a bit. The hot sun felt good on his back. He liked the taste of the salt spray on his face. It felt natural—right. It was as if the past twelve years had never been.

Still, Cade was fair. He had to admit that five of the twelve years away from Bay Parish had been fun. He pushed his white captain's cap back on his crisp black hair, as he admired the wake the ship was leaving. He'd traveled fast. He'd flown a lot of wing. He'd drunk a lot of rum. He'd planted some very delightful oats in very beautiful, if unfertile, soil.

The hot deck plates burned his bare feet. Cade wished he hadn't thought of Janice. On the other hand, there'd be no real reason for her to wait. She was young. She was lovely. She had her own way to make. Who did he think he was? Washed-up Sabrejet pilots were a dime a dozen.

The day continued clear and hot. By noon he was back in the ship lanes, then he lost four hours when his port engine, stiff and new, cut out again. The Gulf had turned a deep purple by the time he entered South Pass. It was dusk when he cleared Pilottown and almost dark when he cut his engines and nosed into the hyacinth-choked slip beside the rotting wooden pier in front of the old frame house in which he had been born.

Neither the house nor Bay Parish had changed, at least on the surface. The old house back of the levee was merely more neglected and weathered than it had been. There'd been some improvements on the levees and the jetties. A few more canals had been dug. There was a new name over the poolroom. The shrimp cannery had changed hands. Sal had bought a big red neon sign that spelled out—*FOOD AND DRINKS*. But, on the whole, Bay Parish was as he had left it.

An aged Negro fishing in the canal laid down his cane pole and came over to where Cade was making fast his lines. The old man was troubled. "Excusin' I say it, captain, but that's Cade Cain's landin'."

"Yeah. Sure," Cade grinned. "I know. And I hit it right on the head—all the way from Tokyo."

The old man peered through the gathering dusk. "Why, glory be. Hit's you!" He touched the brim of his hat and, his wrinkled face wreathed in a toothless smile, he hobbled up the grass-grown road to town, eager to be the first to spread the news that Colonel Cade Cain was back from the war.

Cade finished making fast. From here on in, he had it

made. He'd spent all his red-line and severance pay for the *Sea Bird*. He had just a five-dollar bill in his pocket. But there was food for the taking. The marshes and bayous and reefs were loaded with wild rice, ducks, shrimp, oysters. There was no better fishing anywhere. One party of sports a week would pay for his gas. All he had to do now was live.

The boat fast, Cade realized he was hungry. He lighted the pressure lantern in the galley and opened a can of beans and got out a loaf of bread. The first spoonful of cold beans gagged him. He didn't want beans and baker's bread. He wanted a drink of orange wine. He wanted some fresh fried roe and a tomato-and-onion omelette. With hot garlic bread, the way Nicolene Salvatore fixed it. And maybe a mess of frog legs to follow. Cade's mouth watered at the thought. He could worry about money in the morning. He wasn't going anywhere. He'd been.

He put on a clean shirt and sneakers and pants and walked up the grass-carpeted road. He could smell orange-blossoms and fish, oakum and fresh paint and the sweet-sour fragrance of the tide flats. Cade filled his lungs with air and held it. Jesus Christ, it was good to be home, he thought reverently.

He passed a group of giggling teen-aged girls. All of them looked after him, but none of them knew him. They'd been babies when he had left. Old man Dobraviche was standing in front of the poolroom. The retired river pilot insisted on shaking hands. "Welcome home, boy," he said warmly.

Cade smiled.

The news that he was back had spread. A dozen other men stopped him to say they were glad he was home. Miss Spence, the postmistress, kissed him.

Cade's glow continued to grow. It was nice to be liked, to be wanted. If Janice hadn't been such a greedy little bitch, she could have made his homecoming complete. Final divorce papers were a hell of a first-night bed partner when a man had been in a POW camp for two years. Still, Janice wouldn't have liked Bay Parish.

Salvatore's smelled familiar, of good food and orange wine and beer. Only the neon sign was new. The barroom was, as always, blue with smoke and crowded with fisher-

and oyster-men and truck farmers and grove owners.

A chorus of shy "Hi Cade," and "Welcome home" greeted him. Cade, suddenly shy in turn, returned the greetings and sat in one of the booths against the wall. His throat felt strained. His lips ached from grinning. Being home was going to take some getting used to.

Sal was especially glad to see him. His teeth white against his swart face, the big Portuguese brought a quart of orange wine from the bar and set it and a glass in front of Cade. "It's nice to have you back. Tonight the eats and drinks are on the house. It's been some time."

"Twelve years."

"So Mamma and I were figuring. These last two, pretty bad, hey?"

"They weren't too good."

Salvatore was sympathetic. "Yeah. We figured that. And we were tickled, believe me, when we saw your name on the list of released prisoners. Now you're through with this flying business?"

"So the Air Force says."

Sal squeezed Cade's arm. "Good—good! Now let Mamma make you some dinner. Say, fresh fried roe. A nice tomato-and-onion omelette. With garlic bread. And then a big plate of crisp fried saddles in batter."

Some of the strained feeling left Cade's throat. "You must be reading my mind."

Salvatore's booming laughter filled the bar. "I remember, hey? Once a good customer by Sal's, Sal always remembers."

He strode off to the kitchen to give the order to mamma. Cade sipped at the orange wine. It was as good as he'd remembered it. He drank the wine and refilled the glass. As he set the bottle back on the scarred table, something cut off most of the light in the booth and he looked up to see Joe Laval and the Squid standing in front of the table. Neither man had changed. They were just the same, only twelve years older. The gaunt Cajun sheriff still looked like a weasel. His deputy had been well named. The Squid was still mostly doughy white face and massive arms.

"Just come in from outside, huh?" Laval asked.

Cade sipped at the wine he'd poured. "That's right."

"By which pass?"

"South Pass."

"Come straight from where?"

"From Corpus."

"On compass all the way?"

The question irritated Cade. He considered telling Laval it was none of his business, but he didn't want any trouble on his first night home. It could be Laval had a good reason for asking. "I got a little off course," Cade admitted. "A spot of engine trouble."

"Near where?"

Cade took a cigarette from the package in his shirt pocket and palmed it into his mouth. He'd never liked Joe Laval. Twelve years of absence hadn't made him any fonder. He wondered if Joe was still bird-dogging for Tocko Kalavitch. It would be like Tocko to maroon six men rather than risk taking a fall. Cade ran a finger across his hairline mustache. "Why all the questions?"

"I've a reason," Laval said. "Where did you break down?"

Cade watched the other man's face as he answered, "Not far from the big south mud lump. In fact, I almost grounded on it in the dark."

Laval waited for him to continue. When he didn't, the thin-faced man exhaled slowly, almost as if he'd been holding his breath. "Oh," he said, "I see." He straightened the collar of his crumpled white linen suit. "Let's take a little walk, huh, Cade?"

"Why?" Cade asked, flatly.

"Tocko wants to welcome you home."

Cade thought of the suave Slavonian as he'd seen him last. If there was anyone in Bay Parish he liked less than Joe Laval, it was Tocko Kalavitch. There was nothing Tocko hadn't done, or wouldn't do, for money. His shrimp trawlers and his oyster fleet always showed a profit.

Cade shook his head. "The back of my hand to Tocko."

Laval smiled without mirth. "A big-shot colonel, huh? A hero. Or maybe not such a hero. While the other men you went over with were still dog-fighting all over Mig Alley, you were sitting it out on the ground, shot down over the Yalu."

Cade choked back a hot retort. He didn't want any trouble with Laval. He wished the other man would go away.

Laval stepped away from the table. "Okay. Bring him outside, Squid. And hurry up about it."

Cade tried to avoid the Squid's hand. It lifted him out of the booth like a drag-line and hurled him across the barroom and into the juke box so hard that the instrument stopped playing.

Salvatore came out of the kitchen. "Here. What the hell?" he asked.

"You keep out of this, Sal," Laval said.

The silence that followed reminded Cade of the silence over big south mud lump. None of the dark-complexioned men at the bar or in the booths, most of them of Montenegrin and Serbian and Dalmatian and Slavonian ancestry, attempted to interfere. In Bay Parish, a man fought his own battles and scrupulously minded his own business.

Moving fast for so large a man, the Squid followed up his advantage, smashing hard rights and lefts against Cade's face and body. "You come outside?"

Cade tried to fight back but pounding on the Squid was like beating on a brick wall. His breath rasped in his throat. Blood filled his mouth and choked him. Cade spat it out and backed away, feeling for a weapon. "You bastards," he panted. "If I had a gun I'd kill you both."

Laval continued to smile without mirth. "Why all the fuss? All we want is to talk to you."

Cade's groping hand encountered a chair. He smashed the chair on the floor, snatched up one of the legs and brought it down on the Squid's head.

The Squid's scream was thin and haunting—like a woman screaming in ecstasy. One of his big hands moved forward, almost gently. Then all the lights in Sal's went out and Cade felt himself falling through space.

2 *Dark Mermaid*

From where he lay, his battered face pressed to the soft mud of the levee, Cade could hear familiar night noises; the thud of colliding driftwood logs, the troubled squeak of floating hyacinth bulbs rubbing together, the sigh of unseen grasses being fondled by the wind. Farther out, where the current surged toward the forking of the passes, the ceaseless din of the river.

Cade raised himself on one elbow. He'd wanted to come home. He had. He felt his face with muddy fingers. His nose was swollen. A flap of flesh hung down under one eye. His other eye was swollen almost shut. The Squid had done a good job on him.

He lay thinking back to the beating in Sal's. He remembered hitting the Squid with a chair leg. He remembered hearing the Squid scream. Then all the lights had gone out and when he'd come to again, he'd been standing in the ankle-deep mud of the levee with the Squid supporting him and Laval's thin face only inches from his. He could still hear Laval's tense voice.

"Cast off, Cade," Laval had warned him. "Get out of the Delta. Go on up the river to New Orleans or back to Corpus. But be gone by tomorrow noon. If you aren't, Tocko says to let Squid go all the way."

The thought made Cade sick. He lost the wine he'd drunk, then returned his torn cheek to the mud.

There ought to be a law. There was.

But why? What had he done to Joe Laval? What had he done to Tocko? Why should they be afraid of him?

The freshening wind was off the Gulf. There was the usual bustle on deck as a ship dropped anchor at Quarantine. Cade listened to the creaking of winches, the shouted orders which were carried to him by the wind. Farther out in the river, holding for South Pass, the running lights of a steamer were visible, a steamer bound outside for Martinique, Honduras, Rio, Buenos Aires. It could be bound anywhere.

Cade fought down a desire to be on her. He *liked* being where he was. Bay Parish had been home to eight generations of Cains, ever since a curious Kentucky flatboatman had wondered where the Mississippi went after it coiled past New Orleans. He had fallen in love with and bedded an olive-skinned Baratarian wench reputed to be kin to Jean LaFitte.

Cade, with an effort, turned on his back and fumbled his cigarettes from a shirt pocket. One thing was certain. Nobody was going to run him off the river—not after all the trouble he'd gone to getting home.

He put a cigarette into his mouth and lighted it. The beating didn't make sense. He hadn't done anything to Tocko or Laval. He hadn't even seen either man for twelve years. So six aliens had been marooned on south mud lump. It wasn't the first time. It wouldn't be the last.

Cade sat up in the mud. Most of his nausea was gone. The pain had lessened. He got to his feet and lurched down the levee toward the old frame house where he had been born. Weeds had taken the fence. The gate was hanging by one hinge. He tried the front door and found it locked. In the mood he was in, the old house depressed him. He'd open it up and air it out in the morning. He might even sell it. A single man had no need for a house.

He climbed the levee again. With the exception of the smear of yellow light spilling out of Sal's, the business section of the town was dark. The juke box had been repaired. It was playing *Jambalaya*. Cade stood sucking his sodden cigarette, debating going back and asking Salvatore if he knew what was eating Joe Laval and Tocko. But even if the Portuguese knew, Cade doubted that he

would tell. Minding one's own business was a fetish in Bay Parish.

He'd see Tocko himself in the morning, Cade decided. He'd go directly to the brass. His fingers were bruised from beating on the Squid. His cigarette slipped from them into the mud. He ground it out with one heel and started out on the pier and stopped, every tensed muscle in his body aching as a darker blob of black moved out of the night to bar his way.

It wasn't easy for the Squid to talk. His voice sounded thin and unsuited to his bulk.

"You goin' to leave like Joe tol' you?" he asked.

Cade tried to see the big deputy's face. "What's it all about, Squid? Why has Tocko got his knife in me?"

The Squid's smile was sly. "I ast you first. You goin' t' stay or shove off?"

Cade considered his answer. He was in no condition to take another beating. "I've until tomorrow to decide that."

The Squid's head, like his voice, was too small for his body. He bobbed it as he agreed. "Joe said until tomorrow noon." He sucked in his breath as he raised a big hand and ran it lightly over Cade's body. When he spoke, his thin voice was plaintive. "Don't go. Please."

Cade backed a step, embarrassed. The touch of the Squid's hand made his flesh creep. The Squid liked to know and give pain. Due to some flaw in his biochemistry, to the Squid pain was a woman. Cade sidestepped the big man and walked out on the rotting pier.

Light from the pressure lantern he'd forgotten to turn off flooded the cockpit. Cade jumped down into the boat, then turned and looked back down the pier. The Squid had blended with the night and the silence. In the thin moonlight mingling with the first of the fog rolling in off the river, the frame houses behind the levee and the unlighted business section of Bay Parish looked distorted and unreal, imbued with all the qualities of a nightmare.

Old man Dobraviche had shaken his hand. A dozen men had welcomed him home. Miss Spence, the postmistress, had kissed him. Sal had said the drinks and eats were on the house. The attack on him didn't make sense.

Inside the cabin aft, Cade studied his face in the mirror he used for shaving. It was bad but it would heal. He'd

been hurt worse. He cleaned the wounds as best he could and painted them with merthiolate. Then reshaping his nose with his fingers, he bound it and the torn flap of flesh under his eyes with waterproof adhesive tape.

The mud had soaked through his clean shirt and pants. He stripped them and his sneakers off and lowered himself overside by the rope hanging over the transom.

The cold water felt good on his bruised body but the hyacinth bulbs clogging the slip were so many slimy little snakes with hands. Still clinging to the rope, Cade washed the mud from his body and pulled himself back into the cockpit and dried with a coarse towel.

There was a bottle half full of rum in the galley. He drank from it and put it back. Dumping the contents of one of his duffle bags on a bunk, he picked a .38-calibered Colt automatic from the mound of crumpled clothes and personal possessions and laid it aside before putting on clean dungarees and a skivy.

The uniform he had bought in Tokyo was in the bag. The silver maple leaves on the shoulders of the tunic looked strange and out of place in the cabin of a fishing cruiser. Cade made a mental note to get a mothproof bag in which to hang the uniform. It could be he had made a wrong guess on how to spend the rest of his life. It could be that in a few months he would be banging on doors back at Nellis, trying to get some flight surgeon to re-certify him for duty. What the hell. He was only thirty-two. Once his nerves stopped jumping and he'd put on a few pounds, he could still fly a lot of jet. Maybe it had been a mistake—this business of coming home. Maybe he'd been airborne so long, he was out of place in any other element.

Cade turned down the pressure lantern and stuffed the pistol in the waistband of his dungarees. If Joe Laval and Tocko were as anxious to get him off the river as they seemed to be, perhaps the noon deadline was just a feint. A few slashes with a sharp knife and he wouldn't have any cruiser. He might as well be back in a POW camp, dreaming about the boat he was going to buy if he ever got out of where he was.

A wry smile twisted his lips. Sure. He had it made. From here on in, all he had to do was live.

He made certain the lines to the creosoted pilings were fast, and walked back down the pier and sat with his back against an upturned flat-bottomed skiff that had been pulled up on the levee.

The wind died but the night remained cool. Cade wished he'd brought the bottle of rum with him. He wished he'd brought the loaf of bread and the can of beans. He wished he knew where Janice had gone after she'd divorced him. The least she could have done was to have waited to say goodbye.

"Good luck, soldier. It was nice knowing you."

He wanted a drink. He wanted a smoke. He wanted a woman. He wanted to know why Laval was throwing off on him. The lean-faced Cajun had said:

"A big-shot colonel, huh? A hero. Or maybe not such a hero. While the other men you went over with were still dog-fighting all over Mig Alley, you were sitting it out on the ground, shot down over the Yalu."

The shaven hairs on the back of Cade's neck tingled. That louse Laval.

On the far side of the river, in one of the oyster camps rising on poles out of the mounds of shells that had accumulated through the years, a hound pointed his muzzle at the waning moon and howled. His eyes troubled, Cade got to his feet and stretched, then swiveled his head stiffly as a faint splash in the slip attracted his attention.

A swimmer, attempting to be quiet, was pushing through the bulbs, stopping now and then to tread water, gasping for air, before moving on. Cade drew the pistol from his waistband and stood watching the phosphorescent ripple.

Now the swimmer was gone from sight. Cade could hear panting on the far side of the levee, a hoarse, almost animal gasping clearly audible in the still air.

A small head and a pair of slim shoulders showed over the levee, silhouetted vaguely against the dying moon. Cade started to call out and changed his mind. He wanted to know, he had to know, what the swimmer intended to do.

The small figure on the levee stood a moment listening to the music escaping with the yellow light from Sal's

door, then looked at the dimly lighted cruiser surging at her ropes.

Now the figure was moving again, slowly, out on the pier, stooping low as if to keep from being seen by anyone aboard the boat. Now he was looking in through the ports, trying to ascertain if there was anyone in either the fore or aft cabin. Satisfied that no one was aboard, the newcomer jumped down into the cockpit and entered the after cabin. The door closed behind him.

Cade was grimly amused. The pistol ready in his hand, he walked out on the pier, glancing over his shoulder from time to time to make certain he wasn't being trapped between two fires.

At the transom of the cruiser he paused, then eased himself into the cockpit. Even for Joe Laval's limited imagination, the trap was crude. Whoever Laval and Tocko had sent to gun or knife him, instead of being quiet and waiting, was making himself at home, opening lockers, moving swiftly from one side of the cabin to the other.

Cade eased forward the last few feet and yanked the door of the cabin open. "All right," he said, quietly. "Let's have it. What the goddamn—"

His voice stuck like a pair of jammed landing wheels. The swimmer wasn't a man. It was a girl. Standing in the center of the cabin, her wet hair plastered to her well-shaped head and only two wisps of wet lace to keep her from being as naked as the day she'd been born. A big-eyed black-haired girl in her late teens or early twenties who was toweling vigorously with one hand while she spooned beans into her mouth with the other.

As he spoke she held the towel in front of her and began to cry without sound.

3 *The Fugitive*

Cade leaned against the jamb of the door, studying the girl. She was exotic rather than pretty. Her cheekbones were high and pronounced, with the cheeks under them slightly hollowed. Her bare shoulders and legs were the color and texture of rich cream. Her eyes and her hair were black with red highlights glinting in her hair. She looked like classic Castilian, with perhaps a dash of the Celtic blood with which so many South American races were spiced.

"And who are you?" Cade asked.

The girl tried to speak -and couldn't. She was too frightened.

Cade tried again. "Where did you come from?"

As the girl pointed toward the river, the towel slipped. She blushed and quickly retrieved it.

"Yes, I know that," Cade said. "I saw you. You live here in Bay Parish?"

She shook her wet head. "No."

The word had a faintly foreign sound to it.

"You're off a boat then?"

The girl bobbed her head.

"A ship? A steamer? The one that just dropped anchor an hour or so ago?"

"Yes," the girl said distinctly.

Cade realized that standing in the open doorway of the lighted cabin as he was, he was a perfect target for anyone

on the levee. He stepped inside and closed the door behind him.

The girl clutched the towel closer to her. The well-cared for fingers of one hand caught at her throat in apprehension. Cade leaned against the door. "Why swim off? And having swum off, why pick my boat?"

The girl's hand left her throat, as she gestured in the general direction of the music still coming from Sal's place.

"You thought I would be in the *cantina*?"

"Yes."

Cade realized her teeth were chattering and that the portions of creamy flesh he could see were covered with cold pimples. He looked for something warm and all he could see was his uniform tunic. He picked it from the bunk and handed it to the girl. "Put this on."

She touched one of the silver maple leaves and some of her fright seemed to leave her. "Officer? You are officer?" she asked earnestly. Her intonation was definitely foreign.

"Ex," Cade said curtly.

The girl turned her back and the towel dropped to her bare feet, as she struggled into the coat. When she turned again, it was all Cade could do to keep from sweeping her into his arms. He'd never seen anything cuter. She'd done something to her wet hair. His top pockets had never been better filled. The skirt of the coat came halfway down the girl's thighs. She looked like an animated pin-up picture by Varga.

She tried to smile. "*Gracias!*"

"Colombian?" Cade asked her.

"Venezuelan," she corrected.

To keep from making a fool of himself and possibly getting his face slapped, Cade took the bottle of rum from the locker and handed it to the girl. "Here. Take a drink of this. Then maybe you can stop shivering long enough to make sense."

The girl drank without pleasure and returned the bottle. "*Gracias.*"

Cade sat on the littered bunk, holding the bottle in his hand. "All right. Let's have it. You swam ashore and picked my boat to warm up in and grab some food and maybe a few clothes, because you thought I was in the

cantina. Now you go on from there. Why didn't you come ashore in one of the ship's boats or in the pilot tender?"

The girl spoke distinctly, choosing her words with care. "Because they do not know I am on the ship. Because I am—" she stopped, puzzled. "How you say when you not pay the passage?"

"A stowaway?"

"Sí."

"You stowed away, where? In what port?"

"The port of La Guaira. I am from Caracas."

Cade was incredulous. "And none of the crew spotted you between there and here?"

The girl shook her head. "No." She had the charm of making everything she said sound dramatic. "For six days I am in a lifeboat, over-covered with canvas. I bribe a steward for food." She looked at the open can of beans. "Is not nice to be 'ungry. I am 'ungry now."

"I'll string along with that," Cade said. He took himself a drink of rum. "Okay. We're up to Caracas. Why did you stow away?"

The girl moved his clean clothes aside and sat on the bunk opposite him. "Because I do not have the money or the passport and I want to come to the States. I *have* to come to the United States. And when I get here, I know they will not let me in. So when the boat stopped out in the river, I slide down a rope in the dark and swim to the shore." She added earnestly, "It was a long way an' I was ver' afraid."

Cade brought himself another drink. He wished the girl would button the top button of his tunic or stop leaning forward when she talked. Wet and muddy and frightened as she was, she was one of the most attractive girls he had ever seen. That included Janice. Just looking at her excited him. He put the cork back in the rum bottle. "What's your name?"

"Mimi," she said, gravely, "Mimi Trujillo Esterpar Moran."

It was snug in the cabin with the door closed. The rum lay warm in Cade's empty stomach. He was pleased by his own sagacity. "That Moran sounds like it might be Irish."

Mimi smiled. "It is."

Cade got up and opened the cabin door. The fog was heavy now and blotted out the levee. The juke box in Sal's was still playing *Jambalaya*. As far as he could tell, there was no one watching on the pier. It could be he'd gotten his wind up over nothing. Warning him off the river and making sure he left were two entirely different things. Not even Joe Laval or Tocko could explain cut mooring lines or a dead man. Especially when the dead man was a local boy and former Army officer.

Behind him, Mimi's voice sounded worried. "Someone saw me swim ashore? Someone is looking for me?"

"No," Cade said.

He closed the door and leaned against it, staring at the girl on his bunk. She didn't look like any waterfront tramp he'd ever met. She looked like a nice kid from a good family. More, she had guts to do what she'd done. So he hadn't been with a woman in two years. He was damned if he'd force himself on her just because she had fallen into his lap. If anything should eventuate it would have to start with her, after he'd heard the rest of her story.

"I am so 'ungry," Mimi said.

Cade pumped up the pressure stove in the galley and lighted all three burners. He examined the meager ship's stores he'd purchased before putting out of Corpus Christi and decided on cream of mushroom soup, canned corned-beef hash and coffee. He put the cans on the small work table and found Mimi fingering the silver leaf on her shoulder.

"Colonel," she smiled at him.

"Ex," Cade reminded her.

She touched his wings. "And flyer."

Cade picked a clean shirt and a pair of new white duck pants from the litter of clothes on the bunk and laid them on her lap. "Put these on," he said gruffly. He opened the door of the forecabin and lighted a small lantern. "In here."

Mimi stood up dutifully.

Cade looked at a smear of levee mud on one small cheek. "You'd better wash that mud off. I'll get you a bucket of water while you peel."

Mimi was worried, "Peel?"

"While you take off your clothes," Cade explained. He picked up a bucket attached to a length of quarter-inch nylon line.

Mimi was relieved. "Oh," she smiled, "for wash."

Out in the open cockpit, Cade lowered the bucket over-side. The dog on the far bank of the river was still howling. As he hauled up the filled bucket, there was a clanging of ship's bells in the channel and the steamer he'd seen drop anchor earlier, the ship Mimi must have come from, began to move up river through the fog.

The door of the forecabin was closed. He rapped on it and Mimi opened the door a crack and reached out with a bare arm and shoulder for the bucket, smiling, "*Gracias*. Thank you ver' much."

Cade was relieved when she'd closed the door. He made coffee, then added water to the canned soup and put it and the hash to warm. The rum in the bottle was gone. He sucked the last few drops and pushed the empty bottle out the open port over the sink.

The things that could happen to a man.

He set the small table, debated a moment and broke out a bottle of port and two glasses.. A small glass of wine never hurt anyone—unless the Squid worked him over afterwards. Even under the thin layer of rum, Cade could taste the orange wine he'd drunk in Sal's.

Damn the Squid. Cade felt the butt of the gun in his waistband. The Squid wanted to have a good time. The Squid didn't want him to leave. He'd do what he could to please the Squid. The next time they tangled, he'd be prepared. He'd kiss him all over his pointed head with the barrel of the .38.

The watched soup finally came to a boil. Cade turned off the burner and rapped on the forecabin door. "Okay. Come and get it."

Mimi opened the door, still smiling. She looked even more fetching than before. She'd braided her wet hair and coiled it around her head. The top two buttons of her borrowed shirt were open and she had discarded the wisp of wet lace. The white pants were tight to the point of bursting around her rounded hips. "Okay, I know," she said, "but what is this, come and get it?"

Cade forced himself to look away from her. "Just what

it sounds like. Sit down. Soup's on the table."

He looked back, as she touched the adhesive tape on his cheek and nose with feather light fingertips. "Someone has hurt you. You have been in the fight."

Cade wished she hadn't touched him. "Yeah. Something like that." He sat across from her. "Okay. You said you were hungry. Eat."

The table was narrow. The benches were close together, so that their knees brushed as they ate. The cabin was small and intimate. What might happen tomorrow was a hundred years away. Cade poured two glasses of wine. It was nice sitting across the table from a pretty girl again.

He raised his glass to the girl across the table. "To strangers that met in the night."

She touched his glass with hers. "*Saludos!*"

He drank his wine. She sipped at hers and spooned her soup away from her, eating rapidly but daintily. She wasn't a tramp. Hungry as she was, her table manners were perfection.

Finished with her soup, she smiled. "You are being ver' kind and ver' gallant."

Cade tried to eat and couldn't. It wasn't food he wanted. He wanted love and companionship and someone warm and soft in his arms. He'd lived with men so long, bitter and angry men, in an alien land. "What could I do?" he asked. "Throw you off the boat? Put you back on the levee in nothing but a pair of sheer scanties and a bra?"

Mimi met his eyes. "You know what I mean."

A long moment of silence followed, relieved only by the creak of the mooring ropes and the faint swish of the water in the bilge. A new feeling, a feeling of strain, filled the cabin. Cade refilled the girl's glass. She liked him. He was affecting her just as she was affecting him. Under her calm exterior, she was as excited by the night and their mutual closeness as he was. He could tell by the beat of the pulse in her throat, the way she looked at him from time to time.

"All right. Let's go on with the story," he said. "You had no money and no passport."

"No."

"But you wanted to come to the States. You *had* to come to the States?"

"Si."

"Why?"

Mimi ran the tip of a pink tongue across her full lips.

"Why?" Cade repeated. "Let's have it. Being as pretty as you are, you could have been, well, let's say you could have had a bad six days between here and La Guaira, if one or more of the crew had happened to discover you and failed to report you to the captain. Or you might have been drowned swimming ashore. Or I might have been a heel. I still might be, for all you know."

Although the hips of the white pants fit snugly, the legs were loose. Mimi thrust out her right leg and pulled up the leg of the borrowed pants to disclose a small but efficient looking knife strapped high on the inside of her cream-colored thigh.

"So you have a knife," Cade said. "Why have you taken the chances you have?"

"To find Captain Moran."

The name meant nothing to Cade. "What's this Moran to you?"

Mimi's Latin accent was more pronounced this time. "My 'usband. We were married in Caracas almost a year ago." Her voice barely audible, she continued, "When my family find out, they were ver', how you say, *irritado!*" She found the word she wanted. "Angry. We are ver' ol' family. They did not like I should marry foreigner." Her lower lip thrust out in a sullen pout. "I am not so pleased myself."

"Why?"

"He was supposed to send for me, but he did not. That is why I stow away, to come to him."

Realizing the leg of her pants was still pulled high on her thigh, Mimi blushed and rolled down the leg.

Cade returned his eyes to her face. Of-course. She had told him her name—Mimi Trujillo Esterpar Moran, and he had kidded her about the Moran sounding Irish. For some reason the thought of any other man having had Mimi made him furious. He asked, "How long were you together?"

Mimi said, "One week. Just the week he was in Caracas."

"He hasn't been back since? That is, to Caracas?"

Mimi continued to pout. "No."

"He was Army?"

Mimi's smile was small. "A flyer. Just like you. He was on what you call mission." She accented the *on* in mission.

It was an effort for Cade to talk. "Where in the States is he stationed?"

The black-haired girl shook her head. "That I do not know. I 'ave not heard from him since he left Caracas. But I 'ave written many letters, here. To the adress he gave me—Captain James Moran, Bay Parish, Louisiana, in care of one Tocko Kalavitch. That is why I stowed away in the boat that I did." She seemed to be trying to convince herself. "And in the morning I will find him."

"Yeah. Sure. Maybe." Cade said.

If there were a Moran in Bay Parish, the man was new since his time. He didn't know any Morans on the river. There were Morgans and Monroes and Moores and Mooneys. There was even a Serbian family that had changed its name to Morton, but he didn't know any Morans. Cade felt deflated, let down. He poured more wine in his glass, wishing it were rum, wishing he had a case of rum. It would seem that the wrong people always got together.

The things that could happen to a man.

First, Janice.

Then the Squid.

Now this.

"More wine?" he asked Mimi.

"No, thank you," she said, primly.

He looked at her. And now the thought he had been keeping buried within him struggled to the surface. After all, why shouldn't he just dump her in the river? Probably her whole outlandish story was a lie. Probably she was just a plant, an emissary of Tocko and Company, intending some trick to do him damage once her disarming presence had lowered his guard. Cade lighted a cigarette. Well, he'd play along with her a while. He didn't want to believe the worst of her. But he'd keep his guard high.

It was, all things considered, Cade decided, one hell of a homecoming.

4 *The Glass Wall*

Morning dawned warm and familiar. Cade lay long moments after he'd been awakened, listening to the din of the river on one side and to the twittering of the birds on the other—thrushes, mocking birds and crested cardinals in the leafy trees rising out of the rich Delta mud back of the levee.

There had been no birds in Pyongyang. There'd been a complete lack of a lot of things in Pyongyang. As Cade lighted his first cigarette of the day, he looked at the closed door of the forecabin.

Mimi was cute. She was sweet. He liked her. But he wished the hell she had stayed in Caracas. He had enough problems of his own without having to worry about someone's abandoned bride. From where he lay, it looked like a hit-and-run to him.

Some smart punk forced down on a training mission had seen a way to spend a delightful week-end. It could be that, but Cade was fair. He could be doing Moran an injustice. If the guy were a jet pilot, and he probably was, he could be anywhere by now, all wrapped up in "Security." According to what he'd heard on the coast, the big brass was shipping the boys out of Nellis about as soon as they were able to read a cockpit panel and do a power dive on a ground target without losing their heads and pulling out so fast they caught a bad case of stick reversal and skip-

hopped a Sabrejet over two miles of sand and sage to wind up "an unavoidable training fatality."

It didn't seem right that any man in his right mind, not under orders, would willingly walk out on a girl like Mimi.

Cade wished he'd bought a larger boat, a boat with two heads. No matter how big a boat a man bought, he always needed a bigger one. The head was in the prow. To reach it he would have to pass through the forecabin.

Cade swung his bare feet to the floor and cracked the forecabin door. Exhausted by her experience and the long swim, Mimi was still sleeping soundly. Her borrowed pants and shirt lay folded neatly on the starboard bunk. The sheet with which she'd covered herself had been too warm and she'd pushed it down until only her feet were covered. The small knife strapped to the creamy flesh of her thigh looked out of place, like some obscene foreign growth that had attached itself to her natural beauty.

"No man in his right mind," Cade said to himself.

He closed the door as noiselessly as he had opened it and, padding out into the open cockpit, he used the fog-dappled Mississippi for his purpose. The fog was lifting rapidly. Early as it was, smoke was emerging from the chimneys of the houses. A half-dozen white and colored fishermen were sitting on the banks of the canals and on the levee angling for their breakfasts.

Cade tried to remember how long it had been since he had eaten hard-fried bream and hot corn bread for breakfast. He looked at the useless, heavy, deep-sea rods and reels racked in their cases beside the wheel. He should have brought a cane pole, a few feet of cheap fish line and a handful of .00 hooks.

He got his sneakers and pants from the cabin aft, took the automatic pistol from under his pillow and thrust it into the right hip pocket of his dungarees. If Joe Laval and Tocko thought they were going to run him off the river, they were out of their minds. This was home. He liked it here.

As he walked down the pier, a sleek thirty-two-foot guide boat put out from a basin, new since he'd been away, not far from the pilot boat landing. Cade could see five or six more boats in the basin, all apparently guide boats, all equipped with ship-to-shore telephone antennae.

He wondered if Tocko had added a fleet of charter boats to his various interests. If so, it could explain Laval's actions. He and Tocko would resent a new boat on the river, would begrudge someone else the right to make a dime. Still, that didn't seem reasonable. If Tocko Kalavitch had fifty guide boats, they'd be only a drop in the bucket compared to the earnings of his shrimp trawlers and oyster fleet.

Anyway Cade looked at it, his welcome-home beating didn't make sense. He reviewed what had happened for the twentieth time. Laval had said that Tocko wanted to see him. He'd said he didn't want to see Tocko, and Laval had turned the Squid loose. Cade looked at his watch. Five minutes of seven. Tocko should be in his office by nine. Cade meant to be there shortly after the other man arrived.

He walked down the path to the old Cain house. It wasn't as weathered-looking by daylight as it had been at dusk-dark. There were good lines to the old house. It had been built with slave labor when lumber had been cheap. There were more square feet in the open gallery under the screened second-floor balcony than there were in the average modern three-bedroom house. Someone had cut the grass and pruned the grove that his great grandfather's father had set out. For being as old as they were, the trees were in fair condition. Cade lifted the sagging gate aside and stopped as he saw the freshly painted sign nailed to one of the fluted columns. It read—

FOR SALE
Tocko Kalavitch Enterprises

Cade leaned against the fence doing a slow burn. He hadn't commissioned Kalavitch to sell the house. He hadn't commissioned anyone to sell it. The original house had been in the Cain family over one hundred years. The coach house, reputed to be built of the heart oak of the flat boat belonging to the original Cain, must be even older.

The stinker, Cade thought, when I was reported missing, Tocko figured I'd never come back.

He smoked two cigarettes, just sitting on the fence,

looking at the old house, remembering the good times he'd had in it as a boy. All it needed was a clapboard replaced here and there and a couple of coats of paint and unless the river washed it away, as it nearly had on several occasions, countless more generations of Cains could live in it. The thought saddened Cade. *If* there would be more Cains. He was the last of his line. It could be he couldn't have children. At least he and Janice hadn't had any, although God knew, during the first year of their marriage, they had tried.

Cade felt baffled, frustrated. He'd never felt quite the same before. It was almost like trying to climb a glass wall. Thinking of Janice made him think of Mimi—and Mimi belonged to another man. She was Señora Trujillo Esteban James Moran. Cade hoped for a moment Moran had had a flame-out, then quickly retracted the wish. God forbid. It was bad enough just flying one of the sucker-mouthed gadget-cluttered bastards. Mimi was nothing to him. Her attraction was purely physical. He'd help her locate Moran if he could. Then he'd shake her hand and tell her goodbye. Cade felt the bulge in his hip pocket. But first he'd talk to Tocko. It should be an interesting conversation.

He climbed the levee and walked back out on the pier. Mimi was awake and up. He could see her in the cabin aft doing something in front of the stove. He jumped down into the cockpit. "Hi."

He was trying with all his might not to be suspicious of her. He didn't want to be suspicious.

Mimi cast him a hasty glance. "Good morning."

As she glanced away from the stove, the coffee she was making boiled over and the piece of forked bread she was holding over the big burner caught on fire. Mimi swore softly in Spanish, snatched the coffee-pot from the stove and extinguished the burning bread. Both were hot and she promptly put her fingers in her mouth.

Cade watched her, amused. Anyway a man looked at her, she was cute. She'd rolled up the legs of his pants to pedal-pusher length. Every time she stooped or turned he caught a tantalizing glimpse of rounded cream-colored flesh that made Marilyn Monroe's chief attractions look like she'd bought them second-hand at a war surplus sale.

"Don't you laugh," Mimi said hotly. She laid the piece of burned bread on a plate. "Because you were so ver' kind, I thought I would get the breakfast." She returned her attention to something she was stirring in a pan.

"Fine," Cade said.

He sat back of the small table, watching her, wishing she were Janice. The toast was charred. She'd used at least a half-pound of coffee to the pot. With some rare alchemic ability, she'd managed to mix and cook the powdered scrambled eggs to the same gooey consistency and shade of bilious green that countless army mess sergeants had spent years in achieving.

The black-haired girl brushed a wisp of damp curl from her perspiring forehead. "Well, as you say, come an' get it." She studied the meal she'd concocted. "I am afraid I am not so good the cook, no?"

"It's fine, just fine," Cade said. To spare her feelings he ate a forkful of the eggs and washed it down with a sip of bitter coffee. Surprisingly, when Mimi smiled, the eggs and the coffee tasted good.

Mimi explained, "Is just I am not ever do it before. In Venezuela it is different. In Venezuela no lady cooks."

Cade bit into a piece of charred toast. "Your family has money, hey?"

Mimi shrugged her shoulders. "In Venezuela ever'one has servants."

Except the Indians and mestizos, Cade thought. He asked, "What are you going to do if you can't locate Moran? Write your family for dough and go home?" He translated. "Dough, money, bolivars."

A worried look replaced Mimi's puzzled frown. "They would not send it if I did. They regused to give me money to come here." She shook her head emphatically. "No. Now I can nevair go home. My father, he is ver' proud. I am, how your say, make my bed."

And a very pretty bed, Cade thought. Aloud he said, "Then I hope you locate Moran. You're too pretty to be turned loose on your own."

Mimi was pleased. She put the fingers of one hand to the back of her head and thrust out her chest in an entirely feminine gesture. "You think I am pretty?"

Cade resisted an impulse to suck in his breath. "You get by."

When they'd finished breakfast, he dried and put away while she washed the few dishes they'd used. It was a homey, domestic moment. Cade enjoyed it. He enjoyed it very much but it deepened his resentment toward Janice. Everything could have been so wonderful.

The moment the galley had been made shipshape, Mimi wanted to go ashore. Cade explained, "But Tocko Kalavitch, the man in whose care you addressed your letters to your husband, doesn't arrive at his office until nine." He added, "Besides, try as hard as I can, I can't remember any Morans on this immediate stretch of the river."

Mimi eyed him suspiciously, "You are 'aving the fun."

"No, I mean it."

"You know this town?"

"Every inch of it. And every reef and marsh and inlet and island for a radius of fifty miles. It so happens that I was born here and lived here until I was eighteen."

"I don't believe you," Mimi said. "I mean that you don't know any Morans. You just don't want me to find Jeem."

Her lower lip thrust out in a pout, she sat in one of the fishing chairs, her small hands in her lap, looking up at Cain from time to time through quarter-inch-long black lashes.

"He *has* to be here."

"Okay. Maybe he's mayor," Cade said. "After all, I've been away twelve years."

At five minutes of nine, he examined the clip in his gun, returned the clip to the gun and fired a shot into the river to make certain the gun was working.

"Why you do that?" Mimi asked. "Why you carry a gun?"

"Just an old American custom. Especially down here in the Delta."

He walked with her up the road to town, wishing she was wearing a dress. She wobbled delightfully when she walked and the tight white pants emphasized the wobble.

"What did you do with your dress?"

Mimi told him, "I took it off, in the river. It was tight and not good for swim."

A dozen men and women he hadn't seen the night before stopped him to welcome him home. Whatever Laval and Tocko had to beef about, it was peculiar to them. Everyone else he'd met seemed genuinely pleased to see him.

Morning was hot and humid. He could smell the rich Delta mud and the green growing things sprouting in it. There was no other place in the world like it. He'd come home. He meant to stay.

As they walked up Main Street, Mimi laid a small hand on his arm.

"You have been away a long time?"

"Twelve years, I told you."

"Without once coming home?"

"That's right. You see, I stayed in the Army after the last big one, based at MacDill and Nellis and Langley jet fields. For the last two years, I've been sitting it out in a prisoner-of-war camp on the north side of the Yalu."

Mimi's fingers bit into his arm. "I'm sorry, so sorry."

It was nothing. Other folks had said they were sorry but the feel of her small fingers on his arm, the tone of the girl's voice, gave Cade a lift. If her man had been where he'd been, she would have been waiting for him, with the shades drawn and the cat put out, in her prettiest negligee, with a smile hovering between the tears on her cheeks. That was the kind of a girl she was.

Cade lighted a cigarette as he studied the outside of Tocko's new office. The one-story building was masonry and moderne, with a big picture window. The legend—*Tocko Kalavitch Enterprises*—was printed on it in gold leaf. He wasn't surprised to find the building air-conditioned. The receptionist was young and smartly dressed. The outer office was expensively furnished.

Bay Parish hadn't changed, but Tocko had. The swaggering river gunman and narcotic-and-alien runner of twelve years ago was gone. Tocko was big time now, a Delta man of distinction. His black hair had silvered at the temples. He was wearing a silk shantung suit that had cost him two hundred dollars. A heavy diamond glittered on

one of his fingers. As his smartly dressed young secretary ushered Cade and Mimi into his office, he stood up behind a glass-topped desk and extended a soft white hand.

"Welcome, Cade," he smiled. "I heard you came back last night on a new cruiser—that long. And I wanted to come down and tell you how happy I was to have you home but, unfortunately, I had to fly up to New Orleans on a little business."

Cade ignored the proffered hand. Kalavitch returned it to his side, unembarrassed, still smiling, at Mimi now. "And who is the charming young person? The new Mrs. Cain?"

Cade shook his head. "No. This is Mrs. James Moran. She is attempting to locate her husband, Captain James Moran, and it seems he gave his address as Bay Parish, in care of you."

"Oh, yes. Of course," Kalavitch nodded. "Jim Moran." He continued to smile at Mimi, his soft brown eyes picking at the third button on her borrowed white shirt. "He worked for me, for some months."

Her voice small, Mimi asked, "He is here now?"

Kalavitch shook his head. "To tell you the truth, I don't know where Jim is. You see, after he got out of the Army he worked for me as my personal pilot." Kalavitch laughed. "But I guess Bay Parish was too small and dull for him, so he moved on." Kalavitch was concerned. "He didn't give you his new address?"

Mimi shook her head. "No."

Kalavitch tried to be helpful. "Maybe Miss Spence, our postmistress, can give it to you. My secretary has been turning all the letters that come for Moran over to Miss Spence."

Mimi smiled. "And the post office is where?"

Cade wanted her out of the office before he had his talk with Tocko. "Back down the same street we walked up. In the middle of the block, between a poolroom and a hardware store. I'll meet you over there."

"As you say," Mimi smiled. She transferred her smile to the man behind the desk. "An' thank you ver' much, *señor*."

Kalavitch watched her out of the office. "Nice." He

looked back at Cade. "And now she's gone, what's eating on you?" He looked at his hand. "Is my hand dirty or what?"

Cade reached over the desk, caught Kalavitch by the coat lapels and smashed a hard right to the big man's mouth. "That's for last night. What's the big idea of Joe Laval turning the Squid loose on me?"

Kalavitch used his breast-pocket handkerchief to stopper the smear of blood trickling from one corner of his lip. "You're crazy. I don't know what you're talking about."

"You didn't send Laval and the Squid over to Sal's to ask me to come and see you?"

"No."

"You didn't have Laval warn me to be out of Bay Parish by noon or the Squid would really work me over?"

Kalavitch refolded his handkerchief. "No."

"I don't believe you," Cade said. "Another thing, how come you've got a 'for sale' sign on my house?"

"Your house?" Kalavitch smirked.

"You heard what I said."

Kalavitch shook his head. "But it isn't your house. It's mine. I thought, naturally, she had written you."

"Who had written me what?"

"Your wife, that is your ex-wife, the very blonde and very beautiful former Mrs. Cain."

Cade felt a hard lump form in the pit of his stomach. "Janice was here?"

Kalavitch rested the tips of his manicured fingers on top of his desk. "But of course. How else could I have bought the property? I trust it was perfectly legal? She had your power of attorney and claimed that you had given her the house and the acreage on Barataria Bay in lieu of a cash settlement in your impending divorce."

"I was in a POW camp when she divorced me."

"But she did have your power of attorney?"

"Yes. Yes, she did."

"Then it would seem that the sale was legal."

"You bought the acreage, too?"

Kalavitch shrugged. "But of course. She insisted. Why would I want any acreage in a godforsaken place like Barataria Bay?" He returned his handkerchief to his pocket. "Now I think you'd better go. Because you have

been through a lot, I will forgive you this one punch." He came out from behind his desk and opened the office door. "But I wouldn't try it again. Get out."

Cade hesitated, then turned and walked through the outer office to the street. Mimi was standing under the unpainted wooden marquee of the post office. Even at that distance, Cade could tell that she was crying.

Cade had a feeling he, in turn, was being watched, and not by Tocko. The still heat was suddenly oppressive and somehow sinister. Cade wished he had asked Tocko if Janice was still on the river.

Anyway she had been here and sold him out. Judy O'Grady had been a lady compared to the colonel's wife. Tocko had an eye for beauty. It could be the old house hadn't been all that Janice had sold. He didn't like the way Tocko had said, "the very blonde and very beautiful former Mrs. Cain."

Cade realized he was breathing through his mouth to spare his swollen nose. The gun in his hip pocket rasped the flesh under it. So he'd seen Tocko. He didn't know any more than he had when he'd come to on the levee, except that Janice had been in Bay Parish, perhaps was still on the river.

Cade leaned a hand against the building to steady himself. He felt light-headed. He felt as he had while sitting on the sagging fence looking at the old house, baffled, frustrated, as if he were trying to climb an opaque glass wall—with God knew what on the far side.

5 *Pursuit of Evil*

The sidewalk began to fill with early morning shoppers. A basket on one arm, her ample bulk corseted and encased in black bombazine, Mamma Salvatore paused on her way to market. The men in Bay Parish minded their own business. It was a fetish with them. The women weren't any different from women anywhere.

Mamma's big eyes studied Cade's nose and injured eye. "That Joe Laval. For shame what he did to your face." The fat woman was indignant. "In our place yet. He is no good, that Joe. You should take a gaff hook to him."

"I may do that," Cade said.

Mamma laid a plump hand on his arm. "For why they after you, Cade?"

"I don't know."

Mamma patted the arm on which her plump hand was resting. "Tonight you come back. Tonight I cook for you. And eef that son-of-a-beech of a Joe he tries for make any more trouble, eef Sal don't throw heem out, I weel."

Cade lighted a cigarette. "He's sheriff."

Mamma laughed into one of the flesh folds encircling her wrists like bracelets. "Ha."

Her dark eyes concerned, she started to say more, then changing her mind, repeated, "Tonight you come back," and walked on.

Cade watched her down the street. Mamma, too, wobbled, but her wobble was different from Mimi's. It was

more a side slip than a wobble. There was nothing exciting about Mamma's walk, except, perhaps, to Sal. Mamma Salvatore was built square in the stern and low to the water line, like an ocean-going tug. Cade had no doubt she could throw Joe Laval out of Sal's. If she wanted to exert herself, she could probably throw out the Squid, too. Nor was the law sacred to Mamma. There had been too many dark-of-the-moons in her life. She had helped Sal unload too many pirogues of rum and whiskey and tobacco that bore no excise stamps.

He laughed, and turned back to his own problem.

The cigarette smoke in his mouth tasted foul. His throat was constricted. So now he knew. He didn't own the old house any more. No future generations of Cains would ever live in it. Janice had been in Bay Parish and cleaned him. The hell of it was her sale of the various properties was entirely legal. Janice had been his wife at the time. She'd had his power of attorney.

The back of Cade's ears felt hot, as he wondered what Tocko had gotten for lagniappe and knew, even as he wondered. Tocko was a good businessman. He drove hard bargains. To Janice her sex was a lever, a club, a ladder. If Tocko had wanted her for lagniappe—and Tocko wanted every pretty girl he met—more than money had passed between them. That would explain the Slavonian's amused contempt and the concerned look in Mamma Salvatore's eyes. It even explained why Joe Laval had ordered him out of town by noon.

Tocko knew he would find out and Tocko didn't want any trouble with him.

His feeling of bitter frustration continued as Cade walked down the street in the shade of the wooden marquees overhanging the walk. What of Mimi? She was still waiting patiently with the resigned and often deceptive placidity of many Latin-American women. The oystermen, shrimpers and merchants calling for their mail all glanced at the girl admiringly as they entered the post office, then swiveled their heads on their necks and either gaped open-mouthed or sucked in their breath as their eyes patted her trim, white-duck-covered stern.

Cade had to be honest. He was no longer suspicious of Mimi, not at all. Mimi was like that. He hoped she had

located her husband. He didn't want her aboard the *Sea Bird* any longer than was necessary. First there was the noon deadline. Then there was the girl herself. His own stored-up hunger was a gnawing fire and every movement the girl made added fresh fuel to the flame. He couldn't blame the men of Bay Parish for looking at her. If only he'd married a girl like Mimi instead of one like Janice.

He walked on to where Mimi was waiting. "You got Moran's address?"

Mimi nodded, bright-eyed. "He is living in a hotel in New Orleans." She consulted a piece of paper in her hand. "The postmistress was so kind as to write down the address. Royal Crescent Hotel, on Royal Street."

Cade glanced at the piece of paper. He wasn't familiar with the hotel but from the address on Royal, it was in the old French quarter, not far from the Court of the Two Sisters.

Mimi parted her lips with the tip of a pink tongue. "How far ees New Orleans?"

Cade thought he knew what was coming. "About one-hundred miles by water. A little more than sixty by air."

The tip of Mimi's pink tongue continued to explore her lips. "Oh."

The gesture excited and irritated Cade. He said crossly, "Look. Get it out of your mind."

"Get what out?"

"That I'm going to take you to New Orleans."

"Did I ask you?"

"See, I can't. I haven't the gas, for one thing. For another, I doubt very much if your husband would appreciate your showing up with some other man, especially in that outfit."

Mimi's eyes slitted. "He would be jealous?"

"Yes."

"After he hasn't even written for a year, hasn't answered my letters?"

"Then why are you so anxious to find him?"

"He ees my husband."

Cade's irritation increased. "I'm sorry, Mimi, but you're going to have to get to New Orleans some other way."

To end the pointless conversation, he entered the post

office to see if any mail had been forwarded from Corpus Christi. More men welcomed him home. Miss Spence peered out through her wicket, then opened the door that led into her living quarters just behind the post office. "Would you come back here a moment, Cade?" she asked. "I want to talk to you."

Cade thought he knew what Miss Spence wanted to tell him. To the ageless maiden lady there were no shades of gray. Men and women were good or they were bad. Miss Spence intended to tell him what everybody else in Bay Parish knew.

The small living room, with its crossed Confederate battle flags on one wall, brought a nostalgic memory of childhood. The room smelled faintly of lavender. The old what-not, filled with the treasured accumulation of years, still stood in one corner.

Miss Spence closed her wicket and joined him. "Hmm. You look a little different than you did last evening."

Cade grinned at her. "Just a minor difference of opinion."

"A quarrel? With whom?"

"Joe Laval and the Squid."

Miss Spence sat on the black leather sofa and arranged her skirts so her ankles were modestly covered. "Over what?"

"They didn't bother to say." Cade realized he was still carrying the cigarette he'd lighted and snuffed it guiltily between his fingers. Miss Spence didn't approve of cigarette smoking. "But Joe did suggest that certain parties in Bay Parish would be pleased if I slipped my ropes and went back to where I came from."

"Meaning Tocko Kalavitch?"

"I presume as much."

Miss Spence looked at him over her glasses. "Don't."

"Don't what?"

"Don't go. It's time someone stood up to Tocko." The aging postmistress leaned forward. "But that isn't why I wanted to see you, Cade. I'm not worried about you. You can take care of yourself. I'm much more worried about the pretty little girl who spent last night on your boat."

Cade felt like a guilty school boy. "How did you—?"

Miss Spence said dryly, "You aren't in Los Angeles or

Tokyo or even Corpus, Cade. You're back in Bay Parish." She looked over her glasses again. "What do you know about her, Cade?"

Cade evaded the question. "Not much."

"She came ashore illegally?"

"What makes you ask that?"

"I have eyes."

Cade looked at the floor and said nothing.

Miss Spence continued, "Not that I'm interested in that angle. I'd much prefer not to know. But she looks like a sweet child to me, a good girl. And if you have any influence with her, I think you'd better advise her to go back to wherever she came from without looking up James Moran."

"Why?"

"He's no good."

"In what way?"

"In any way. It's common knowledge around town that Moran used his army training to fly aliens in for Tocko. At so much a head, of course. And despite the fact that the girl thinks she's his wife, having some knowledge of the way Mr. Moran operated while he was here in Bay Parish, I would say the legality of their marriage is open to question."

"She says they were married in Caracas."

"Young women," Miss Spence said, thin-lipped, "especially young women in love, have a tendency to believe what they want to believe. But I happen to know at least four Mrs. James Morans wrote him regularly, including the young lady from Caracas."

"Oh," Cade said. There seemed to be nothing else to say.

Miss Spence laid her hand on his knee. "I know you, Cade. Outside of normal wildness, you were a good boy. You've turned into a fine man. The bitterness and bloodshed and killing to which you've been subjected haven't made you mean the way they have so many men. But if you're falsely gallant enough to help that girl locate James Moran, you won't be doing her any favor and it will only mean more heartache for you."

"How do you figure that?"

"You know your wife came to Bay Parish? That is, your former wife."

"Yes. I learned that this morning."

"And you know Tocko Kalavitch's reputation with women?"

"Yes."

Miss Spence was embarrassed. "Then I doubt if I need say more. Your former wife and Tocko were very close. In fact, she was his house guest for some weeks."

The air in the small room was suddenly hot and very humid. It was difficult for Cade to breathe.

Miss Spence continued, primly. "Of course, I have no proof, but there was talk, a lot of talk. In this instance, I believe, with good foundation." Miss Spence delicately refrained from befouling his name. "Because this young woman of whom we are speaking not only bestowed her favors on Tocko, she was, according to what the help tell me, equally generous with James Moran. Tocko and Moran quarreled over her publicly. She was the cause of the breach in their business relations. More, when Mr. Moran left Bay Parish, your former wife left with him and the only forwarding address I have for her is the same hotel in New Orleans at which Mr. Moran is now stopping."

Cade felt a hundred years old. It wasn't either right or fair that one sex machine could do the things to a man that Janice had done to him. He got heavily to his feet. "Well, thanks. Thanks a lot."

The postmistress regarded him with troubled eyes as he opened the door. "I thought you ought to know. Now I'm not so certain I did right in telling you."

Cade repeated, "Thanks. Thanks a lot, Miss Spence."

Mimi was still waiting in front of the post office. Her lower lip was thrust out in a pout. The cream-colored rounds of her breasts pushed the thin fabric of his shirt into visible peaks. Even looking at the girl excited him. He regretted he'd attempted to be a gentleman, regretted he hadn't taken her the night before, by force, if necessary. For all her pretended modesty, Mimi had probably expected him to do just that. Women loved stinkers. Both fiction and life were filled with concrete examples. The

bigger a louse a man was, the more most women liked him.

Still, a man was what he was.

Cade started to cross the walk and stopped as a hand touched his shoulder from behind. His muddled eyes hopeful, his thin voice filled with sensuous anticipation, his too small head bobbing like a nodding Buddha as he talked, the Squid was smiling down at him.

"You ain't gonna leave like Joe tol' you, are you, Cade? You're still gonna be on your boat by noon." The Squid's fingers caressed Cade's shoulder. "Don't go. Please don't go."

Cade started as violently as if a snake had touched him. He shook off the Squid and, with skin goose-pimpled and flesh crawling, continued on his way.

6 *Death on the Deck*

The heat increased as the morning sun rose higher in the sky. Small isolated toadstools of steamy vapor hovered over the muddy pools that had formed in the low spots in the street during the night. As Cade reached the curb, Mimi laid her hand on his arm and stood looking up at him.

"How you say *dificil* in English?" she asked.

"You mean difficult?"

"*Si.*" Her big eyes searched his face. "It is *dificil* for me to beg, but—"

"But what?"

Small fingers bit into Cade's forearm. "If you would be so kind as to take me to New Orleans, I will be ver' grateful. Besides, you will be well paid."

"By whom?" Cade asked, coldly.

"By Jeem. My 'usban' will pay you."

Cade wished Mimi would take her hand off his arm. "Why ask me?"

"Because I am stranger here. Because you are only man I know. Because you have already been so kind."

The memory of his talk with Miss Spence still rankling, Cade was short with her. "You mean such a sucker."

Mimi shook her head. "Thees word I do not know."

Cade's irritation increased. "Let it go. It doesn't matter." He considered telling Mimi about the other Mrs. Morans and didn't have the heart to do so. Mimi was a

good kid. It wasn't her fault that a heel like Moran had played fast with her. It could be Miss Spence was wrong. Besides, in the spot he was in, a hysterical woman was all he needed to complete the distorted nightmare through which he had been moving since his return to Bay Parish.

Mimi's fingers bit deeper into his forearm. "Please."

Conscious that the passersby on the sidewalk were watching them, Cade palmed a cigarette into his mouth with his free hand. "How do you know, after he hasn't even written to you for a year, that Moran wants to see you?"

Mimi was truthful. "I don't."

"How do you know he'd even pay for the gas it would take me to run you up to New Orleans?"

Unshed tears formed in the corners of Mimi's eyes. "I don't know that, either."

Cade lit the cigarette in his mouth. "Look, kid. I'm afraid you've made a mistake. The best thing you can do is look up an immigration man, tell him you entered the country illegally and ask him to contact your consul. Then the worst thing that can happen to you is to be sent back to Caracas."

Mimi's under lip thrust out in a pout. "No."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to go back to Caracas. I want to go to New Orleans. Besides, I told you last night. My family would not receive me."

The heat and the scenes with Tocko and Miss Spence had made Cade's head ache. He was sorry for Mimi. They had a bond in common. She was in love with a heel. He was married, or had been married, to a tramp. But running Mimi up river to New Orleans was out of the question. He had the showdown with Laval to face. Then there was the matter of gas. Cade fingered the lone five-dollar bill in his pocket. He might raise New Orleans with what gas still remained in the tanks but he'd never get back down river again.

"I've done all I can. You'll just have to shift for yourself from here on."

"There is a road to New Orleans?"

"Of a sort, but I wouldn't advise you to hike it."

"You mean walk?"

"Yes."

"Why not?"

"It leads through some pretty rough country. Besides, you're too pretty a girl to start out through the swamps alone, especially in that outfit."

"Why?"

"You know why."

Mimi lowered her eyes and a few tears zigzagged down her cheeks. She brushed at them angrily. "Then why don't you take me to New Orleans?"

Her breasts rose and fell with her emotion until the firm young flesh straining against the fabric threatened to pop the none too securely fastened buttons of her borrowed shirt. "I've told you," Cade said. "Besides, believe it or not, I'm only human and male. I doubt if you'd be any safer with me than you would be on the road." He shook his head. "No. The best thing you can do is to contact Immigration and have them contact your consul."

Cade turned abruptly and walked up the street. He'd never felt so like a heel. Still, he had his own problems. He'd had nothing to do with Mimi stowing away in Caracas. She'd known the chances she was taking when she'd crawled under the tarp of the lifeboat on the freighter that had anchored at Pilottown the night before. He'd given her good advice. The best thing she could do was to contact the Venezuelan consul.

As an afterthought, he turned back and gave her the bill in his pocket.

Mimi eyed the bill suspiciously. "For why?"

"Because I think you're a nice kid. Because I'm sorry for you."

Mimi put the bill between her breasts. "Thank you."

This time she turned away and stood looking out over the river. Cade shrugged and walked up the street to the courthouse. The building was ancient, built of stuccoed white stone; its high-ceilinged corridors and rooms giving an illusion of coolness.

The girl back of the parish recorder's rail was new to Cade, undoubtedly one of the children who'd grown up in the twelve years he'd been away. He told her what he wanted to know and the girl located the information in the files lining one wall. Tocko had given him the truth. The

sale of the house and the acreage on Baratavia Bay had been duly recorded in a transfer of deed from Mrs. Cade Cain to Tocko Kalavitch. Cade asked the girl behind the desk for a piece of paper and on it wrote the dates of record, to check them against the date on the final divorce papers that had been waiting for him in Tokyo. If Janice had sold the properties before the decree became final, both sales were perfectly legal. There was nothing he could do to recover his property. If, however, she had made the sale after the decree had become final, he at least had a talking point in court. He knew nothing of the law but it seemed reasonable to assume that a divorce would invalidate a power of attorney.

Cade folded the paper on which he had written the dates and put it in his shirt pocket. He didn't care about the acreage on Baratavia Bay. It was too isolated to be of any value. The land had stood untouched and unused since his great grandfather had purchased it for some purpose lost in time. The house was another matter. The house had a sentimental as well as a cash value. He'd been born in the old house. He'd meant to raise his children in it.

The gun sagging in his hip pocket had rubbed the flesh of his thin buttock raw. Perspiration made the abrasion smart. He stood a moment on the courthouse steps wondering what to do. Well, all he could do was to go back to the *Sea Bird* and wait. It was only ten o'clock. His noon deadline was still two hours away.

He walked back toward the levee down one of the chinaberry-tree shaded streets that led through the colored section of Bay Parish. It wasn't any different from Main Street. The smiling faces were merely darker, the greetings more enthusiastic and punctuated now and then with praise to the Lord for his safe arrival home.

Cade knew fierce resentment. This was his town. He liked Bay Parish. Bay Parish liked him. If it hadn't been for Janice, Tocko and Laval, it could have been a wonderful homecoming. He turned to answer a question one of the admiring folks asked him—and saw Mimi. Pouting again, she was trailing along behind him, the black Delta mud squishing between the exquisitely formed toes of her bare feet. Even her dirty bare feet were pretty.

Cade waited for her to catch up. "Now what? Why are you following me?"

Mimi's small chin jutted, then began to quiver. "Because I don't know what else to do. I won't go back to Caracas. I won't."

Cade tried to think of something to say. He couldn't. There didn't seem to be anything for him to say. As long as the girl was so determined to have her heart broken properly, perhaps he could borrow the money from someone to buy her a dress and some shoes and pay her fare by boat, bus or plane to New Orleans.

He turned and walked on toward the levee with Mimi walking beside him.

Her voice small, she said, "I am a lot of trouble to you, am I not?"

"Yes," Cade said.

Her voice continued small. "I'm sorry. It is jus' you have been so ver' kind, that there is no one else I can trust."

Cade was annoyed. "Well, stop bawling about it."

Mimi wiped at her wet cheeks with the back of her hand. "I am not bawling. I am jus' crying a leetle."

Cade wished her voice, the sight of her small rounded body, didn't do the things to him that they did. How much was a man supposed to be able to take? He asked, crossly, "You're still determined to locate Moran?"

Mimi looked at him from the corners of her eyes without turning her face. "That is why I come to thees country."

"You won't go home?"

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"I told you. My family is—"

"Yes. I know," Cade interrupted her. He finished the sentence for Mimi. "Your family is ver' old and ver' proud. And they were ver' *irritado* when you married Moran. How long had you known the man?"

"A week."

"And you were together a week?"

"Yes."

"Living as man and wife?"

"Yes."

"You had a child by him? There's a baby back in Caracas?"

Color crept into Mimi's cheeks. "No."

"Then, after spending a week with you he left you flat and you haven't heard from him since?"

"No."

"But you're still in love with the guy?"

Mimi watched the mud squish through her toes as she walked. "I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"I mean I don't know. I get all excited inside when I think of how it was to be married. But I am not, how you say, experienced. I am ver' strictly raised from a ver' small girl and Jeem was the first man I was evair with, alone." Mimi glanced sideways at Cade. "Until I met you."

The bastard, thought Cade. *The big Irish bastard*. Pushing Mimi over must have been as difficult as waiting for a ripe papaya to drop.

The grass-grown bank of the levee was steep and slippery. He helped Mimi up the slope, her flesh soft and warm under his fingers. He liked this girl. He'd never liked anyone so much on so short an acquaintance. She was in a bad spot but she was being a lady about it. There was nothing cheap about Mimi. One thing was certain. Easy to push or not, Cade was willing to bet the *Sea Bird* that Moran hadn't gotten what he wanted until he'd gone through a ceremony of some kind. It could be they were legally married. And now Moran had Janice.

When they reached the broad top of the levee, Mimi asked, "What are you going to do with me?"

"I don't know," Cade admitted. He walked down the levee toward the *Sea Bird* with Mimi hurrying beside him, taking three steps to his one. "I do know I'm not going to take you to New Orleans, but it may be I can borrow enough to outfit you and pay your fare."

"Outfit?"

"Buy you a dress and some shoes."

"Borrow?"

Cade combed through his meager Spanish. "*Prestado*. What you do when you haven't any money."

They were on the pier now. Mimi took the five-dollar bill from its hiding place between her breasts. Her body

had perfumed it. "This is all the money you have?"

"That's right."

Her voice was as soft and small and as warm as her lovely body. "And you gave it to me."

Cade was curt with her. "So what?"

Her small fingers bit into his arm. "You are officer. You are gentleman. You are nice."

Cade was embarrassed. "Stow it. Sweet talk isn't going to get you anywhere." He jumped into the cockpit of the *Sea Bird* and helped Mimi down. "Right now, let's have a cup of coffee. I'll make it this time. But get one thing straight in that pretty little head of yours."

"Si?"

"I'm not taking you to New Orleans."

Mimi's voice continued small. "That is for you to say."

Cade made certain the cruiser wasn't rubbing on the pier and that the mooring lines were fast, before opening the door of the aft cabin. At first, his eyes still blinded by the sun, he thought he'd walked into a trap, that the man on his bunk was drunk and waiting for him. He tugged his pistol hastily from his pocket.

Then Cade realized that the Cajun was dead. Laval's shirt front was stained with blood. He lay with one limp arm trailing to the deck plates. In death the gaunt Cajun sheriff looked even more like a weasel than he had in life. Cade felt the flesh of his face. It was still warm. He hadn't been dead more than a few minutes.

Cade caught at the rim of an open port to steady himself. Joe Laval was dead on his boat and he had threatened to kill him. In Sal's, the night before, in front of two dozen witnesses, during his fight with the Squid, he had panted:

"You bastards. If I had a gun I'd kill you both."

Behind him, her view of the cabin blocked by Cade's back, Mimi asked, "What is the matter? What are you looking at?"

The smell of the blood still dripping to the deck plates sickened Cade. He had smelled too much blood, lost too much of it himself. Backing out of the cabin, he closed the companionway door and leaned against it, breathing through his mouth. Perspiration beaded on his face. He felt like he wanted to be sick and couldn't.

Mimi tugged the tail of her borrowed shirt out of the waist of her borrowed pants and used it to wipe Cade's face. "What is it? Tell me. What is the matter, Cade?"

It was the first time Mimi had used his name, Cade liked the sound of it in her mouth. He tried twice before he could speak. "There's a dead man in the cabin."

"Who?"

"The local sheriff. A man by the name of Laval."

"You are certain he is dead?"

"I'm certain."

"How dead?"

"Shot. I think through the heart."

"By whom?"

"I don't know."

"But why should anyone kill him on your boat?"

He was afraid he knew the answer to Mimi's question. Tocko had always hated him, ever since they had been boys and he had refused to allow Tocko to push him around. Now, after pirating Janice, and after stripping him of property that had been in the Cain family for one hundred years, Tocko had reason to fear Cade, fear him enough to plant a dead man on his boat. A murder conviction would be much more permanent than a warning to leave town.

He had threatened Joe Laval. Now Joe was dead and his only alibi for the approximate time of the killing was that he had been walking with a pretty girl, a girl who was in the country illegally, a girl who had spent the previous night aboard his boat.

It was the sort of thing only a Tocko Kalavitch could dream up. On the other hand, Joe had been Tocko's right-hand man. Tocko would be hard put to find anyone else who would do the dirty jobs Joe had done.

"But why?" Mimi demanded.

"Put your shirt back in your pants," Cade told her.

He glanced up, then down, the levee. It dozed in the mid-morning sun. The only sounds were the jangling of a ship's bell in mid-river, the surge of the river itself and the buzz of a single-motored plane rising from the small airport on the far side of the town. The storm-pitted glass in the windows of the old house acted like so many reflectors, blinding him. The only moving object he could see

were two distant men just starting up the weed-grown road that led to the business district.

Cade took his glass from its bracket over the wheel and trained it on the two men. The man in the white suit was Tocko. The face of the other man was unfamiliar but he was in the uniform of the Immigration Service. They could only be coming to one place.

Cade returned the glass to its bracket and looked at Mimi. Moran had been in Tocko's employ. Men like Moran liked to boast of their conquests. Undoubtedly, Tocko knew all the details concerning Moran's romance in Caracas—and wanted her himself. Tocko wanted every pretty girl he saw. The big Slavonian collected screams in the night as some men collected stamps.

Cold anger replaced Cade's queasiness. Tocko might or might not be able to pin Laval's death on him. A jury would decide that. But Tocko could have him held for trial, leaving Mimi unprotected.

Cade's agile mind raced on. Mimi was in the country illegally. After the "discovery" of Laval's body, Tocko's smart move would be to persuade the immigration officials to parole the girl in his custody as a material witness. Tocko was a power on the river. He was a man of property and substance. He knew whom to see. It was a fifty-fifty gamble that the immigration officials would listen to him, especially if Tocko were willing to post bond for Mimi. And Tocko would be willing. That kind of a scream from Mimi would be worth any amount of bond.

Even thinking of the girl that way excited Cade. After all, he'd been hungry for two years.

Mimi blushed at the look in his eyes and tucked more of her borrowed shirt into her already well-filled white pants. "Please, Cade," she reproved him gently. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

Cade spoke without conscious volition. "Just thinking how nice it would be."

He started the port, then the starboard motor of the cruiser. There was no strain on the aft lines. The forward line gave him more trouble. He was drenched with sweat by the time he fought it over the rusted iron and returned to the wheel of the cruiser.

Tocko and the immigration man were running now,

shouting something unintelligible over the throb of the motors. Cade made a derogatory gesture and gunned the *Sea Bird* out of the slip too fast, its powerful twin screws spitting a messy wake of mangled hyacinth bulbs and churned mud.

He had to have time to think, time to get rid of Laval's body.

Her bare feet spread on the deck to maintain a precarious balance, Mimi looked from the muddy wake to the shouting men on the pier. Then holding on to the back of the wheel chair with one hand to steady herself against the slap of the river, she put the thumb of her free hand to her nose and wiggled her fingers experimentally. "What does that mean in English?"

Cade fed more gas to the boat as he swung the wheel hard, up river. "That we're going to New Orleans."

Mimi was silent a moment. Then she said, quietly, "Thank you. You are, how we say, *muy buen caballero*. It would be nice with you, too."

Cade sucked in his breath sharply as he glanced at the dark-haired girl. She was the damndest one hundred pounds of mixed naïvete and poise he had ever seen stuffed into one feminine body. Her statement was just that, a statement, not an invitation.

To keep from making a fool of himself, Cade forced his eyes to scan the gas gauge. The tanks were still a quarter full. If he hadn't forgotten the channel, if he didn't hit a submerged object, if the immigration man didn't telephone on up the river for a Coast Guard boat to stop him, at the knots they were logging they should raise the lower harbor by early afternoon.

The more Cade thought about going to New Orleans the better he liked the idea. He wanted to meet Mimi's "husband." He wanted to talk to Janice. Perhaps one, or both, could explain why he was being pushed around.

7 *The Royal Crescent*

In a sheltered cove a few miles above Buras, Cade cut his motors long enough to drag Laval's body out of the cabin. If a Coast Guard boat should stop him, he didn't want the dead man aboard. After two years in Pyongyang, he had all he could stomach of prisons and prison camps.

In this instance he had played it smart. This way he might be suspected of killing Laval but no one could prove anything.

Cade considered weighting the body but could find nothing aboard the cruiser he could spare. It had taken every penny he'd had to buy the boat and outfit it as meagerly as he had. In the back of his mind he supposed he'd reasoned that if he ran too short of cash he could always put a small mortgage on the old home place. Now the old house was gone. Tocko had bought it at his price, with Janice thrown in for lagniappe.

Mimi eyed the dead man with feminine distaste. "You knew him?"

Cade touched his swollen nose and the adhesive tape under his eye. "Very well. He gave me these last night. At least, he had his deputy do it."

"Why?"

"He didn't say. He did order me to be out of town by noon."

"I see," Mimi said with quick comprehension. "This is why you wouldn't go."

Cade heaved the body up on the transom of the boat. "Let's say one of the reasons." It was hot and still in the cove. Cade was panting just from the effort of lifting the body. He still had a long road to travel before all of his strength returned. He glanced at his watch as he rested. It was eleven o'clock. Joe had made his deadline stand up, after all. Not that it mattered to Joe. The gaunt Cajun was through taking orders from Tocko, through with throwing his weight around, finished with doing Tocko's dirty work. Cade squeezed the sweat from his face with the side of his hand before Mimi could use the tail of her shirt. Now that he'd had time to think, Tocko sacrificing Joe Laval just to get rid of him didn't make good sense. Joe had been invaluable to Tocko.

Cade leaned against the side of the cruiser. But then, nothing made sense, nothing made sense since, lousy and dirty and half-starved, he'd called on his last ounce of strength to stagger across the line under his own power at Panmunjom.

"Rest and quiet, that's an order," one of the big-shot medics in Tokyo had told him. *"I see you come from the Delta country, Colonel. When you get back to the States, buy a boat, take it easy, crawl into the bunk with your wife and a jug of rum and don't get out of the sack for two months except to eat."*

Mimi watched him warily, wetting her naturally red lips with the pink tip of her tongue. "What are you thinking?"

"You might be surprised," Cade said, wryly. "Then again, you might not."

He heaved Laval's body over the edge. The splash sounded unnaturally loud in the hush of the cove. The body bobbed several times like a swimmer treading water, then was caught in an eddy and floated off down river.

Cade dropped a bucket overside and sloshed the transom and the cockpit with water. It was a minor matter to make the cockpit shipshape again. The cabin was another affair. The mattress on which Laval had been killed was sodden with clotted blood. Blood had dripped down onto the deck plates and seeped in between the cracks. Cade scrubbed the deck as best he could but there was nothing

he could do with the mattress except throw it overboard. When he'd finished, his trousers and shirt were sodden with sweat. Cade thought of going for a swim and thought better of the idea. The sight of Mimi in a pair of his shorts and a makeshift halter would only add to his problem. The girl liked him. She trusted him. He wasn't completely a heel, he hoped.

His sour mood stayed with him, as he started his motors again and continued up river. He hadn't been smart in running. He had acted on impulse, instead of reasoning the thing out. If the law couldn't prove he'd killed Laval, now that he'd disposed of Joe's body, he couldn't prove that he hadn't killed him. What evidence there was, was in the river. If he was suspect, and he would be, his sudden flight, the missing mattress and the blood that had seeped into the cracks would all be against him. Any half-smart lawyer, using his threat to kill Joe and the three pieces of evidence as a foundation, could build a good case against him.

Cade's resentment against Mimi grew. If it hadn't been for Mimi, if he hadn't tried to save her from Tocko, he wouldn't have run. So Laval had been shot on his boat? He hadn't shot him.

Mimi sensed his mood. "Have I done something, Cade?"

His name didn't sound so good in her mouth. "No. Nothing," Cade said, shortly. "Just leave me alone."

He sat watching the shore line fall behind the speeding cruiser, swinging wide now and then to give an outbound steamer plenty of seaway, occasionally passing a banana boat or a smartly painted tanker laboring up stream against the current.

It was two o'clock when he wove his way through the ships riding at anchor in the lower harbor and a few minutes later when he cut his motors and nosed into the private slip of a ship chandler he and his family had done business with for years, not far from the Charbonnet Street Wharf.

Mimi eyed the gear-cluttered pier with distaste. "Why are we stopping here?"

Cade told her, curtly, "To get some money. What did

you think I was going to do, run the *Sea Bird* right up Royal Street and help you out in front of the hotel in that outfit?"

Mimi's eyes narrowed slightly, "I'm sorry, I am a lot of bother to you."

"Yes, you are," Cade admitted.

He made fast to the pier, then getting his papers from his strong box in the locker under his bunk, he strode down the pier to the office. The Chandler was glad to see him. After a quick glance at the *Sea Bird* and its registry papers, he was glad to lend Cade a thousand dollars on the boat—at ten percent.

Cade made the arrangements to leave the cruiser where it was for the time being and returned for Mimi. She refused his offered hand and scrambled up on the pier herself. "I can manage. I don't want to be any more bother to you than I can help."

"That's fine with me," Cade said.

He told himself he would be glad to get rid of the girl. He would outfit her as best he could. He'd take her to the Royal Crescent Hotel and turn her over to Moran. From there on in, she could make out on her own, while he had a showdown with Janice.

It was almost four o'clock by the time he'd bought Mimi a dress and some hose and shoes and underthings, to replace the wisps in which she had swum ashore. The dress was white, of a waffle weave material, with a square neck cut to show the top rounds of her breasts. It looked well on her but Cade decided he'd like her better in the borrowed white pants and shirt which Mimi insisted the slightly shocked clerk put into a bag for her.

Back on crowded Barrone Street, Mimi stood so close that Cade could feel her slim body trembling. His sour mood deepened. He'd picked the girl out of the river. He'd fed her and clothed her. He'd saved her from Tocko Kalavitch. He was risking a murder rap for her. And was she grateful? No. She was so eager to get to the stud to whom she's given her virginity that she was a-tremble with anticipation.

"Cold?" Cade asked sarcastically.

Mimi shook her head and tried to smile. "No. Scared."

Cade whistled down a cab.

"The Royal Crescent Hotel. It's on Royal Street."

The cab driver looked from Cade to Mimi and grinned knowingly. "Yeah. Sure. I know where it is."

Cade didn't like his grin. It stamped the hotel. Obviously Janice wasn't as choosy as she had been when he was paying her bills. Then nothing but the best had been good enough for her.

Mimi looked straight ahead. "I haven't much time to thank you. You have been kind, ver' kind." She put her right hand to her left breast. "And I will always remember it here."

The cab stopped for the light on Canal Street.

Mimi continued quietly, "I have been beeg problem to you, I know. You are a man. I am a girl. But this I cannot help. I am also married woman. I am no longer free to give what I might like to give. And deep down inside you, you would not have wanted it to be any different than it has been. Some men are not like that. But you are that sort of man."

Even in his bitterness, Cade was amazed by the depth of her perception.

Mimi found and squeezed his hand. "Anything else but as it was would have cheapened both of us."

Cade played with her fingers. "You think Moran has been true to you?"

"That is another matter."

"What if he doesn't want you?"

"That is my problem."

"Yeah. Sure," Cade said, dryly. He leaned back against the leather seat of the cab, fighting a mild headache, wondering how Mimi was going to react when she found out that her "husband" was living with his former wife.

It could be an interesting scene.

The hotel was much as he had imagined it would be. There was a dimly lighted cocktail lounge off the foyer. The rusted ornamental wrought iron needed painting. Both the ornamental mosaic tile entrance and the glass doors looked like they could stand a good washing.

As Cade started to pay off the driver, Mimi put her hand on his arm. "Thank you. Thank you ver' much for

everything. But you do not need to come in with me. After all, it has been a year and I would prefer to be alone when I meet Jeem."

Cade gave the driver a five-dollar bill and waited for his change. "Uh uh."

Mimi was puzzled. "Uh uh?"

Cade tipped the driver, put his change into his pocket, then tucked Mimi's hand under his arm. "That's American for nothing doing. How about my money?"

"Money?"

"Yeah. For the gas it took to run up here and the clothes I just bought you."

"Oh, yes." Her small chin jutted. "Jeem will be glad to pay you."

Cade tightened his hand on her arm. "Could be. Anyway, we're going in together."

Mimi glanced at him hotly from the corner of her eye but said nothing. The lobby was in keeping with the outside of the hotel. A half-dozen artificial palm trees grew out of sand pots. The chairs were covered with pastel leather and looked new. It wasn't the chairs in the Royal Crescent that took a pounding. It even smelled like the sort of a place it was.

The clerk was young and glib. He looked at Cade's white captain's cap and water-stained white shirt and pants and white top-siders, then at Mimi's ample bosom. "Yes, sir, captain. A room with a bath, I presume? Say something around eight dollars?"

Mimi blushed. "No. You have a misunderstanding. We do not weesh for a room. I am looking for my 'usban'."

The clerk's eyes turned opaque. "Oh."

"A Mister Jeem Moran. He comes here from Bay Parish."

"Oh, yes," the clerk said. "Mr. James Moran."

Mimi steadied her trembling fingers by holding on to the counter. "Would you be so kin' as to call heem and tell heem that Mimi is here."

The clerk was mildly amused. "I'm afraid that would be a little difficult, miss."

Mimi looked at the house phone on the counter. "Why would it be *difical*?"

"Because Mr. Moran isn't stopping with us any more.

He checked out a little better than two weeks ago.”

She gasped. “He moved to some other hotel? Here in New Orleans?”

“That I wouldn’t know, lady. Mr. Moran didn’t take me into his confidence. After all, I’m only the clerk.”

Mimi pounded on the counter with her small fists. “But you must know where he is. I have come all the way from Caracas.”

The clerk wasn’t impressed. “Look, lady. I don’t care if you came all the way from St. Louis. I don’t know where the guy is. Like I said. He moved out a little better than two weeks ago and he didn’t leave a forwarding address.” The clerk pointed to an envelope-choked slot in the key rack. “In fact, if you locate the guy, I’d appreciate it very much if you’d tell him to come pick up his mail.”

Cade leaned an elbow on the counter. “How about the blonde in the adjoining room? Did she check out, too?”

Caught off balance, the clerk asked, “You mean Mrs. Cain? Yeah. She and Moran—” The clerk realized he had been trapped and stopped talking.

Mimi transferred her anger to Cade. “You knew! You knew all the time my Jeem was weeth some other woman, some she no-good. Who ees thees Mrs. Cain?”

It was an effort for Cade to speak. “My wife. That is, my former wife,” he told Mimi.

8 *Business Partners*

The barman in the cocktail lounge off the foyer refused to go on record. "Five feet four. One hundred and fifteen pounds. Blonde. Gray eyes. Very pretty. The right side of thirty." He shook his head. "No, I really couldn't say, mister. They come and go. Believe me. Good-looking blondes are thirteen to the case in here." He picked up the glass he'd been polishing and looked at Mimi. "So are big six-footers with black hair. If they drank in here, I undoubtedly seen them. But their descriptions don't ring no bell."

Mimi gnawed at her lower lip.

Cade sipped at the rum in his glass and realized that he was hungry, that he hadn't eaten since morning. "You serve food?"

The barman put the polished glass on the back bar. "The best food in town, not barring Antoine's or Arnaud's. But only in the booths, mister. The waitress will take your order."

Cade carried his double rum and Mimi's untouched brandy to one of the booths. Her eyes slitted and sullen, Mimi followed him. "You knew."

Cade waited for her to sit down. "I don't know now. But I was told that they left Bay Parish together, after a fight between Moran and Tocko."

"Over your wife?"

"My former wife."

"Your former wife then."

"So I was told."

"Tocko is the fat man who suggested the postmistress could give me Jeem's address?"

"That's right."

"The man who was running up the levee when you put out into the river?"

"That was Tocko."

"Maybe he'd just learned Jeem's new address. Why didn't you wait for heem?"

"With a dead man on my boat?"

"Even so."

"Then, let's put it this way. Did you notice a man with Tocko?"

"Yes. A man in uniform."

"The uniform of the U.S. Immigration Service."

Mimi sucked in her breath and held it for a long time. Then she exhaled slowly. "Oh, I see. Again, I have to thank you."

Cade debated telling her the obvious reason for Tocko turning informer and decided not to. The girl was keyed to the point of breaking. She had enough to worry her as it was. He said, "After all, a girl as pretty as you are can't suddenly materialize in a town as small as Bay Parish, especially a point of entry into the country, without having someone wonder where she came from."

Her eyes still sullen, her lower lip thrust out in a pout, Mimi sat toying with her glass. Cade was glad when a bored waitress spread menus in front of them. What happened from here on he didn't know, but that could wait until they had eaten.

The menu was in French. He ordered for both of them, one of the meals of which he had dreamed during his two-year diet of fish heads and rice: Pompano en Papillote. Poulet Rochambeau. Fond d'Artichaut. Glacé a la Vanille, Café au Lait.

When the waitress had gone, Mimi asked, "What are we eating, Cade?"

Cade told her. "That's easy . . . Fish baked in paper. Chicken. A salad. Ice cream and coffee."

Neither of them spoke again, both preoccupied with their own thoughts. The food, when it came, was good. It

wasn't as good as Antoine's or Arnaud's or Mamma Salvatore's, for that matter, but it was the first meal of its kind that Cade had eaten in years and he enjoyed it.

Mimi's anger and disappointment seemed to spice her appetite. As the various courses were served, she ate everything on her plate with exquisite manners and Latin enthusiasm. Cade enjoyed watching her eat. Everything Mimi did, she did well. He thought of her as he'd seen her lying nude on the bunk of the forecabin and shook his head.

"No man in his right mind."

Mimi licked the last of the Glacé a la Vanille from her spoon. "I beg your pardon?"

"Just thinking out loud," Cade said.

He ordered a package of Turkish cigarettes and two liqueurs to finish off the meal. It had been a good meal. He'd enjoyed it.

Mimi sipped at her anisette. "It was nice, ver' nice. *Gracias.*"

Cade lighted a cigarette for her. He wished he knew what to do with Mimi. He couldn't leave her alone in New Orleans any more than he could have left her alone in Bay Parish. Mimi was a problem. Cade leaned his forearms on the table. "Look, little honey."

"Si?"

"Now we've failed to locate Moran how about you changing your mind and going back to Caracas?"

Mimi blew smoke through her nose. "No."

"But Moran isn't registered here. You heard the clerk. He checked out two weeks ago."

"There is more than one hotel in New Orleans. I will go from one to the other."

"But we don't even know they are still in New Orleans."

"They?"

"You heard that, too. Seemingly, Janice checked out with him. At least, at the same time."

Mimi laid her hand on his. "Thees girl to whom you were married."

"What about her?"

"You love her?"

"At one time I thought I did."

"How long have you been divorced?"

"According to the date on the final decree, about as long as since you've seen Moran."

"You knew she was divorcing you?"

"No." Cade tried to keep the bitterness from his voice. "They didn't serve divorce papers where I was."

"Where was that?"

"North of the Yalu River in Korea."

Mimi was incredulous. "She divorced you while you were in a prison camp?"

"Yeah. I slept with the final decree on my first night back in Tokyo."

Mimi's breasts rose and fell with her anger. Cade watched them, fascinated. "I am right in what I say in the lobby. Thees woman, thees Janice, is a she no-good. Even if, how you say, I hated hees gots, eef my man had been a prisoner, eef he had been fighting for me, he would nevaire have known. I would have been waiting weeth all the love in the world."

"I believe that," Cade said.

"What did you do to her to make her want thees divorce?"

"Nothing. Except perhaps not make enough money."

"You are colonel."

"Ex-colonel. But a colonel's pay was chicken feed to Janice."

"And now she ees weeth my man."

"So it would seem. Moran has money?"

Mimi's full lips twisted in wry smile. "If so, he nevaire sent me some. If he had sent me money I would not have to hide under the canvas of a lifeboat."

Cade glanced casually around the bar. It was beginning to fill with early evening trade. "Not so loud," he cautioned Mimi. "You never can tell who might be listening in a joint like this."

A pleasant-faced waitress appeared in front of the booth with a silver thermos jug. "How's the coffee situation?"

"Thanks. I can use some," Cade said. He made his cup more accessible, then looked at the waitress again. "Are you the girl who served us?"

"No," the girl said. "That was Annette. I just came on shift. We change shift at five."

"I see," Cade said.

The waitress hesitated and said, "Say, Charlie, that's the day barman, said you were inquiring about a good-looking blonde and a big black-haired man who were stopping at the hotel but checked out about two weeks ago."

"That's right. James Moran and Janice Cain."

"You aren't a cop, are you?"

"Do I look like one?"

"No," the waitress admitted, "you don't. Still, a girl can never tell. You want to locate this couple, is that the idea?"

"Yes," Mimi said, "ver' much."

"How much?" the waitress asked.

Cade laid ten dollars on the table. "Say, ten dollars' worth."

"Let's say, twice ten dollars."

Cade laid a second bill on top of the first.

The waitress was fair. "First, let's make sure we are talking about the same people. She's a blonde, blue-eyed, this side of thirty, with no need of falsies? Looks and walks and dresses like she might be a model?"

"She was a model," Cade said.

"He's a big good-looking black Irishman. Curly hair, gray eyes. A cleft in his chin. A heavy drinker who laughs a lot. Has something to do with flying."

Mimi nodded. "That ees a good description."

The waitress fingered the bills on the table. "Then we're talking about the same people. The reason Charlie didn't remember them is because he never works the night shift and they always came in around this time, maybe even a little later. And always with two or three pollys in tow."

"Pollys?" Mimi puzzled.

"Politicians," the waitress explained. "You know, state representatives and senators and the like, the slickers we, the people send to Baton Rouge to raise our taxes so they can pry somebody's Uncle Benny into the poor house and build roads for the ducks. So help me. While the couple we're speaking of were here, the joint was practically an annex of the state capital."

Cade shook his head. "I don't get it."

"Neither did I," the waitress admitted. "But the tips were good while it lasted. It was almost as if Huey had

come back to life and the town was running wide open again."

"But where are they now? Where did they go from here?"

The waitress continued to finger the bills on the table. "Well, don't come back and sue me if I'm wrong and I haven't the least idea how to get there, but I gathered from what snatches of conversation I overheard, that when they left here they were going to some swank resort or fishing camp that this blonde is building on a big piece of undeveloped acreage she owns on Barataria Bay."

"I see," Cade said.

The waitress picked up the bills on the table. "My money?"

"Your money."

"You're satisfied with what I could tell you?"

"I'm satisfied."

Mimi wet her lips with the tip of her tongue. "Would you tell me just one thing more? How did they act? I mean with each other. Would you say they were sweethearts?"

The waitress put the two bills in the pocket of her nylon uniform. "That's a hard thing to say, honey. They were very friendly. She occasionally called him 'dahling—' He called her 'dear.' But she also called most of the pollys 'dahling.' And from the amount of figuring and scribbling she and Moran did on the backs of menus and on the tablecloths, I got the distinct impression that if they were depressing the coils of an innerspring together, it was strictly a secondary matter. You know, more like they were business partners."

"What kind of business?" Cade asked.

The waitress shrugged. "There you have me, mister. But again I had the distinct impression it had something to do with the land on Barataria Bay."

Cade laid a bill on the tray to cover the check and a tip, then stood up and reached for his cap.

Mimi stood up with him.

"Back to the boat," Cade told her.

9 *Talk of the Town*

There were stars but no moon. It had been twelve years since Cade had been on the river at night. Some of the landmarks had changed. It was difficult running without lights. It was also dangerous. Once he almost rammed into a floating tree being carried out into the Gulf by the current. Once a freighter, veering from its course, for some reason known only to the man at the wheel, nearly ran them down.

After passing the cluster of lights on the west bank, which he hoped was Venice, Cade throttled the motors down until he barely had seaway and debated his best move.

He could head directly for his destination by running the little-used pass originating just south of Venice and terminating in West Bay. It would save him miles and gasoline. He could stop off in Bay Parish and attempt to refuel for the long run to Grand Isle. He might also be able to ascertain just where he stood with the law, learn what moves Tocko had made regarding Joe Laval's disappearance and his own hasty departure with Mimi aboard the *Sea Bird*.

Cade glanced through the dark at the small oval face of the girl standing beside his elbow. To save her new dress and shoes and hose, Mimi had changed back into her borrowed white pants and shirt. The black-haired girl wore

well. The more intimately Cade knew her, the better he liked her. There was no pretense about her. Mimi was for you or against you. She had been bitterly disappointed at failing to find Moran in New Orleans, but had refused to cry. She hadn't called out once or shown any outward signs of fright on the precarious trip down river. Nor had she asked any foolish questions. When he had told her he intended to head for Barataria Bay and a showdown with Janice and Moran, she had accepted his judgment without question. In the country she came from the men made the decisions. Such pants as the women wore were merely for ornamental purposes.

He said, "I'm trying to make up my mind whether I ought to stop in Bay Parish and replace what fuel we've used."

"We do not 'ave enough to get to this Barataria?"

"Plenty. If we don't run into a blow."

"A blow?"

"A storm."

"There is apt to be a storm?"

"I wouldn't know," Cade said wryly. "This is the season for them but it's a little too dark to see if the small craft warnings are flying and under the circumstances I don't think it would be smart to check with the Coast Guard."

Mimi proved she was only human by asking her first foolish question. "Why not?"

"For two reasons," Cade told her. "One, you're in the country illegally. Remember? Two, there is the little matter of the man I dropped into the river. For all I know, I may be wanted for murder."

Cade decided to stop at Bay Parish and eased his throttle forward. He'd been right about the lights. They indicated Venice on the west bank. He could see the lights of Bay Parish now. Cade felt his way inshore as far as he dared and dropped anchor. The cruiser immediately swung around and held, nosed into the current, rising and falling with a gentle motion.

"I'll swim in from here," he told Mimi. "You won't be afraid to stay on the cruiser alone?"

Mimi bobbed her head. "Yes. I 'ave been ver' afraid all the way down from New Orleans. But that does not make

any difference. You are *captain*. I will stay where you tell me to stay."

Cade patted her and wished he hadn't. Her flesh attracted his hand like a magnet. It was still a long way, a hell of a long way, to Barataria Bay. He hoped he could control himself. Only time would tell. He wrapped his gun in oiled silk and put it in his side pants pocket.

"I shouldn't be too long. I'll be back as soon as I find out where we stand and make arrangements to refuel."

The water looked dark and oily and somehow sinister. He knew how Mimi must have felt when she had swum ashore. And she had swum ashore from mid-stream. It would be nice to be loved by a girl like Mimi. As an afterthought, Cade handed her a flashlight. "If I can't locate the cruiser and have to hail, flash this down on the water, shore side, but only flash it once."

"Whatever you say," Mimi said. She raised on her tip-toes and kissed him lightly, without passion. "For good luck."

Cade held her tighter and longer than necessary. It was exquisite torture. This, too, was a part of his dream, except that in his dreams the girl had been Janice and his need had been satisfied. Mimi freed herself from his arms gently.

"I should not 'ave done that."

Cade stood, fighting himself. He wasn't afraid of her knife. He could have the knife in the river and Mimi on her back before she could say Caracas. He could take Mimi on one of the bunks, on the deck plates of the cook-pit, up against the rail. Anywhere with Mimi would give him the relief he needed. Still, it would be a breach of faith, as well as a breach of the flesh. Mimi trusted him. She liked him. He was *capitan*. It was the old army game all over. If rank had its privileges, it also had its responsibilities. There were certain things an officer and a gentleman didn't do. As long as the black-haired girl even thought she was married to Moran, it would be a hasty, meaningless meeting of two bodies. It wouldn't be the dream he'd dreamed. If flesh were all he wanted he could have stopped at any number of places in New Orleans and spent five or ten of the thousand dollars for which he had mortgaged his cruiser.

"I'm sorry. So sorry," Mimi said.

Cade stood up on the wide transom of the boat and split the water in a clean dive that carried him three-fourths of the way to shore. The cold water felt good on his body, but even this close in, the current was strong. Cade swam the few remaining feet in a powerful crawl, then, fighting his way through the inevitable tangle of hyacinth, he climbed up the side of the levee and stood panting for breath. The cruiser was lost in the darkness of the river but from where he stood he could see the business district of Bay Parish and Sal's new red neon sign. Carried faintly by the off-shore wind, the strains of the Harry Belafonte recording of *Mathilda*, *Mathilda* came to his ears.

Cade marked the spot where he'd come ashore. Then unwrapping his pistol, he walked toward the red sign and the juke box music. Sal could tell him where he stood with the law.

Except for the lights in the houses, the back streets of Bay Parish were as dark as the river had been. Now and then he passed or was passed by a colored man or woman. Cade walked without any attempt at concealment. His long years as a pilot, of seeing men die beside him, of kissing death daily without the union being consummated, had given him an unshakable belief in preordination. When the time came you got it. Until then, the wheel could spin like mad without anything worse than a two-timing wife and a dame you wished you could stay with, and couldn't, happening to you.

Sal's combination bar and restaurant was an isolated building with two vacant lots on one side and a sour orange grove on the other. Cade looked in one of the open windows. The familiars were bellied up to the bar. Tocko was sitting in a booth with the Squid and a bronze-faced young man in his early thirties. The heavy-set Slavonian was pounding lightly on the table with one fist but only the Squid seemed impressed. Cade decided the strange one could be either a flyer or a seaman with his master's papers. He had that look in his eyes.

Cade walked around the building to the back door. The door was open to catch what breeze there was. Through the screen he could see Mamma Salvatore busy at her

stove, pausing from time to time to refresh herself from a big glass of iced orange wine.

Cade tapped on the wood of the screen softly. "Mamma. Mamma Salvatore," he whispered.

The big woman picked up her glass of wine and waddled casually toward the screen as if to get a breath of fresh air. Between sips of wine, she said softly, "Don't come in and don't talk too loud."

"Why not?"

"Tocko and the Squid are in the bar."

"I know. I saw them."

"And you are in bad trouble."

"How bad?"

"The beeg trouble. The law is looking for you. Tocko has sworn out a warrant charging you weeth keeling that dog Joe Laval."

Cade started to open his mouth and closed it for fear one of the butterflies fluttering in his stomach would fly out. When he could, he asked, "How does Tocko know Joe is dead?"

"A shark fisherman snagged his body late this afternoon." Mamma was pleased. "You keeled him, Cade?"

"No."

"Who did?"

"I imagine Tocko. Or had him killed. Anyway I found him on my boat this morning."

Mamma Salvatore shook her head. "No. Eef that was how it was, Tocko would not be so angry. No. Joe was too valuable to Tocko. Now he has no one to do his dirty work."

"He has the Squid."

Mamma was pleasantly high. "The Squid doesn't know pee from peanuts."

"Then who killed Joe?"

The fat woman sipped at her wine. "Who can tell? Joe has needed keeling for years." She giggled. "Then there is the girl on your boat."

"What about her?"

"Tocko turned her in. Right after I saw you by the post office this morning, Tocko called Immigration and told them the foreign-born wife of one of his former employees had entered the country illegally but he would be glad to

post bond eef they would parole her een his custody unteel she could locate her husband."

"I figured that when I saw Tocko and an immigration man hot-footing it up the levee."

Mamma winked salaciously. "Is good?"

Cade shook his head. "I wouldn't know."

Mamma laughed into one of her bracelets of wrinkles on her fat arms. "Ha."

"I mean it."

Mamma was serious. "Then you are fool. Is what young women are for. Is what Tocko did to your wife. Is what Moran did, too. Everyone in town was talking."

Cade realized he was sweating again. "You know this to be true, Mamma?"

The fat woman shook her head. "I did not see them in bed. But I woman. I was young once. I can tell. You do not get thee deep shadows under thee eyes from frying fish." She pressed her nose to the screen. "But what are you doing here? Papa and I hoped you were a long way by now."

All of Cade's muscles and glands ached dully. His nerve ends felt like they had been rubbed raw. Quiet and peace, the medic had told him! "I'm anchored out in the river," he told Mamma. "I'm headed for Barataria Bay and I need a little more gas."

"Wait," Mamma said, quietly. "Wait. I will get Sal."

Cade watched the fat woman waddle away across the kitchen and disappear through the swinging door. They were ignorant, sensuous, semi-illiterate, two of the last of the freebooters on the river; but Mamma and Sal were his kind of people. There were no gaps in their friendship. When they liked you they liked you.

The scuff of feet in grass attracted Cade's attention and he backed swiftly into the dark shadows beyond the light pouring out the open kitchen door. The Squid, his grotesquely small head bobbling as he peered hopefully into the dark, was padding down the side of the old wooden restaurant.

The butterflies returned to Cade's stomach as he drew his gun.

The Squid was rounding the building now, sniffing like a hound dog on the trail of a coon. Cade attempted to

back still deeper into the shadows. It was a mistake. His right heel struck the bottom case of a stacked tier of empty Coca Cola cases and as he tried to catch his balance he knocked the whole tier over in a clatter of broken bottles and thudding cases.

The Squid, trotting now, came over to the sound. "You there in the dark. Who are you?"

The palm of Cade's hand was slippery with sweat. He could kill the Squid all right, but what happened then? Tocko might or might not be able to pin Joe Laval on him but there would be no doubt about the Squid. Killing the Squid in cold blood could mean only one thing.

The Squid continued to advance. Saliva drooled from the corners of his mouth as he recognized Cade. "So you came back, eh? Tocko is smart. Go see why Mamma is so excited, he tol' me, an' it's you." The Squid reached out a big hand. "You shouldn't have done it, Cade. You shouldn't have killed Joe. Tocko tol' me if I found you I could have all the fun I wanted." The big man's eyes gleamed wetly in the starlight. "Go on. Hit me with your gun. Then I'll hit you back."

Cade fought down his recurring desire to be sick as the Squid's clammy fingers caressed his face, insistent, urgent, demanding.

"Go on. Hit me," the Squid whispered.

Cade raised the pistol in his hand, then held it level with his ear, as Sal opened the screen door of the kitchen and came over to where he and the Squid were standing. As tall a man as the Squid, outweighing him by fifty pounds, the swart-faced, aging Portuguese caught the Squid by one shoulder and turned him around as easily as if he were revolving a glass under one of the beer taps of his bar.

When Sal was excited he ran his words together. His words ran together now.

"Yougoddamnsneakingsonofabitchingqueer." Sal's massive chest labored in his anger. "Youandthatlouseofa-Tocko." He fought for self-control. "Tocko saw Mamma whisper to me. Tocko guessed something was up and sent you to pry. Is that it?"

The Squid looked like he was going to cry. "You stay out of this, Sal."

Sal lifted his hand, made a fist of it and moved it for-

ward, more of a push than a blow. There was a dull thud as it struck the Squid's jaw. He stood a moment weaving from side to side like the stack of a sea-going tug rolling in an offshore swell, then crumpled to the ground.

Sal apologized sadly, "Am getting old. Was time I bust his goddamn jaw."

Inside the bar, a smooth tenor was singing *Mathilda*, *Mathilda*. Cade could smell sweet orange blossoms spiced with the pungent scent of garlic and olive oil wafting out of the kitchen door. The starlight seemed somehow brighter. On the far bank of the river, the first white rays of the moon began to appear over the oyster camps.

Cade returned the gun to his pocket. "Thanks."

Sal shrugged. "Is nothing." His booming voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper. "Mamma is saying you need gas. I got plenty of gas. You can have all you want for nothing." He took off his beer-spotted white apron and laid it on a tier of empty cases. "You come along with Sal. I get my boat and guide you where it is."

As an afterthought, the big Portuguese extended his other hand and pressed the full bottle of orange wine he'd been holding on Cade. "But before, up with the bottle. Mamma is saying you look like you need a drink."

The iced bottle felt cold and good in Cade's hand. He wanted to grin and laugh at the same time. It was as if an unbearable weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He uncorked the bottle and drank. "Looking at you, Sal."

"Your health," Sal said, soberly.

10 *Water Baby*

During the morning it rained. Afternoon was hot, with only a vague suspicion of clouds in a blatantly brassy sky. Except for the distant smoke of a freighter, hull down on the horizon for Tampa, or possibly Martinique or Honduras, as far as Cade could see there was nothing but the undulating sheet of green glass being split by the prow of the cruiser and whipped into a frothy white wake by the powerful churning of the twin screws.

He'd bought a good boat. It pleased him. If he held the speed at which he was traveling, he should raise Grand Terre Island and Grand Pass by mid-afternoon and the acreage on Barataria Bay by early evening.

It had been Sal's idea that Cade ride out the night at anchor. He was glad now that he had. The Gulf was capricious, not to be dealt with lightly. A man needed all his senses. Cade had been born on the water. He had no fear of it. He did have a deep respect. The sharks and the crabs had grown fat on Sunday sailors who treated the Gulf like a salt water mill pond. Great Spanish treasure armadas had tossed like chips on its surface and spilled their stolen gold from Padre Island to the Keys and the Channel of Yucatan.

It was a few minutes of one when, her hair tied in a pony tail, Mimi thrust her head out the open companion-way door and smiled, "How you say, lunch is served?"

"You just said it."

Mimi was pleased with her newly acquired phrase. "Then come and get it. Or do you wish to eat on a tray?"

Cade debated briefly. They were well out of the ship lanes. The scene with Janice and Moran was bound to be unpleasant. He had been beaten and framed and put upon. Mimi was the one bright spot in his return to Bay Parish. Instead of racing like mad to deliver her to another man, he might well enjoy her while he could. There were, it said in the book, other things in life besides sex. It said. Cade cut his motors. "No. Don't bother. I'll anchor."

Mimi's smile widened. "Good. The food on a tray, she bobbles."

"Like you, honey," Cade thought.

When the cruiser lost seaway, Cade soaped his lead and tossed his line. They were in thirty fathoms of water, over good grouper bottom. It could be, he might fish for an hour after he and Mimi had eaten. A thick filet cut from a twenty- or thirty-pound red grouper would make a tasty main dish for supper.

The anchor made fast, he rinsed his hands and ran his wet fingers through his hair. The galley looked, somehow, different. Mimi had the knack few women had of doing much with nothing. She'd managed to make the small table look attractive. The hot corned-beef hash and cold asparagus spears looked good. She'd even opened one of the untaxed bottles of tawny port that Sal had insisted on giving him.

"I am good cook, no?" Mimi asked. Her laughter filled the cabin. "All I need is the can opener."

"It looks wonderful," Cade said.

The strain he'd felt with the girl was gone. The deep V of her borrowed white shirt still exposed the cream-colored tops of her round young breasts. The white pants were amply filled. He still wanted her. He couldn't be male and not want her, but his sense of immediate need was gone. He felt as he had the first night when Mimi had stood semi-nude and dripping in the cabin of the *Sea Bird*. Mimi was a good kid. He liked her. Anything that eventuated, if anything ever did, would have to start with her. His black mood of the night before was gone. The world was still filled with good people, men who valued loyalty and friendship, women who were chaste. It was just that

the few had ones like Janice and Moran and Tocko and the Squid who stood out by comparison.

The simple meal finished, Cade carried two folding canvas chairs and the partly filled bottle of wine out into the open cockpit. His vague idea of fishing left him. It was good just to sit in the sun and talk to Mimi. She wanted to know how long it would be before they reached the place they were going.

"Some time before dark," Cade told her. "I stood fairly well out from the pass but there's land right over there, just beyond the horizon. In an hour or so, I'll have to cut my speed and start feeling my way through the mud lumps."

Mimi looked out over the green sheet of glass on which the cruiser was resting. "You are anxious to see this Janice?"

Cade glanced at the girl sidewise. "Why should that interest you?"

"I am a woman and curious."

"No. Not particularly," Cade said. "Any affection I had for her is gone, I think. I'm more interested in finding out why I'm being pushed around, why she cleaned me out the way she has."

The expression puzzled Mimi. "Cleaned you out?"

"Sold my property."

"Oh. This land where we are going is ver' valuable?"

"It hasn't been for two hundred years."

"Then why does anyone want it?"

Cade slid down in his chair and shielded his eyes from the sun with the stiff brim of his cap. "That's what puzzles me. In fact I don't get any part of the deal. She is supposed to have sold it to Tocko but according to that waitress in New Orleans, she and Moran have on a big deal of some kind, a deal that has to concern the property." Cade sighed softly. "Then there's Joe Laval."

"The man killed on your boat?"

He nodded. "According to Mamma Salvatore and from what Sal told me last night while we were refueling, it wasn't Tocko who killed Joe or had him killed. Joe was too valuable a stooge."

"Stooge?"

"A cat's-paw, to pull a Slavonian monkey's chestnuts out of the fire."

Mimi clapped her hands. "I 'ave read about that. It 'appened in Mr. Aesop."

Cade's smile was wry. "Also in Bay Parish."

A nagging something in the back of his mind continued to annoy him, as it had at intervals since he'd discovered Joe's body. It was something he'd seen or heard afterward, just before he'd pushed off for New Orleans.

Mimi reached across the space that separated the two chairs and laid her hand on his. "You are so serious."

Cade looked at the small fingers resting on the back of his tanned hand. "Murder is a serious affair, especially when your name is signed to the tab." He reversed the position of their hands. "Now you've asked me a lot of questions. Let me ask you one."

Mimi eyed him suspiciously. "What?"

"You're pretty anxious to reach Moran, aren't you?"

"He is my 'usban'."

"Currently playing house with my former wife."

"Playing house?"

"Sleeping in the same bed."

"But thees we do not know. The nice girl who waited on our table in the restaurant in the hotel said they *seemed* to be business partners."

"During the hours she saw them."

Mimi looked out at the calm green water and said nothing.

Cade played with the fingers under his. "What if you find out Moran pulled a fast one?"

"How you mean?"

"What if you aren't legally married?"

Mimi's laughter filled the cockpit of the boat. "Ha. Before I let Jeem touch me," she lowered her eyes to the deck, "you know how I mean—"

"Yeah," Cade said, shortly. "I know how you mean."

Mimi continued, "At home in Caracas I am insist we go to the priest an' also the registrar, an' I have the papers to prove it."

The sun was hot and intimate. The only motion was the gentle rise and fall of the cruiser on the almost impercepti-

ble swells. It was as if they were alone in the world, a world composed of sky and green sea water. This, too, had been one of Cade's dreams. He continued to play with Mimi's fingers. "Sure. I figured that. But that wouldn't mean a thing if Moran was already married when he married you."

Mimi clung to her faith. "Jeem would not do such a theeng."

"Then why hasn't he answered your letters?"

"Thees I do not know."

"Why didn't he send for you?"

"I do not know thees either."

"But what if I'm right? Then what are you going to do?"

"What if you are right about what?"

"About you and Moran not being legally married."

Mimi's breasts rose with her emotion until they threatened to pop the already strained top button of her borrowed shirt. "Now I 'ave come thees far I will, how you say, cross that bridge when I am come to eet."

Again Cade was tempted to tell her what Miss Spence had told him; again he resisted the temptation. The chances were Mimi wouldn't believe him. She would think he was making it up, hoping to make time on his own.

The semi-tropical sun beating down on the open cockpit was beginning to make Cade's head ache. Sweat beaded on his face and trickled down his sides. He wished he was in, not on the water. Still, the gentle rise and fall of the cruiser gave him a pleasant feeling. At least one of his dreams had come true. He had a good boat. Perhaps that was as much as a man could expect.

Janice's sale of the old house made sense. Money was all-important to Janice. He could see that now. Janice would sell anything she owned, including herself, if the buyer met her price. But if she had sold the acreage to Tocko, where did Moran come in, and why was she building a fishing lodge on property she no longer owned?

Mimi extracted her hand from under his. "How long were you married to thees Janice?"

"About five years."

"She is pretty?"

"Very."

"Weeth nice body?"

"Very nice."

"So nice as mine?"

Cade attempted to eye the girl beside him dispassionately. "I'd say as far as curves and hollows are concerned you're very similar."

"You were colonel when you were married?"

"Yeah. I was upped from major in the South Pacific, before I was transferred to jets."

"You were happy weeth her?"

Cade wondered what Mimi was getting at. "At least, I thought I was. Yeah. Sure. We got along fine until I was sent to Korea."

"Where you were shot down?"

Cade's eyes hardened as he thought of Joe Laval's welcome. "*A big-shot colonel, eh? A hero. Or maybe not such a hero. While the other men you went over with were still dog-fighting all over Mig Alley, you were sitting it out on the ground, shot down over the Yalu.*"

It had been a hell of a thing for Laval to say. He was glad the lean Cajun bastard was dead. Not every man could be an ace. You had to play the cards as they fell. For every big-shot jet jockey there were a hundred capable pilots who risked their lives hourly without any fanfare or newspaper publicity.

"Over the Yalu," Cade said sourly. "On my fourth mission."

"She thought you were dead?"

"Anyway, missing in action."

"And while you were prisoner, she got the divorce?"

"That's the way it happened."

All Mimi's gestures were emphatic. She shook her black curls. "No."

"No what?"

Mimi leaned forward in her chair. "Thees woman not love you. All the time you thought you were happy, she was jus' sleeping weeth the silver maple leaves on your shoulders."

Cade looked at Mimi, then away. He could smell the natural perfume of her body. Her young flesh looked soft

and warm and inviting. He had been hungry for two years. "Could be," he said, sourly. "But isn't that rather dog in the manger?"

"Dog in the manger?" Mimi puzzled.

Cade's headache increased. The glare of the sun on the water hurt his eyes. He stood up abruptly. "Skip it. But if you ever get back to Caracas, look it up in your copy of Aesop."

He stood staring over the side of the boat. The green water looked inviting. "How well do you swim?" he asked Mimi.

She stopped looking puzzled and smiled. "Ver' well. *Madre mia* used to call me her water baby."

Cade's sour mood continued. He didn't care what Mimi's mother had called her. He didn't care why Janice had married him. What he wanted was a woman in his arms and a mattress under the woman. He lighted a cigarette, took two quick puffs, then tossed it overside and searched the wheel locker for the two pairs of cheap swim trunks he'd purchased in Corpus Christi. One of them was red, the other yellow. He held out the yellow pair to Mimi. "Okay. Then let's go for a swim before we start on again."

Mimi's smile turned uncertain. "I would like to, ver' much." She shook her head. "But thees I could not do."

"Why not?"

She touched her breasts with naive candor. "Because up here I would be bare. I do not have something to wear, how you say, topside."

"Wear your bra or a towel."

Still dubious, Mimi accepted the yellow trunks. Her big eyes searched Cade's face. "It—will be all right?"

"Of course," Cade said.

Mimi patted his arm. "Of course. Forgive me that I ask."

She carried the shorts to the forecabin. Cade made certain that the anchor was fast and that there was a secured rope dangling overside. Then, slipping into the red trunks, he used the transom of the cruiser for a diving board.

The water was cool, almost cold. Cade dove as deeply as he could, then fought his way even farther down. When he surfaced again, both his sense of immediate need and

his headache were gone. He circled the boat in a fast crawl. The cool water and the physical exertion cleared his head. He felt good. He felt fine.

He turned on his back and floated as Mimi climbed up on the transom. She made a pretty picture. She'd knotted one of the galley dish towels and fastened it with a safety pin to form an attractive halter. The yellow trunks were much shorter and tighter on her than the red trunks were on him. Cade was proud of himself. If he got Mimi to Barataria Bay unharmed, Colonel Cade Cain could recommend civilian Cade Cain for a medal, for forbearance above and beyond the call of nature.

Mimi waved gaily, then cut the water in a perfect dive. She dove as well as she did everything else and she had no fear.

They swam for half an hour, racing, up-ending, scrambling up the rope from time to time to use the front of the cruiser as a diving board.

Cade had never felt more tranquil, more at peace. He was resting, floating on his back, when he saw the first dark cloud and realized the wind had begun to blow. There was a perceptible difference in the feel and the look of the water. He turned on his side and called, "We'd best get aboard and up anchor. It looks like we're in for some wind."

Mimi nodded. "Whatever you say."

The cruiser was swinging gently now. The rope that had been dangling to starboard was hanging over the transom. Cade scrambled aboard and leaned down to help Mimi up. As she came up over the varnished wood, the knotted towel caught on the chrome burgee standard and the safety pin opened.

The gesture was instinctive, normal, natural. Cade had taken all he could. He pulled Mimi into his arms, his free hand cupping her young loveliness, his lips pressed to hers, as they stood straining together, dripping salt water on the deck plates.

The words were a sob in Mimi's throat. "No. We must not. Thees ees wrong."

Her fingers tangled in Cade's wet hair, for a long moment she returned his frenzied kisses, every curve and contour of her young body throbbing with desire. Then she

went suddenly limp in his arms. Her flesh was still firm but cold. The cheeks Cade were kissing were salty with tears. The eyes searching his face were big and black and hurt.

She had asked if it would be all right. He had told her it would. Mimi had trusted him. She had even removed her knife.

Cade forced himself to release her, recovered the knotted towel from the burgee standard. The pitch of the anchored boat was much more pronounced now. His voice was as thick as the rapidly gathering clouds.

"I'm sorry."

Mimi held the towel in front of her. "I'm sorry, too," she said, quietly. "So ver' sorry. I weesh I could tell you how sorry."

Somehow dignified and regal despite the fact that all she had on was a pair of too tight yellow swim shorts, she turned and entered the cabin, closing the door gently behind her.

Cade drained the nearly empty bottle of port he found rolling beside one of the canvas deck chairs. Then, eyeing the windblown clouds, he started his motor and up anchored, just as the first sheet of blinding rain drenched the bobbing cruiser.

The Gulf was no longer green. It was a deepening rain-pocked purple. The swells grew even more pronounced. After setting his course, Cade glanced back. The triangular dorsal fin of a curious twenty-foot shark was crisscrossing the area in which he and Mimi had been swimming.

It had been a foolish thing to do. A dozen things could have happened. It wasn't his fault they hadn't. Between lulls in the puffs of wind, he could hear Mimi crying in the cabin.

Because he'd gone as far as he had? Because he hadn't gone farther?

Women.

Cade opened the motor full throttle for the run to the big south mud lump and braced himself as the twin screws bit into the water.

11 *Home to Janice*

Cade glanced at his watch. It was twenty minutes of eight. It would be dark in a few more minutes. The rain and wind had lasted less than an hour but left a vicious chop behind them. The run from the mouth of the pass had taken longer than he had thought it would. Now he was bucking an outgoing tide.

In the deepening dusk the big south mud lump glided past to starboard. Cade cut his speed still more and swept the mud lump with his searchlight. The tide was full. Only portions of the lump were visible. The six men he had seen were gone, chum for the crabs and the fishes.

It was tricky business running the mud lumps in the dark. Cade considered anchoring for the night and decided against it. Now he was this close, he wanted to get to the showdown with Janice right away. He wanted to get Mimi out of his hair. He didn't want to spend another night aboard the boat with her.

Her eyes swollen from crying, Mimi appeared in the doorway of the cabin. She was wearing the dress and hose and high-heeled shoes he had bought her in New Orleans. Her voice was as sullen as her eyes.

"Do you want me to fix you something to eat?"

Cade shook his head. "Don't bother. We should be inside in another hour." He felt impelled to hurt her. "Besides, I might be tempted to anchor."

In the faint glow from the red and green lights on the

instrument panel, Mimi looked as if she were about to cry again. "I said I was sorry."

Cade felt as if he were shouting at her. "Okay. So we're both sorry. If you're hungry, fix something to eat. But don't light any lights and stop bothering me or I'm apt to run us aground."

He cut the speed of the cruiser until he barely had seaway. The channel was narrow and tricky here, but once he was through Grand Pass he would be in open water again. Jean LaFitte, long ago, had anchored in the Bay. He had even maneuvered his barkentines and cutters through the narrow series of watercourses that helped drain the Mississippi at a point opposite New Orleans. LaFitte had used the inland route to bring his booty to the city.

Mimi gnawed at her lower lip. "Well, don't shout at me."

"I'm not shouting," Cade shouted.

He turned on his running lights, wishing to Christ he'd come into the Bay the short way. Still, if he'd cut through the series of watercourses instead of stopping at Bay Parish, he wouldn't know he was wanted for murder. Even if he couldn't do anything about it, it was always best for a man to know where he stood, especially with the law or a woman.

Mimi remained in the doorway of the cabin. "How do you know where you're going?"

Cade tried to explain and couldn't. A man could explain sailing on compass. But feeling his way through the dark was something else. It was like flying a jet. A man either could or he couldn't. It was a combination of things, of having threaded the channel a hundred times before, the sound and the feel of the screws, the color of his wake, an occasional familiar landmark.

"I've been here before," he said. "How's for breaking out another bottle of wine? As long as we're about to see our respective mates, we ought to celebrate the occasion."

"Whatever you say," Mimi said. She opened her mouth to say more, then changed her mind and disappeared into the cabin to reappear a few moments later with an opened bottle of the tawny port that Sal had given them.

As she extended her hand with the bottle the cruiser

scraped over a mud bar and Cade, instinctively, held his breath. When he could speak again, he said, "You first. *Saludos.*"

"No, thank you," Mimi said primly. "I nevair drink on the empty stomach."

Cade drank from the neck of the bottle. The wine tasted weak and insipid. He wished it was Jamaica rum. He wished he was roaring drunk. He wished Mimi was Janice or that he was James Moran. He could tell himself that Mimi meant nothing to him, that she was just another girl he'd met, but once she went out of this new life he was leading, he doubted if anything would ever be quite the same again. It was more than physical. He liked her.

He took a second big drink, then corked the bottle. If only he'd met Mimi before she'd met Moran. But when Mimi had met Moran, he'd still been married to Janice. Or had he? Not that it made any difference.

He was through the pass now, in deep water again. He could tell by the bite of the screws. There was no wind here, no swells, no chop. The Bay was a sheet of black glass, broken only by the white wake and the occasional phosphorescent slap of a leaping fish. Except for the purr of the motors and the throb of the underwater exhaust, the only sound was the crying of the startled birds roosting in the offshore islands.

The Bay was huge and black and mysterious and somehow sinister, much as it must have been in the days of Jean LaFitte. Its population fluctuated. People came and people left. The moon was still entangled in the trees rising from the wooded shoreline. It was too dark to see, but Cade doubted if the Bay, at least this section of it had changed. Even if it were daylight, all he would be able to see would be a few crude fishing camps, the rare cabins of muskrat and wild rice hunters squatting along the water-courses leading inland.

The thought amused Cade. It could be there were squatters on his land. Seven years of squatting established proprietary rights. If any of them cared to contest the sale the court might decide for them! It would serve Janice and Tocko right.

The moon rose from the branches of the trees and seemed to spotlight the white cruiser. The night wind was

cool on his cheek, like soft black velvet threaded with silver.

As he rounded a vaguely familiar landmark, a spit of land, Mimi spoke for the first time since she had handed him the bottle. "You are ver' good sailor."

"Thank you," Cade said. He wished he hadn't drunk the wine. It hadn't helped. What he wanted didn't come in bottles.

"We are almost there?"

Cade searched the moonlit shoreline. "I'd say we're abreast of my property now, but it's been some time since I've been here." He located a pin prick of light. "That should be the camp dead ahead."

"There is a building?"

"A shack. My father and I used it maybe three or four times a year."

"How many rooms in the shack?"

"One."

Mimi wet her lips with her tongue. "Oh."

The pin prick of light brightened and became a shaded high-watt bulb outlining a substantial pier extending out into deep water. There was a fast-looking single-stack cutter tied to the pier and several smaller boats in the slips leading into it. Whatever use Janice had found for the acreage came under the head of big business.

Cade warped the boat into an empty slip. The shack he and his father had built was gone, replaced by a substantial two-story log lodge with a half-dozen small cottages flanking the main building. Back of the lodge he thought he could see a landing strip. Only the lodge was lighted.

He cut his motors and made fast.

"You said it was a shack," Mimi pouted.

"Yeah, it was," Cade said.

He started to step up on the pier and Mimi stopped him. "You are so anxious to see your Janice you are going ashore like that?"

Cade ran his hands down his sides and realized he was still wearing the red swim shorts. They and his cap were all he had on.

He put on his last clean shirt and white pants. The heavy .38 caliber pistol made an uncomfortable bulge in his hip pocket. Cade transferred it to his side pants pocket

and slipped his bare feet into his sneakers. Mimi was waiting in the cockpit. He helped her up on the pier, then stepped ashore.

The pier was new. The smell of freshly milled lumber and the reek of creosote was strong. The cross planks were laid but still had to be spiked. Cade stood, his cap on the back of his head looking up at the lighted lodge.

Mimi was impatient with him. "For why are you waiting?"

"Just wondering," Cade told her.

"Wondering what?"

"If I'm walking into a trap."

He looked from the lighted lodge to the dark mat of vegetation rising back of the narrow beach. Seemingly, the pier and the beach were deserted. The only sounds he could hear were the whispering of the wind, the night noises in the swamp and the rhythmic *thud thud* of the gasoline power plant supplying the juice for the lights.

"Trap?" Mimi puzzled.

Cade didn't bother to answer. Janice had sold him out. She'd dirtied his name with Tocko. She was doing the same with Moran. She knew he had been released. She had good reason to fear him. It seemed logical to assume that she would expect him to catch up with her and she would prepare some defense against him.

The something he'd heard or seen in Bay Parish continued to nag at his mind. Suddenly he remembered what it was. Of course. He'd heard the sound of a small plane warming up. Moran was a flyer. It was only a few minutes by air from Bay Parish to where he stood. If Moran had been in Bay Parish he knew that Joe Laval was dead and that Tocko had signed a warrant charging Cade with the murder. All Janice had to do to protect herself was to have the local sheriff waiting.

Mimi swatted at a mosquito. "I am uncomfortable here. The bugs are biting me."

"Besides, you're anxious to get to Moran."

"After all, he is my 'usban'."

"Sure," Cade said. "Before you let Jeem touch you, you insisted he take you to the priest and also the registrar." He cupped one of Mimi's elbows. "Okay. Let's go see what's what."

His sneakers made no sound but the loose planks rattled under his weight. The click of Mimi's high heels sounded unnaturally loud in the moonlit silence.

Along with the other improvements, a beach had been pumped in and they had to wade through two hundred feet of loose sand to reach the wide porch of the lodge. The cypress-paneled foyer was huge, with a natural stone fireplace at each end. The furniture was new, oversized and leather. A deeply tanned youth wearing oil-stained slacks and a clean white seaman's skivy was standing behind a small hotel desk, tinkering with the star drag on a deep-sea reel. He didn't look like a hotel clerk to Cade.

The youth laid down the reel and looked at Cade's white captain's cap. "I thought I heard a boat put in. Don't tell me you came down from the city in the dark?"

Cade shook his head. "No. Up from Southwest Pass."

"That's an even tougher haul. You must know these waters."

"I do."

The youth fumbled under the desk and found a registration card. "Well, we aren't really open yet but I think we can take care of you. A room for you and the missus? Or do you want one of the private cottages?"

"Neither," Cade said. He leaned an elbow on the desk. It was an effort for him to use the name. "Mrs. Cain is here?"

"Yes, sir, she is."

"Could I see her?" It was more of a statement than a question.

"I don't see why not."

Mimi asked, almost shyly, "And Mr. James Moran? He, too, is here?"

The youth back of the desk looked puzzled. "Yeah. Sure. They're both here. They came down a few days ago to get the place ready for the grand opening next week. Who shall I say wants to see them?"

He turned as the door behind the desk opened and a striking girl wearing horn-rimmed harlequin glasses emerged carrying a handful of papers.

"These reservations, John—" she began, then used her free hand to rip off her glasses and stared at the couple in

front of the desk. "Cade. Cade, darling," she screamed. "You're home!"

Cade instinctively sucked in his breath. He could feel the blood pounding in his temples. Janice hadn't changed. Her hair was still the color of ripe wheat. Her green-gray eyes were wide set and intelligent. The high, firm, peaked breasts he'd dreamed of in Pyongyang still strained against the bodice of the smartly simple cotton dress she was wearing. Neither Tocko nor Moran showed. Her deep tan was becoming. It made her face look even younger than he remembered it, almost virginal.

The papers flew one way, the glasses another, as she rushed into his arms, laughing and crying at the same time. "Oh, my darling, my darling."

Cade felt like a goddamn fool. He stood mute, motionless, embarrassed, holding the familiar body lightly. It wasn't the reception he'd expected. Janice wasn't afraid of him. She seemed genuinely glad to see him.

Janice pressed her lips to his and talked into his mouth. "Then you did get my letters and my cable."

Cade felt even more like a fool. "No," he said, flatly. He tilted the girl's saucy chin with a crooked forefinger. "Why so glad to see the returned hero? I thought you divorced me."

Janice brushed the divorce aside as immaterial. "Oh, that," she said, lightly. "I can explain that." Her lower lip quivered. Her green-gray eyes filled with tears. "Well, aren't you going to kiss me? Aren't you glad to see *me*?"

12 *Bed and Blonde*

Cade decided he didn't like Moran. The big man smiled too much. He showed too many teeth when he smiled. He was too glib, too hail-fellow-well-met. And Cade didn't like the way he looked at Mimi. He'd met men like Moran before. There was nothing of which the big black Irishman wouldn't be capable.

Cade looked across the littered table at Mimi. Mimi had drunk too much wine. Her eyes were unnaturally bright. She sat looking at the face of the man beside her like a small white kitten fascinated by a big sleek tom.

Janice had finished her meal, and now was saying, "I know how it must have looked to you, Cade. But think of the spot I was in. To all intents and purposes, except legally, you were dead."

"So you divorced me."

Janice played with his fingers. "All right. So I made a mistake. But at the time, nothing mattered. I thought I'd lost you forever." She was frank. "I had myself to look out for."

"So you came back to Bay Parish and sold my property to Tocko Kalavitch."

"I sold the house."

"He lies," Moran said. "That's one of the reasons I broke up with Tocko."

"Why?"

"Because he was trying to push Janice around. His only

claim to the property is pre-emption. You see, as soon as he heard you'd been shot down he moved right in and built this lodge, figuring no one would ever call him."

"For what purpose?" Cade asked. "I mean, why did he build it?"

Moran was apparently as frank as Janice had been. "As a drop for aliens." He lighted a Turkish cigarette. "Oh, not your run-of-the-deck five-hundred-dollar a head wet-backs but the big shots who had to get out of where they were. Men who could afford to pay through the nose. Big shots, for instance, who'd bucked even bigger shots behind the Iron Curtain. Men for whom the MVD were looking."

"MVD?" Mimi hiccuped.

"Russian secret police," Cade explained. "Short for Ministry of the Interior, formerly NKVD, *Narodny Kommissar Vnutrennyh Del* or People's Commissariat for the Interior."

Moran laughed easily. "You seem to know."

"I just spent some time north of the Yalu," Cade replied dryly.

Moran went on, "Anyway, he started pushing Janice around. I wasn't too happy in what I was doing. So when she came up with the idea of making a swank hideaway of this place and offered me a cut if I'd help get it started, I jumped at the chance." He patted Mimi's hand. "What the hell? I'm no angel but then I'm not a complete heel and some of Tocko's business methods gagged me."

Cade drank the dregs of his highball. "Such as?"

Moran met his eyes. "Such as six guys one of his boats brought in and because a Coast Guard cutter was getting too close, he dropped them off on big south mud lump. That way the respectable shrimp fleet owner, Tocko Kalavitch, wouldn't have to take a fall." Moran added virtuously, "At least, when I was flying guys in from Martinique and Caracas, I fulfilled my contract. I set them ashore on the mainland."

Janice snuggled even closer to Cade. "Then, when I heard you'd been released, I wrote right away and I cabled. I even called Tokyo, long distance, but your old wing commander said you'd been flown to Hawaii and from there to the States." She smiled. "But I knew that sooner or later my letters or my cable would catch up with

you. And all the time we were in New Orleans, at a flea bag called the Royal Crescent, arranging for publicity, and a charter for Jim to fly patrons down here, and soliciting political support, in case Tocko tried to make trouble—well, I expected the phone to ring any minute and you to say you were down in the lobby. I left a forwarding address at the post office. So did Jim.”

“I see,” Cade said.

It was a smooth, plausible story, the type of half-truth that Janice would concoct. He wondered if she thought he would believe her and how far she would go in her attempt to make her story stand up.

Moran tried to refill Mimi’s glass. She shook her head. “No, thank you. I ’ave plenty.” He brushed her hair with his lips. “The whole thing has been a tragic mix-up but I see how it happened now, at least, as far as Mimi and I are concerned.”

Mimi looked less like a little white kitten than she had. “How?” she asked flatly.

“You addressed your letters to me in care of Tocko, didn’t you?”

“In care of Mr. Kalavitch, Bay Parish, Louisiana.”

“And there you are. If you’ll pardon the expression, the louse never turned them over to me. And that old witch of a postmistress is just as bad. Probably because Tocko paid her not to, she never sent out my letters to you.”

Mimi’s accent became more pronounced. “Then you deed write?”

“Every week. I even sent you passage money to join me, three hundred and twenty-five dollars.” Moran lit a cigarette from the stub of the one he was smoking. “Maybe we can sue the old bag for interfering with the mail or destroying money orders.”

Cade wondered if Mimi believed Moran. It was hard to tell. Her big eyes gave no clue to the way the wheels in her mind were turning.

Janice pushed her chair back from the table. “It’s getting late.” She stroked the back of Cade’s hand with her fingers. “I know that Jim and Mimi want to be alone.” She bent and kissed Cade’s cheek. “And it’s been more than two years since I’ve seen you, darling. We can talk

this all out in the morning. I'm only glad it's turned out the way it has."

Moran smoothly helped Mimi to her feet. "Come on, darling. I guess we can take a hint."

Mimi stood, swaying slightly, her eyes searching Moran's face. "You are certain you wrote me? You are certain you sent me the passage?"

Moran kissed the tip of her nose. "Of course. And I can tell you I was plenty hurt when I didn't hear from you."

Janice laughed. "Hurt? The man was furious. He thought one of two things had happened. Either your family forced you to annul the marriage and wouldn't even let you answer his letters or you'd met one of your own countrymen you liked better than you did him."

"Oh," Mimi said. The word could mean anything. Her eyes still uncertain, glancing at Cade from time to time, almost as if she expected him to stop them, she allowed Moran to propel her across the floor of the dining room.

Janice linked her arm through one of Cade's and followed them. "The hell with the dishes. The full staff won't be down until Thursday but there's a girl who lives back in the swamp who comes in every day."

The wood-paneled lobby was deserted. The reel was still on the counter but the youth Cade had seen behind the desk was gone. Here the night noises of the swamp and the *thud thud* of the gasoline power plant were more pronounced than they had been in the dining room. A long, dimly lighted hall led to the rear of the building. Beside the entrance to the hall a stairway led up to a balcony and rooms on the second floor.

Moran locked the front door of the lodge, while Janice turned out most of the lights.

And so to bed, Cade thought. Both Moran and Janice had lied about one thing. They were more than business partners. They were two of a kind and they worked very well together. Smooth. Like the flesh on the inside of a woman's thigh, Cade told himself.

Finished with locking the front door, Moran took Mimi's arm again and walked her toward the hall. "Well, see you both in the morning."

"In the morning," Janice said. She stood, with one hand

on the rail of the stairs leading to the upper floor. "Good-night."

A few feet down the hall, Mimi turned. "Good night, Cade," she said, softly. "Thank you for being so kind. You are, as we say, true *caballero*."

Cade wished he could see her face.

"Sure," Moran said, soberly. "I owe you a lot, fellow. And I'll make it right with you, too." He opened one of the doors in the hall, stood aside to allow Mimi to pass him, then closed the door quietly behind them.

"My room is upstairs," Janice said.

Cade realized a lump had formed in his throat. He followed Janice up the stairs and waited while she unlocked the door of a room opening off the balcony, still wondering how far she intended to go to make her fantastic story stand up.

As Janice lighted a bed lamp made from a polished cypress knee, she smiled. "This was to have been one of the guest rooms, at twenty-five dollars a day. But now that you're home, we'll keep it for ourselves." Janice switched on another lamp, on the dressing table. "You came by boat, honey?"

"That's right."

"Your own?"

"A thirty-eight foot twin-screw job that I bought in Corpus."

"How wonderful," Janice enthused. "That gives us another guide boat." She patted his cheek. "And a good man to handle it. You should see the reservations, darling. We're booked practically solid for the season. And why shouldn't we be? This will be the only resort of its kind, the best fishing and swimming in the world, the utmost in privacy with no questions asked. And only a few minutes by air from New Orleans."

Cade continued to study the room. It was entirely feminine. The bedspread was pastel silk. So were the drapes on the windows. The open closet door revealed only dresses. If Moran had shared the room with Janice, there were no visible signs of his occupancy.

Cade walked to the screened window and looked out. Night lay dark and heavy on the Bay. The moon was wan-

ing. The stars seemed less bright. The only light was the bulb on the pier. Even at the distance, he could see the *Sea Bird* tugging at her mooring ropes and, beyond her, the dark bulk of the cutter.

"Who owns the cutter?" he asked.

"The contractor who's building the pier," Janice said. "His men are living aboard."

Cade wondered how big a fool Janice thought he was. A contractor wouldn't use a cutter. He'd use a tug and a barge. Something more than renting luxury rooms to amorous businessmen with attractive secretaries and a secondary desire to fish was being planned for the lodge. Well, he'd wanted a showdown with Janice—and here he was.

As Cade turned from the window he realized he was still carrying his cap. He hung it on the back of a chair. Janice kicked off her shoes and, sitting on the bench in front of the dressing table, began to comb her hair, smiling at him in the mirror between strokes.

The lump in Cade's throat dissolved. His knees were suddenly weak. The whole scene was fantastic. It was exactly as he had dreamed it would be, only grotesquely distorted and somehow sordid.

Janice met his eyes in the mirror and stopped smiling. "You're still angry with me, aren't you, darling?"

Cade was frank. "I don't know what to think."

"You've been listening to the nasty narrow little minds in Bay Parish."

"Among other things."

"What things?"

"After all, you did divorce me."

"I thought I explained that."

"You might have waited."

Janice nodded. "Yes. I should have known better. I see now I was wrong. But at the time it seemed the logical thing to do."

"What beats me is how you managed it," he said. "You had no real grounds, here or in any other state. And all the courts were turning thumbs down on proceedings against G.I.'s in combat abroad."

"I didn't get the divorce in this state, but it was the

pollys here who fixed it for me through their connections. I told you—I'm pretty thick with them. I have been for some time."

"So is Tocko, I bet," growled Cade.

It was hot and close in the room. The gun in Cade's pocket felt too heavy.

Janice continued to study his face in the mirror. "You're very angry with me, aren't you?"

"I don't know what to think."

"Put yourself in my position."

"I'm trying to."

Finished with her hair, Janice stood up and caught the hem of her dress with both hands. "Angry enough to shoot me?"

"I don't know."

"Isn't that why you brought the gun?"

Cade breathed hard as Janice pulled her dress over her head and hung it neatly on a hanger. All she was wearing under the dress was a short white petticoat and her hose. He'd forgotten how truly lovely she was. Janice meant, obviously, to go all the way to back her claim that she still loved him, that she'd thought he was dead, that all she had really done was to look out for herself.

Janice came back to the bed, stripped off the pastel silk spread and folded it neatly. Then, sitting on the edge of the bed, she rolled down one of her hose, her blonde hair falling over her face, as Cade had dreamed a thousand times of seeing it fall.

"I can't say I blame you," she said. "From your point of view, it was a nasty, despicable thing for me to do. But any mistakes I've made have been of the head and not of the heart. So I'm an avaricious little bitch, I can't help it." She brushed her hair out of her eyes and hooked her thumbs in the elastic waistband of the petticoat. "I've seen too many wives of dead and 'missing' officers running billing machines or clerking in dime stores. And I wasn't having any."

The petticoat followed her hose to the floor and she sat looking up at Cade with her gray-green eyes slitted and sullen, reminding him somewhat of Mimi.

"Well—?" Janice asked, quietly. "Well—?"

13 *The Futile Gun*

The night heat fondled Cade's body with little, black, moist fingers. He lay looking at the ceiling that he couldn't see, acutely conscious of Janice's breathing. He'd never felt so emotionally or physically depleted.

This was the dream he'd dreamed?

He moved slightly and Janice moved with him, as if even in her sleep she was reluctant to lose contact. Whatever else she was not, Janice definitely was a good actress. For some reason of her own, she wanted him to think she was still in love with him. She'd done her best to further the illusion. Just the same, her best hadn't been enough. Cade felt shamed and put upon and soiled—as if he'd been had. What Janice had given him held little value for her. She'd given the same to Tocko and Moran. Cade was certain of that now. Janice had been too eager to please him. There was something in the back of her greedy little mind, something for which she still needed him.

Cade eased his way to the edge of the bed and the spring, giving under his weight, made the bed sway like a boat. Over the shrilling of the cicadas and the booming of the frogs, he could hear Mimi's small, militant voice.

"Thees woman no love you. All the time you thought you were happy, she was just sleeping weeth the silver maple leaves on your shoulders."

Cade wondered what Mimi was thinking now. He felt a twinge of remorse. Still, all he had done was what she had

asked him to do. She'd been determined to get to Moran. He hoped she was satisfied.

The air in the room was stifling him. Carefully, so as not to awaken Janice, Cade eased out of bed and dressed. Perhaps it would be cooler on the pier. Perhaps he could think more clearly. Janice's talk of a swank resort was a lot of foolishness. There weren't enough rooms in the lodge to make it pay. The pier had cost more than she could hope to take in in five seasons. Then there was the single-stack cutter. She and Moran were up to something, something that tied in with Janice's hectic affair with Tocko, with his being warned out of Bay Parish by Joe Laval, with Laval being murdered.

As he felt his way down the dim stairs to the lobby, Cade wondered if it were possible that Moran had shot Laval. He'd heard a light plane in Bay Parish. Moran was a flyer.

The silence in the lobby was complete. Cade turned too sharply at the foot of the stairs and the gun bulging his pocket slammed against the newel post. The silence magnified the sound. Cade stood holding his breath, looking down the hall at the door of the room into which Moran and Mimi had disappeared and realized he was jealous. After what he'd just been through with Janice!

Men, Cade decided, were complex creatures, almost as complex as women. He reached for the hook of the front screen door and found it already unhooked. Someone else had been unable to sleep. Moran? Mimi? The youth he'd seen behind the desk?

Cade waded the loose sand to the pier. The air sweeping over the dark bay was cooler and cleaner there. There was a faint slap of waves on the beach and farther out, a suggestion of whitecaps. Cade turned his attention from the water to the cutter made fast to the T-shaped pier. A white "S" enclosed in a white circle was painted on the stack. The insignia was vaguely familiar. Cade tried to place it and couldn't. One thing, however, was certain. The cutter was built for speed. It was not a contractor's boat.

He turned and looked back at the lodge. Only the lobby was lighted. There were no lights in any of the other rooms. Cade tried to put Mimi out of his mind. So Moran

was a bastard. So, according to Miss Spence, he had at least three other wives. What happened to Mimi wasn't any of his affair. She'd stowed away in La Guaira to join Moran. She'd swum the river in the dark. She'd kept herself pure for the guy. Cade hoped she was happy.

He started to turn back to the pier and stopped as a faint light, feeling its way out past a drawn shade, showed in one of the cottages. So a cottage was occupied, and not by a tired businessman and his amorous secretary.

Cade raised his eyes to the tall web of steel behind the cottage. It was the first time he'd noticed the tower. It was substantial, solid. It looked like a professional two-way affair, perhaps a ship-to-shore sending outfit. Either that or a powerful ham set.

In a luxury fishing lodge?

Cade felt the butt of the gun in his pocket, as he walked out on the pier. The small cruisers he'd noticed were old work tubs with peeling paint. Sandwiched between them were several new skiffs, one a fourteen-foot job, powered with a new fifteen horsepower Sea Horse with two cruise-a-day tanks. Janice was getting money from somewhere, more, a lot more, than she could have possibly gotten from the sale of the old house.

Sweat started on his face again and trickled down his sides. He wished now he'd stayed in New Orleans. He hadn't accomplished a thing by coming to the Bay. His intended showdown with Janice had turned out to be just a show—an amorous interlude that had been all play-acting and had left him disgusted with both himself and her. He still didn't know a thing more than he'd known when he first heard Janice had been in Bay Parish and had sold his properties.

He stooped to feel the tautness of one of the lines mooring the *Sea Bird* and the sweat dribbling down his sides turned cold. There was someone behind the next piling. Cade drew his gun from his pocket and looked around the piling. Mimi was sitting on the far side, swinging her bare feet over the planking.

She looked up at him with wet eyes, " 'Allo."

In the light from the bulb on the pier head, Cade could see that her face was stained with tears and that the bodice of her dress had been torn and pinned together.

He returned the gun to his pocket, lighted a cigarette and squatted down beside her. "Smoke?"

Mimi took the offered cigarette. "Thank you."

Cade had a fair idea of what had happened. He wished he could think of something to say to comfort her. It wasn't nice to see a dream dissolve. He knew.

Mimi sucked at the cigarette in silence. Then, wiping her wet cheeks with the back of one hand, she announced, "Is all right now. I weel not cry any more."

"It didn't go so good, huh?"

Mimi shook her head. "No. I 'ave been ver' *bobo*, like you say, a leetle fool."

"In what way?"

"Jeem has no affection for me."

"No?"

"No." Mimi's small chin jutted. "All he did was use me in Caracas. I was ver' pleasant way for him to spend a week. I am not even his wife."

"He admitted it?"

Mimi shook her head. "No." She put her free hand on her left breast. "It is a feeling I have here. I could tell when we were alone." Her breathing grew labored. "He has no love for me. All I am to him is a woman. All he wanted was encore. And when I wouldn't he hit me with his fist and knocked me down on the bed."

The bitterness in his voice surprised Cade. "Why didn't you use your knife?"

Mimi's bitterness matched his own. "Because he took it away from me." She studied her bare feet. "But my knife and my shoes were all he did get." She began to cry without sound. "It is funny, no, how you can want someone so badly and then not be in love at all? That is why my dress is torn. And now I do not know what to do."

"How about going back to Caracas?"

"No. My family would not receive me."

Cade sighed. "I tried to tell you. Miss Spence, that's the postmistress in Bay Parish, said the return addresses of at least three other girls writing him read—Mrs. James Moran."

"Now you tell me thees."

"Would you have believed me if I had told you before?"

Mimi thought a moment. "No." She continued to cry without sound.

"Where is Moran now?"

"I don't know. He called me bad names and tried to stop me but I ran from the room an' out here."

Cade looked back at the lodge. Janice's window was lighted. She was awake and knew he was gone. It could be Moran was with her, comparing notes.

What wind there had been had died. The bay no longer lapped at the beach. The whitecaps were gone. Cade began to sweat again. His throat contracted. The roof of his mouth was dry. He felt as if he were sitting on a cork waiting for all hell to pop.

"Rest and quiet, that's an order, Colonel," the medic in Tokyo had told him. *"When you get back to the States buy a boat, take it easy. Crawl into the bunk with your wife and a jug of rum and don't get out of the sack for two months."*

So he'd bought a boat. He'd drunk a few bottles of rum. He'd even been to bed with his wife; that is, his former wife. All that was missing was the rest and quiet, with a murder charge and Mimi added. The situation had all the qualities of a nightmare. Cade was almost afraid to open his mouth for fear the mounting hysteria inside him would rush out.

The squatting position cramped his legs. Cade stood up and lighted a second cigarette. Mimi stood beside him. "But what are you doing here?"

Cade told her. "I'm in the same boat you are, baby. Janice is still sleeping with my maple leaves. I still have something she wants."

"What?"

"I don't know, but she doesn't care any more for me than Moran does for you."

Mimi's Latin temper got the best of her tears. She shoved out her little jaw. "Then why did they bother to lie? Why did they not just tell us to go away?"

"I don't know," Cade said.

His feeling of attempting to climb a sheer glass wall returned. He felt unutterably tired. Nothing made sense. Nothing had made sense since his return to Bay Parish. He watched the black water lap at the hull of the *Sea*

Bird, thinking that if his tanks were filled instead of empty, a partial solution of his problem would be to feel his way back up the series of inland watercourses to New Orleans and turn the whole matter over to the law. It was too big for him.

He turned his attention to the skiff with the attached outboard motor. The small port of Grand Isle was only a few miles away. He and Mimi could easily make it in the skiff but running away wouldn't solve anything. Besides, he had no reason to run. He hadn't killed Laval. All he'd done was come home.

Mimi followed his eyes and sniffed. "I 'ad outboard like that in Caracas harbor. At La Guaira."

Cade knew a moment of irritation. He had enough problems of his own without worrying about Mimi. He wished she were back in Caracas. Or did he? He'd never known any girl he'd liked so much in so short a time. Mimi was everything Janice wasn't.

He lifted his eyes from the skiff to the sky as he heard a familiar drone. There was only one sound like it. He waited for the lights on the landing strip to come on. They didn't. Instead, all the lights in the lodge winked out and the door of the radio shack opened briefly to spill an indeterminate number of men into the night. Then all was dark again.

Mimi tried to locate the sound. "Is plane."

Cade continued to study the clouds. "A helicopter," he corrected her. "And from the sound, a big one." He slipped the gun from his pocket. "You wait here."

"No," Mimi said determinedly. "No. Wherever you go, I am going."

There was the pad of bare feet on the deck of the cutter. The crew men, roused from their sleep, wearing only their shorts, leaned on the aft rail, studying the night sky, as if they were watching a show.

Cade looked from the yawning men to the dark lodge, then walked back down the pier to the stretch of pumped-in beach. From the sound of the revolving planes, the 'copter was having trouble locating the strip.

Drop a flare, you fool, Cade thought.

Then the depth of the nightmare increased. From

somewhere back of the lodge a voice that could only be Tocko's called, "Okay. Show your lights, boys, so Charlie can come in."

Closer at hand, Moran's voice answered profanely, "I'll shoot the first bastard who does. I might have known you'd try to foul up the deal by pulling something like this?"

A flashlight beam stabbed the sky, followed by a shot.

"I warned you," Moran said.

Cade walked around the unlighted lodge with Mimi panting beside him. Its huge planes revolving slowly, the helicopter was hovering over the landing strip now. Then a second and a third and a fourth flashlight beam pierced the sky and the pilot set it down. As he did, a dozen shots thudded into the metal and from the far side of the strip Tocko called:

"Find Moran, Squid."

The Squid's thin voice answered, "I'll find him."

A second burst of scattered shots evoked an echoing chorus of frightened foreign voices from the plane. No one else seemed excited. It was business with them and this was their business. Cade watched, fascinated, as a searchlight moved across the field and pinpointed the landed plane. The bronze-faced youth he'd seen in a booth at Sal's with Tocko and the Squid was at the controls. He brushed at the light on his face, more annoyed than worried, as he urged the frantic passengers in the cabin to descend the ladder. Then someone on the far side of the landing strip shot out the light with a rifle.

Cade rounded the corner of the lodge and was forcibly stopped by a muscular arm. "You!" Moran said. "As the saying goes, you should have stood in bed."

Cade caught a glint of blued steel in Moran's hand and raised his own gun. "For God's sake, someone make sense before I put in for Section Eight. What's this all about?"

Moran was amused. "Now he's going to shoot me. Some of you boys keep that pain-queer pinhead off me while I take care of the colonel. The little bastard couldn't be a good sport and die in Pyongyang. He would have to come back."

"Make sense," Cade repeated. "What's this all about?"

"Money," Moran laughed. "A hell of a lot of money." His bulk huge in the dark, the big man moved toward Cade slowly until the buckle of his belt was almost flush with the muzzle of Cade's gun. "Go ahead. Shoot."

Cade lowered his gun in sudden tardy suspicion and triggered a shot at the ground. There was only a sharp click of metal on metal. Cade wondered how he could have been such a fool! He wouldn't have been if it hadn't been for the dream. In the back of his mind, knowing better, he'd still hoped to make it come true.

He knew now why Janice had been so eager to resume her marital obligations. It hadn't been love. It hadn't even been passion. It had been cold calculation. She and Moran could see he was armed and had good reason to kill them both and neither she nor Moran had any intention of being sporting about it. They'd wanted him set up like a sitting duck on a pond. So sometime during the frenzied interlude in her bedroom, while his attention had been elsewhere, Janice had extracted the bullets from his gun.

Cade attempted to reverse the weapon and use it as a club but the barrel of Moran's gun sliced viciously through the dark and knocked him to his knees.

Moran continued to be amused. "Try that for size, little man. I've always wanted to slug a colonel."

Through his blur of pain Cade could hear Mimi screaming. Farther away there were shots and blows and the Squid's excited squealing.

Moran singled out two men. "You, Fred and Roy. You know what to do with him. Don't mark him any more than he is. And remember, I want him to have some water in his lungs if he should wash ashore."

"You're running the show," a man said.

It sounded like the voice of the youth Cade had seen behind the desk. Mimi was still screaming. The confusion around him continued. At a distance, the Squid bleated, "Goddamn. You let me by. You heard what Tocko said."

Cade attempted to get to his feet and Moran drew back his foot and kicked him in the face. His voice was almost gentle. "Lie down, little man. You've had it. You're out of all this now."

A second sharper wedge of pain seemed to split Cade's head in two. He mentally damned the armor and head rest

on an F-86. He'd always known it would happen and it had, on his first mission. A flight of Migs had jumped him at six o'clock and he hadn't even seen them come in. He pulled back to stop the falling sensation and the whole gadget-loaded cockpit exploded and propelled him into space.

14 *Time to Kill*

It was a pleasant sensation. Cade, still fogged with pain, thought briefly that he was riding the moss-filled sack swinging at the end of the long rope tied to one of the upper branches of the huge sweet bay tree behind the old house. If he swung high enough he would be able to see the oyster camps on the far bank of the river.

His mild glow faded and he was cold again. He wasn't on the swing. He couldn't be. The swing had been gone for years. Besides, someone was holding his hands and feet. Somewhere a man was counting.

"One. Two. Three."

The impact of his falling body on the water knocked the air from Cade's lungs and shocked him back to partial consciousness. Then, at a small distance and going away, the man who had counted said:

"Well, that takes care of that."

"Better circle to make sure," a second voice said. "Some of these small wiry guys are tough."

Cade's sinking sensation resumed, but now he was unable to breathe. An irresistible force was exerting increasing pressure on his body. He sank listlessly, revolving slowly, until his instinctive will to live forced his hands and feet into motion. He broke water, gasped air and sank again, with the churn of the screw of a fast-moving cruiser threatening to puncture his eardrums. As instinctive as the will to live, he dove as deep as he could. When he surfaced

the second time, he was riding the frothy white wake of the boat whose running lights were now fifty yards away.

The man who had counted asked, "What's Jim going to do with his cruiser?"

"That's up to Jim."

"And the girl?"

The man who had counted laughed. "That's up to Jim, too. But first he's got to catch her."

The laughter and voices and lights disappeared in the deep morning fog. Fully conscious, Cade lay on his back, looking up at the dimming stars, barely moving his hands and legs enough to stay afloat. He'd never been so tired. The cold water felt soft and good on his fevered body. Rest, the medic had told him. Well, why not? What had he left to live for? Deep in his subconscious mind Cade was tempted to lie still and let the water take him.

But there was something he had to do.

Cade tried to remember what it was. First it eluded him. Then he remembered. Of course. *He had to kill Moran.*

He continued to float, conserving his strength, re-orienting his mind. Strangely, he felt no resentment toward the men who had dropped him from the boat. All they had done was to follow orders. He was nothing to them. They were nothing to him. It was Moran who'd kicked him in the face and laughed:

"Lie down, little man. You've had it. You're out of all this now."

Moran was his oyster. Moran was the man he wanted.

The planes of Cade's face changed. His cheekbones grew more pronounced, as his lean cheeks firmed. His black eyes became even blacker. The wisp of a mustache became an affectation.

He named Moran in Portuguese, Serbian and French, then turned on his belly and swam with an easy overhand stroke he could keep up for hours, if need be. His topsiders weighted his feet. He trod water and unlaced them and twelve years fell away with the sneakers. The silver maple leaves were gone from his shoulders. He was no longer former Lieutenant Colonel Cain. He was all river Cajun, as much at home in the water as he was on land. He was old man Cade Cain's boy, a direct descendant of a

cold-eyed Kaintucky flatboat man who had mated with an olive-skinned Baratarian flame who was kin to Jean LaFitte.

Cade shook his head to clear it. He wouldn't die. He couldn't die. It was inconceivable for him to die until he'd stuck a knife in Moran and twisted it sufficiently to do what he'd come to do.

The scene at the lodge, the mysterious plane, the babble of foreign voices and the gun fight between Tocko's and Moran's men didn't matter. They were of no consequence. He could figure them out later. Right now he had to stay alive. Moran was the oyster he wanted.

Cade swam blindly for a long time. Then reason asserted itself. Moran had wanted water in his lungs in case his body should wash ashore. It was logical to assume that Moran wouldn't want him to wash ashore in the Bay. Embarrassing questions might be asked. Both Mamma Salvatore and Sal had known that he and Mimi had been headed for the lodge. That probably meant that he'd been dropped in the Gulf, possibly near big south mud lump where he'd seen the six dead men. It seemed to be a favorite drop, undoubtedly because a body left on the lump would eventually wash out into the Gulf.

Still, big south mud lump was a long run from the lodge. It had been early morning when he'd left Janice. He had no way of knowing how much time had lapsed. Cade stopped swimming and trod water while he searched for the north star. It was so faint he could barely see it. Full morning wasn't far away. One by one, the stars were fading from the sky. The fog rising wraithlike from the water was veined with the deep red of false dawn. One of the old-world superstitions he'd learned in his youth from an aged Dalmatian fisherman occurred to Cade. The fog was veined with red, which didn't happen very often. When it did it meant that the Lamb of the Lord was crying tears of blood for his lost sheep.

Orientated, Cade swam on. He had no way of knowing how far away it was but by swimming east, he had to reach land.

Fifteen minutes, a half-hour passed. Twice, large, slowly moving bodies passed him in the water. The sky was almost bright now but the gathering fog had

deepened. Swimming through it was like flying blind through an endless bank of clouds, except that he had to furnish the motive power.

Cade's arms grew heavier with every stroke. It was an effort to kick. The overhand crawl that had been so easy when he had left Bay Parish was rapidly becoming torture. Two years of fish heads and rice and garbage soup had drained him of his strength. He still had a long way to go before he would be the man the youth had been who impulsively had left Bay Parish to enlist in the Air Force.

Cade swam on doggedly. He wouldn't die. A Cain always paid his debts. He couldn't die until he'd killed Moran. His head was as light as his arms were heavy. He was hearing things now. He thought he could hear the twittering of birds and there were no birds on the mud lumps. His light-headedness increased as his strength failed. Now he even thought he could hear Mimi calling him.

"Cade," she called guardedly, "Cade."

Cade tried to answer her and gulped water. He'd swum as far as he could. He couldn't take another stroke. He took one. He took two, then three and his thrashing hand struck sand. His fogged mind tried to analyze the hard granules between his fingers. There was no sand on the mud lumps. He wasn't in the Gulf. He was still in the Bay. The birds and perhaps Mimi were real.

"Here," he called weakly. "Here."

Flat in the shallow water, like a swimming frog, he worried his way across the sand and tried to rest his cheek on one arm but the water was still too deep. He worked his way farther up on the beach and felt dry sand under his hands. Then, a great roaring filling his ears and the black water lapping at his bare feet, he turned on his back with the last of his strength and passed out. . . .

The sun had risen. He could feel it on his face. His head was cradled on something soft and yielding. He thought he could smell feminine flesh. Cade opened his eyes and saw a fourteen-foot skiff bobbing at anchor with the attached outboard motor tilted at the right angle to allow the salt water to drain out. Beyond the skiff was a solid wall of fog.

He opened his eyes and looked up into Mimi's face and

beyond her face into a tangle of green leaves. On one of the lower branches of the tree, a vivid splash of crimson became a crested cardinal, puffing its small throat in strident song.

Mimi touched his face with her fingertips. "Rest."

It was an effort for Cade to talk. His throat felt like it was encrusted with salt. "How did you get here?"

Mimi continued to fondle his face. "I followed the lights of the men in the boat." She nodded at the anchored skiff. "I tol' you I 'ad boat in Caracas."

Cade snuggled down in the lap on which his head was resting. "I'm glad you're not in Caracas."

Mimi smiled. She closed his eyes with her fingertips.

When Cade opened his eyes again the sun had begun to climb. The bank of fog was gone but his head still reposed in Mimi's lap and the skiff still bobbed at anchor.

It was easier now for him to talk. "I didn't dream it, then."

Mimi shook her head. "No."

"How long have I been asleep?"

"Not long. Perhaps an hour."

"And there have been no boats?"

"No boats."

"No one looking for me?"

"No. They think you are dead," Mimi said.

"And you?"

"What about me?"

"Aren't they looking for you?"

She shrugged. "Maybe."

"You followed the men who dropped me, is that it, Mimi?"

"I tol' you. As soon as I could get to the *Sea Bird* an' put on some clothes."

Cade realized that Mimi was wearing his white shirt and pants again. "What happened to your dress?"

"Mister Moran tore the rest of it from me when I tried to keep heem from keeking you." Her lips twisted in a wry smile. "I 'ope he enjoys it as much as he does my shoes an' my knife." She sighed. "Such a nice dress."

Still incredulous, Cade asked still another time, "You followed the men who dropped me?"

"Yes."

"Weren't you frightened?"

"Ver' frightened." Mimi's big eyes seemed to grow larger. "An' I am even more frightened when I call an' call an' call an' you do not answer. I am theenk maybe I am come to the wrong place or you do not become conscious again when they are put you een the water." She pressed one hand to the bulge on the left side of her borrowed shirt. "I am nevair so relieved as when I hear one ver' faint 'here'."

"No one tried to stop you when you started the kicker?"

Mimi shrugged and the yielding substance on which Cade's head was cradled was more delightful as she moved. "No," she said, scornfully. "They were all too busy fighting an' shooting an' calling each other the bad names." Mimi reported with satisfaction, "Is something about a lot of money an' both that Tocko an' Jeem wanting to be the only one to enjoy the favors of thees yallow-haired old woman to whom you were married. While they were still fighting an' shooting at each other she screamed at them to stop an' Tocko called her a hot-panzed leetle beetch an' said unless she would come back to heem, he would foul up the deal, if it was the last thing he evair deed." Mimi blushed.

"How did you know where the men in the boat were taking me?"

Mimi shrugged again. "I did not. I followed their lights until they disappeared, then I kept on a few miles farther. Then I shut off the motor and waited until they came back again. And when they had passed me sitting in the dark, I went on in the direction from which they came an' began to call."

Cade pressed the fingers stroking his face. "You're okay."

Mimi was pleased. "You like?"

"I like very much."

Cade attempted to digest what Mimi had just told him. They were, obviously, on one of the smaller islands in the mouth of the Bay. Pressed for time the two men following Moran's orders hadn't bothered to take him out into the Gulf. They'd dropped him in one of the passes, East Pass probably, hoping the suck of the tide would complete their

work for them. That was why he'd reached land as soon as he had.

The abortive landing of the helicopter and the fight at the lodge made less sense. Moran had admitted openly that until he and Janice had broken with Tocko, the latter had intended to use the lodge he'd built on land he didn't own as a drop for smuggled aliens. Aliens willing to pay any price Tocko named to be put ashore on the mainland. The men the 'copter pilot had landed or had tried to land were undoubtedly aliens.

But to whom did the cutter belong? It came under the head of big business. Who had advanced the money to build the expensive pier and pump in the beach and equip the radio shack? What was worth so much money? Why had Moran and Janice spent two months in New Orleans currying favor with city and state politicians? What was the deal Tocko intended to foul up if Janice didn't come back to him?

Only one thing was clear. He, Cade, was a fly in everybody's ointment. Janice wanted him dead badly enough to give herself to him, merely to get at the shells in his gun. Either Tocko or Moran had tried to frame him by killing Joe Laval. When he'd asked Moran to make sense at the beginning of the fight on the landing strip, Moran had been amused. He'd said:

"The little bastard couldn't be a good sport and die in Pyongyang. He would have to come back."

For one reason or another all three of them wanted him dead. The dryness returned to Cade's throat. He wished he had a drink of water. He wished he had a cigarette. He wished he was smart. The hell of it was he'd never pretended to be smart. All he was was a guy by the name of Cain.

He did know Mimi's legs must be cramped. He knew he should be up and on his way if he intended to kill Moran, and he did intend to. But he liked being where he was. It was the closest he'd come to his dream, the closest he'd come to following the medic's orders. It was quiet and peaceful on the island. He liked the sun on his face. He liked the song the cardinal was singing. He liked lying with his head on Mimi's lap. It was like being returned from the dead, like walking across the line at Panmunjom.

Cade had never been more content or comfortable. There was something more than the normal biological attraction of the sexes between himself and Mimi. They were, as Latin-speaking people said, *sympatico*, in accord on all things, at least all things that mattered.

"I'm tiring you?" he asked her.

She shook her head and smiled. "I like."

Cade lay looking up into her face, almost afraid of pushing a miracle too far. "You wouldn't happen to have a cigarette?"

Mimi nodded brightly and dug down into her borrowed shirt. "I 'ave just one and two matches. I knew maybe you might want."

She put the crumpled cigarette between his lips. It was perfumed like a cigarette carried loose in a woman's purse, daintily fragrant, tasting more of her flesh than of tobacco. Cade was a little sorry when she lit it.

He sucked smoke into his lungs and offered the cigarette to her. "We'll smoke this and be on our way."

Mimi bent over him. "Where?"

Cade wished Mimi would learn to button more than the bottom two buttons of his shirt.

"Where?" Mimi repeated.

"Back to the lodge."

"Why?"

"I'm going to kill Moran."

"How?"

"I don't know."

Mimi leaned down to blow smoke in his face. "It is for you to say. You are the man."

A thought suddenly struck Cade. "You remember that cutter docked at the pier?"

"Of course."

"Did the men aboard it take any part in the fight?"

Mimi shook her head emphatically. "No. All they did was watch. And while I was starting the keeker I could hear bells aboard and seamen began to haul in the lines."

Cade wondered how he could have been so dumb. Of course. It had been so simple all the time. The big boys seldom interfered, openly, in inter-family quarrels. It wasn't politic. They preferred a policy of watchful waiting, but now the bitterly contested states' tide bill had passed,

vesting all off-shore sovereignty in the states involved, there were a good many firms which might be vitally interested in certain types of waterfront acreage.

Cade could think of five off-hand, all internationally known, all in the same line of business.

15 *Many a Slip*

Its long immersion in water had stopped Cade's watch but from the position of the sun he judged the time to be close to four o'clock. It had seemed so simple while he'd been swimming through the fog. He would return to the lodge and kill Moran.

How?

He had no weapon but his hands. There was a chance that now, thinking he was dead, Moran and Tocko and Janice had worked out some sort of truce. In that case, he would have not only Moran but Tocko and the Squid to deal with.

Cade parted the drooping branches of the water oak behind which he'd poled the skiff and looked out. He was not surprised to see the *Sea Bird* cruising fitfully off-shore. One of the two men in the cockpit was sweeping the irregular shoreline with a pair of glasses. As Cade watched, the cruiser moved on slowly. Cade followed it with his eyes.

"Buy a boat," the medic had told him.

Mimi exhaled softly. "They saw us?"

Cade shook his head. "No. At least, they're moving on."

He debated waiting until dark before poling on again. It was one thing to beat his way back up the Bay with the throttle of a fifteen-horsepower kicker wide open. It was something else to pole his way along the shore line,

following the contours of the land, moving from one point of cover to another. He hadn't dared to use the kicker since they'd started. Its high-pitched whine was audible for miles and while Moran might think he was dead, the men in the boats combing the Bay were looking for a very alive girl in a fourteen-foot skiff powered by an outboard motor.

Mimi had trouble swallowing. "I am thirsty."

"Yeah," Cade said. "So am I."

He started to pole out from under the tree and stopped to look at the tilted motor attached to the metal transplate. His mind still wasn't working clearly. Between the two tanks and the motor he had poled an unnecessary one hundred pounds all day. He detached the gas tank. It was empty enough to float. He threw it on to a tangle of exposed roots, then unscrewed the motor and the extra tank and dropped them overboard.

Mimi looked at him, puzzled.

"They're no good to us," Cade told her. "We don't dare use them." He looked out through the screen of leaves, trying to locate some familiar landmark. "We can't be more than four or five miles from the lodge. I'll pole a few miles closer if I can. About a mile from the lodge there used to be a spring. If it's still there, we'll have a drink. After that, I think we'd better go on by foot."

"Whatever you say."

Cade poled out from under the tree and on up the shore line. Without the motor and the tanks, the boat was easier to handle. But the pole he'd broken off a dead tree wasn't entirely straight. On a hard push it twisted in his hands. During the morning, blisters had formed on his palms. Shortly after noon, the blisters had broken and now it was torture to grip the pole. It had been a long time since he'd poled a boat and that had been a pirogue, not a skiff.

He'd been right about this portion of the Bay remaining unchanged. During the long hot day they'd passed four fishing camps but all of them were deserted. Animal life was abundant. There were 'gators on the mud slides in the bayous, snakes lying sunning themselves on partly submerged roots and sand bars. The muskrat population had increased since the days when he'd come to the Bay with his father. Twice he'd seen swimming otters. Several

times, deer had peered out of tangles of brambles.

Blood from the raw flesh on his palms began to stain the pole. Cain went on doggedly. The sun sank still lower in the sky. As it touched on the water and seemed to bounce, Mimi wet her lips with her tongue. "There will be trouble when we reach the lodge, perhaps shooting?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And you have no gun."

"No."

She spoke, as always, dramatically, as if imparting a great secret, "Then instead of going to the lodge, why don't we go to the *policia*?"

Cade was hot and tired. His injured head and his swollen jaw ached. His pole caught in a submerged root and when he pulled it free, an angry cottonmouth came with it and tried to climb into the boat. Cade used the pole to throw the snake up on shore, and poled on. It was the first foolish question she'd asked. Even so, it was an effort for him not to be curt with her.

"Where do you think you are?" he asked her. "In Times Square or on the corner of Canal and Royal? The nearest local law, if any, is on Grand Isle. Moran's men would pick us up before we got two miles across the Bay. The only real law down here is the Coast Guard and we've no way of contacting them. Besides, you're in the country illegally. Remember?"

The sun had burned a deep V on Mimi's chest. In the morning her nose was going to peel. She looked down at her bare feet. "After you kill Moran, if you can do it, what are you going to do with me?"

"I don't know," Cade admitted.

Once it touched the water, the sun sank rapidly. Cade hoped he was as close to the lodge as he thought he was.

The next spit of land looked familiar. As Cade recalled, there had been a huge water oak near the spring. The tree was still there, only shattered. A storm blowing in off the Gulf had split and partially uprooted it and lightning had completed its destruction.

Cade beached the boat on the shelf of sand in front of the tree. "This is it. I mean the spring. We're not more than a mile from the lodge."

He led the way inland through the trees, with Mimi

following closely behind him. The spring was where he remembered it, but also changed. Some fisherman or squatter had bricked it in and built a crude cabin in the clearing. The cabin, as the others he had seen, was empty.

Cade lay on the moist ground with Mimi beside him and showed her how to make a crude cup of her hands. When she had drunk what he considered enough, he stopped her.

Mimi's eyes turned sullen. "But I am still thirsty."

"Even so," Cade said.

He drank sparingly, then sat with his back against a tree. Now that he was almost to the lodge, the impossibility of what he hoped to do appalled him. Cade wondered if he were turning chicken. He doubted it. It was just that he was one man against perhaps a dozen and the other twelve men would be armed.

"Why can not I drink?" Mimi asked.

"It might make you sick," Cade told her. "Wait. After we've rested a few minutes we can drink some more."

While he waited he searched the shack. There was a crude bunk, a wood-burning stove, a few shelves to hold provisions. On a hunch, Cade felt along the shelves. On the top shelf, pushed back and forgotten, were a rusted can of beans and a small tin of sardines. The rust didn't seem to have eaten through the can. The sardines were easy to open. There was a key on the can. The beans were another matter. Cade kept up his search of the cabin and the small clearing around it and near what had been a woodpile, he found a dull axe with a broken handle. He used the blade of the axe to open the beans. He divided them and the sardines equally on two leaves from a wild mango tree.

They ate beside the spring, Cade watching Mimi, feeling as he had during their first meal together aboard the *Sea Bird*. A dozen times during the day they'd had to climb out and push the boat over ankle-deep grass flats. Her bare feet were cut and torn by shells. The sun had tortured her flesh. She'd been through hell all day without one word of complaint. Now, as during their first meal together, she was starved. Still, hungry and frightened as she was, squatted beside a wilderness spring in the deepening dusk, she managed somehow to look as if she were

eating Huitres en Coquille a la Rockefeller at Antoine's. There was no doubt about it. She was people.

"Is good," Mimi smiled at him. "Now may I drink again?"

Cade nodded. "Yes."

His own hunger left him as he looked from the drinking girl to the faint trail barely distinguishable in the darkening mat of vegetation. He had no right to risk Mimi's life, especially after she'd saved his. So he would manage to kill Moran. There were still Tocko and the Squid. There were Harry and Fred and the bronze-faced 'copter pilot, all living outside the law. With the exception of the Squid, any one of them would be very pleased to get their hands on Mimi.

Cade was sorry now he had jettisoned the motor and the tanks. The girl had been right. He should run for Grand Isle and turn Mimi over to the local authorities. Even being sent back to Caracas couldn't possibly be as bad as what would happen to her if she fell into the hands of any of the men at the lodge. They might even share her. To men of their type a woman had only one purpose. She was a vessel to be filled. And when they had finished with Mimi the light would be gone from her eyes. If she didn't use a knife on herself, she would be just another waterfront jade perched on a bar stool somewhere, willing to sell, for food and lodging and drink, that on which she no longer placed any value.

Mimi was concerned. "You are not eating."

"No," Cade said, shortly.

He'd been mad. He could see that now. He couldn't go back to the lodge. He couldn't attempt to kill Moran. His revenge would have to wait. He wasn't all river Cajun, after all. He'd carried rank on his shoulders too long. If rank carried privileges, it also carried responsibilities. And the succession of gold and silver bars and maple leaves had burned into the flesh of his shoulders. His first duty was to Mimi. Once he got her to a place of safety, he could think of himself.

He drank from the spring and stood up.

Mimi stood up with him. "Now we are going to the lodge?"

Cade nodded. "Yes. But not to kill Moran."

"No?"

"No. I'm going to try to steal a boat and get you to Grand Isle."

"But you said Jeem's men would catch us before we 'ave gone two miles."

"Possibly not at night."

Cade led the way back to the shore. It was completely dark now and the water was slightly phosphorescent wherever it was broken. The power plant at the lodge had resumed its monotonous *thud thud*. The high-watt bulb on the pier head was lighted. He could see it through the trees on the next spit of land. Whatever he did he would have to do before the moon rose.

Mimi's fingers bit into Cade's forearm in sudden comprehension. "You are doing this for me."

"Let's say for both of us."

"You are afraid something bad will happen to me."

"Moran hasn't had his men searching the Bay all day because he wants to hold your hand."

"No," Mimi agreed with him. "I should nevaire 'ave come to the States. I should nevaire 'ave stowed away in La Guaira."

Cade squeezed the hand on his arm. "If you hadn't, I'd still be back on that island, possibly snake bit or 'gator bait by now."

Mimi shook her head. "No. You would still be in Bay Parish an' everything would be fine for you. The law would know by now that you deed not keel Señor Laval. It was because I insisted on finding Jeem, insisted you take me to New Orleans, that you are in all thees trouble."

Cade studied the pole he'd left lying across the stern thwarts of the boat. "That's water over the dam."

"Water over the dam?"

"Spilled milk."

"Thees I do not know."

Cade continued to study the pole. It would be useless in the basin in front of the lodge. The water in the basin was at least six fathoms deep almost all the way to the shore, another reason why the big firms might be interested in the land. "Over and done with," he told Mimi. "You got mixed up with a heel. I married a sex-propelled cash

register. The best we can do is forget the whole affair and get out of this with as much skin as we can."

"But ees your property."

"I'll live. That is, if I'm not executed for killing Joe Laval."

Cade walked back the way they had come, tore a four-foot piece of twelve-inch clapboard off the shack and shaped a rough paddle with the dull axe-head.

There were luminous eyes around the spring now, as the night things of the swamp and hammock began to stir. As he worked, he heard a thrashing in the underbrush as some wild thing made its kill and once a dry slithering whisper as a snake crawled through the grass.

There were things to be said for flying an F-86. The worst that could happen to you was for a Gook to lob a .37 shell into your cockpit, or forget to turn off the emergency fuel system after you took off and have the pump accidentally kick on and the excess fuel pouring into the engine literally burn you alive. Either way was quick. The Delta and the creatures in it, human and otherwise, worried a man to death.

Mimi was sullen-eyed when he returned. "No," she said.

"No what?" Cade asked her.

"You 'ave your pride," she said. "You are doing thees as you 'ave done everything else, for me."

Cade lost his temper. "Goddamn it, get into the boat."

Mimi's lower lip trembled. Fór a moment Cade thought she was going to cry. She didn't. "Whatever you say," she said, with simple dignity. "You are the man."

Cade poled along the shore and out to the extremity of the next spit of land. The basin lay just beyond it. The pier looked the same as it had the night before but the cutter was gone. The three work boats and the *Sea Bird* were still in their slips. The men who had used the *Sea Bird* to look for Mimi had had to gas the boat. If he and Mimi could get aboard the cruiser undetected, what he hoped to do would not only be feasible, it would be relatively simple. The *Sea Bird* could run away from any of the other three boats.

Cade looked from the pier to the lodge. However the

fight had ended, it was over. The helicopter was gone from the landing strip. A half-dozen of the rooms on the first floor of the lodge, as well as the dining room and the lobby were brightly lighted. He could see no one on the pier or on the beach. As on the night before, the only sounds in the basin were the lapping of water on the shore, the shrilling of the cicadas, the booming of frogs and the *thud thud* of the plant powering the lights.

"What are you going to do?" Mimi whispered.

Cade told her. "Steal my own boat, if I can."

He poled away from the shore and was almost immediately in deep water. Cade let the pole slip from his bleeding palms and picked up the crude paddle he'd hewn. The wind was off-shore and brisk. It was as difficult to paddle the flat-bottomed skiff as it had been to pole it. No matter on which side he paddled it yawed off course. The distance from the point of land at which he'd started to the end of the pier was less than half a mile. Cade was breathless and drenched with sweat. Over an hour passed before he could reach out and catch a breather by holding on to the creosoted pilings. As new as it was, barnacles had already begun to form. The fresh creosote burned his raw palms. The skiff thudding against the pilings was even more difficult to handle in the chop under the pier than it had been in open water.

Laboriously, Cade made his way inshore until he could grasp one of the sagging ropes that moored the *Sea Bird*. The men who had used it hadn't bothered to put out the fenders and there was a nasty scar to starboard where the cruiser had rubbed against the lee aft piling.

He pulled the skiff under the transom and held it as steady as he could while Mimi scrambled aboard. Then he followed her, casting the skiff adrift.

The skiff drifted out into the bay. From time to time the off-shore wind carried a burst of laughter from the screened dining-room windows of the lodge. Once Cade thought he heard Janice laughing. He stood a moment panting in the dark, squeegeeing the sweat from his face and chest, then checked the controls by feel. Everything seemed to be in order.

He cast off the slack aft line and hauled it in, then

waited for the cruiser to yaw and cast off the line to lee.

"What can I do?" Mimi whispered.

"Nothing," Cade whispered tersely. "I'm going to play it out between the pilings if I can and let the tide and the wind carry us out into the bay before I cut in the motors. Because the minute I do, all hell is apt to pop."

He scrambled up on the catwalk and moved forward, wishing it weren't quite so dark. It was like trying to see through a solid black wall.

The tide was out and the cruiser was riding three feet lower than the pier. Cade reached up through the dark to locate the bight making it fast and a strong hand grasped his arm and lifted him up onto the pier as easily as he might have lifted a bottle.

His pinhead bobbling, his thin voice shrill with excitement, the Squid said, "It's you. It's you I bin watchin' for an hour. They said you was dead but you ain't. You come back, didn't you, Cade? Back to the Squid."

Cade stood limp, depleted, beaten. He'd come to the end of his stick and there was no silk to hit.

Mimi scrambled up on the pier beside them and beat at the Squid with her small fists. "You leave him alone."

The Squid used his free hand to hold her. "An' you're the girl who ran away." The Squid was well pleased with the Squid. "Tocko is goin' t' like this. Maybe now Joe is gone he'll even make me sheriff."

Mimi bit the hand holding her and the Squid squealed shrilly. "Do it again, huh?" he pleaded. "I like that."

The big man walked Cade and Mimi down the pier. It was useless to try to hold back. It was like being towed by a drag-line. Mimi continued to scream and fight. Cade walked stiff-kneed, beaten. He'd done his best and it hadn't been good enough.

As they reached the patch of loose sand the screen door of the lodge opened and a man called, "What the hell's going on down there?"

"I got the girl who run away," the Squid called back. "Her an' Cade come sneaking back, a-paddlin' in a skiff. Tried to steal his boat."

The wind whipped away most of his words.

“Who?” the man called. “Who did you say came back?”

“Cade,” the Squid shouted. “You know. The guy Moran said was dead. Cade Cain. The guy who killed Joe Laval.”

16 *The Big Deal*

The dining room seemed filled with men. There were at least a dozen at three tables shoved together in the center of the room. A half-dozen more were grouped at a table in the corner. These glanced up apprehensively as the Squid pushed Cade and Mimi into the room ahead of him.

The big room was fogged with smoke. The tables were littered with scraps of food and empty dishes and partially filled bottles. All of the men were in their shirt sleeves. Most were wearing guns. All of them turned and looked at him and Mimi. Two of the men stood up.

They would be Fred and Roy, Cade decided. He looked for Janice and found her. She and Tocko and Moran were sitting at the same table that she and he and Moran and Mimi had occupied the night before. From the look on Moran's face and the way Janice was fondling Tocko's over-plump white hand, his former wife had changed sides and beds again.

The Squid pushed him up to the table and looked accusingly at Moran. "Ya didn't tell us the truth. Cade ain't dead at all. Him an' the girl come paddling up t' the pier jist as alive as could be, usin' a piece of board for a paddle. They was atryin' t' steal his boat when I caught 'em."

Tocko got to his feet and looked across the table at Moran. "I thought you said Cade was dead."

One of the two men standing at the other table said, "Goddamn, he has to be. He was out cold when we

dropped him in the mouth of the pass. He should be thirty miles out in the Gulf by now."

Tocko continued to look at Moran.

Moran spread his hands. "You heard what Roy just said."

Janice brushed the ash from the tip of her cigarette. There was begrudged admiration in her voice. "You're a hard man to kill, Cade."

His feeling of weakness and depletion passed, Cade rested his hands on the back of an unoccupied chair. "You might try loving me to death. You did a pretty good job last night."

"You seemed to like it."

"A man who's just spent two years in a Commie prison isn't exactly a connoisseur."

Janice flushed angrily but made no answer.

Cade studied the deeply tanned faces watching him. "Just what is this, a love feast?"

"I guess you could call it that," Moran said. "Although I can't say I enjoyed my food."

"It would seem you lost."

Moran sipped at the drink in front of him. "So it would seem."

Tocko sat back in his chair and looked at the Squid. "Is there anyone on the pier?"

The Squid shook his head. "Naw."

Tocko glanced at the six men sitting by themselves.

"Then you'd better get back. Right at the moment it could be very embarrassing if Lieutenant Peyton or one of the other Coast Guard officers should take a notion to drop in unexpectedly to see how Mrs. Cain is getting along with her new resort."

"Sure," the Squid said. "Sure. But I done good, didn't I, Mr. Kalavitch?"

"You did fine," Tocko assured him.

Janice watched the Squid leave the room. "Ugh. He gives me the creeps. Why do you keep that thing on your payroll?"

"He's useful," Tocko said. "Just as Joe Laval was useful." He looked reproachfully at Cade. "You shouldn't have shot Joe, Cade."

Cade shook his head. "I didn't."

Tocko studied his face for a long time. "I believe you." He looked from Cade to Moran. "So shooting Joe was more of your work."

Moran palmed a cigarette into his mouth and lit it. "Prove it."

Tocko shrugged. "It doesn't matter. But the picture is beginning to clear. Joe was taking money from both of us. It was you who told him to order Cade off the river. For that I got a punch in the jaw. Then when Cade didn't frighten, you were afraid he might look up Janice and interrupt your ill-advised idyll, so you killed Joe aboard Cade's boat, hoping the law would relieve you of one of your minor problems."

"Prove it," Moran repeated.

The fat man shrugged. "As I said, it is immaterial." He asked one of the men at the big table to bring over another chair and offered it to Mimi. "Do sit down, my dear. I tried my best to help you. I didn't want you involved in this. You see, I happen to know Moran wasn't legally married to you. That is why I reported you to Immigration, hoping they would deport you before you became mixed up in this mess."

Mimi sat looking at Janice. Her eyes were sullen and slitted. "*Gracias.*"

Tocko returned his attention to Cade. "And you, Cade. You look like you've had a rough time of it. I'm afraid you're in for an even rougher one. But there is no need for us to be ungentlemanly about it. Sit down. Have a drink."

Cade paid Tocko the same begrudged admiration Janice had shown him. Tocko had grown. He was no longer that Kalavitch boy. He'd parlayed guts and shrewdness and an utter contempt for the law into big business.

The fat man poured four fingers of whiskey into a clean glass. "Your chief failing, as I see it, is in not being a good judge of wives." He patted Janice's hand. "She is smart, this one. As our Greek friends would say, she can nail a horseshoe on a fly. Her selling me the acreage after her power of attorney had been nullified by the final decree of divorce was very shrewd."

Cade tasted the whiskey in his glass. It tasted good. "Then I still legally own the land?"

"That would seem to be the crux of the matter." Tocko smiled. "But there is also the will you entrusted to Janice, leaving everything 'of which I die possessed, real and personal, to my beloved wife, Janice Cain'."

"The divorce also nullified that."

"True, but as there are no other heirs and as several prominent local politicians have already been promised a cut of the spoils, I doubt if there will be any official investigation into just when you died. Officially you never reached Bay Parish."

"You can't make it stick."

"I think I can."

Cade felt cold sweat start on his spine. "But I don't give a damn about the land. I'd almost forgotten I owned it."

Tocko shrugged. "Unfortunately for you, we are not concerned with your feelings. Alive, you are a very serious obstacle in the wheels of progress."

"With who turning the wheel, Sun, Shell, Sinclair, Standard Oil, Sunoco?"

"You're shrewd."

"I saw the cutter at the pier."

Janice sucked in her breath and exhaled slowly. "Gee-Sus. I never knew there was so much money in the world."

Tocko continued to beam. "The amount of money involved at the same time complicates and simplifies things for us all." He looked across the table at Moran. "To give Jim credit, he was the first to see the possibilities, once the new state's tide law had passed. He also saw the advisability of interesting certain local politicians so there wouldn't be any legal complications to hurdle."

Moran poured himself another drink. "So here I am."

"Wrapped in cotton," Tocko assured him. "As I have been telling you since morning, as long as we agree I am the head man and certain domestic problems are resolved, there is plenty for us all. You are a good man. I admit it. If you hadn't been I wouldn't have engaged you in the first place."

Moran gulped the drink he'd poured. "Thanks."

Cade looked at the larger table. None of the men at it were paying any attention to the conversation. All they were interested in was the individual sums they had been promised. He asked, "And the landing of the 'copter and

the gun fight on the strip this morning?"

Tocko's smile returned. "Was merely a successful attempt on my part to resume a pleasant and profitable business and physical association. Also, shall we say, a club."

Cade's sunburned face felt uncomfortably warm. His cut feet and raw palms pained him. The whiskey failed to ease the constriction in his throat. He said, "Just as a matter of curiosity, let's see if I have this right."

"By all means," Tocko smiled.

"You met Moran shortly after his discharge from the Army. Still posing as an officer, he spent some months flying in aliens your boats had collected in La Guaira. It was for that purpose, as a drop, that you built this lodge."

"That is correct."

"While in Caracas, Moran met Mimi. We know that angle."

Mimi's eyes grew more sullen.

Cade continued. "Shortly after that, Janice showed up in Bay Parish and you bought or thought you bought the old Cain house and the acreage here on the Bay. As lagniappe, you insisted on certain favors from Janice—and grew to like them."

"Very much," Tocko admitted. He ran a plump hand down the small of Janice's back and patted her. The thought seemed to amuse him. "I might even marry her. Because outside of these favors of which you speak, she is the most unscrupulous woman I have ever met. We should go far together."

"Is that a nice thing to say?" Janice asked, but she was smiling.

There was an open package of Camels on the table. Cade offered the package to Mimi, put one in his mouth and lighted both cigarettes. "Meanwhile," Cade waved out the flame of the match, "Moran returned to Bay Parish and used the possibilities in the recently passed tide law to pry Janice out of your arms."

"It wasn't difficult," Moran said, thickly.

Janice scowled at him over her glass. "You keep your dirty tongue off of me."

Moran began an obscene reply and thought better of it. Cade looked from one flushed face to the other and

realized both of them were drunk, that they had probably been drinking since morning. The chances were, the same was true of the men at the big table. It was a love feast, but an armed one. Janice and Tocko were sitting with their backs to the wall. Cade looked over Janice's shoulder at the open screened window behind her and the big veins in his temple throbbed visibly.

If he could create a diversion, if he could get them to quarreling among themselves, if he could get out of the room for five minutes, it might just be he could do what he had hoped to accomplish in the first place—with Janice and Tocko thrown in for *his* lagniappe. It was at least worth trying. He and Mimi had nothing to lose.

Tocko suggested suavely, "Suppose we leave personalities out of this."

Cade shook his head. "We can't. After leaving Bay Parish, Janice and Moran went to New Orleans together and spent several months getting to know and greasing state and city politicians who might be useful to them. As a cover they talked about a swank fishing lodge, a cheater's paradise in an unspoiled wilderness; but Janice also let it be known in the right places that she was sole owner of several thousand acres of tideland on a deep-water basin in the Bay. A basin with a deep ship's channel leading to the river and the city—a perfect spot for a storage dock or a refinery, not to mention the submerged potential oil land that went with the acreage. One of the larger oil firms was interested; interested enough to advance her sufficient money against possible future royalties to complete and furnish the lodge; to build a pier; to build and equip a radio shack with which they could keep in touch with their mobile test outfits working the Bay and Gulf."

"You son-of-a-bitch," Janice said. "You should have been a fortune teller instead of a flyer. You'd have gone a lot farther with a crystal ball than you did with a Sabre-jet."

The men at the big table were listening to the conversation now. Cade glanced over his shoulder at them, then snuffed his cigarette and looked at Tocko. "This morning you crashed back into the picture," Cade said, "by making Moran an unwilling accomplice to the illegal landing of six

aliens. This gave you the bluff of calling in the law, with the certainty you'd all go to jail if Janice didn't return to you and you weren't permitted to resume your rightful position as head man."

Tocko was amused. Moran said, "You're good, guy. That was just what happened. And with my record I don't dare call his bluff. So there it stands. I'm damned if I do and the same if I don't."

"Why?" Cade asked flatly. "Why not play it smart?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why not dump Tocko and play along with me? The land is legally mine. If you let Tocko take over, all you'll get is crumbs. I'll cut you in for a full half."

"Shut up, Cade," Janice said thickly. "You're trying to make trouble."

"How?" said Moran.

"By having him indicted for conspiracy in the murder of the six aliens he had one of his boats maroon on big south mud lump when a Coast Guard boat got too close." Cade added, "I saw the bodies. You must know the details."

"And Janice?"

"Janice isn't mine to offer, but with Tocko out of the way I don't imagine you'd have any trouble with her."

Tocko got to his feet slowly. His plump face was pink with anger. "Words, words words. Use your head, Jim. Let's not have any more trouble. We have everything ironed out."

Cade laughed. "Sure. With you taking both Janice and nine-tenths of the money and Moran being kissed out of the picture because of his past record."

Janice stood up beside Tocko. "Don't be a fool, Jim. All Cade is doing is trying to save his neck." She laid her hand on Moran's arm. "Can't you see? He *wants* us to fight among ourselves."

Moran slapped her. "Shut up. No. I can't see."

"You can't see what?"

"Why I should let you and Tocko make a chump out of me. Why I should take the short end of the deal. I figured this thing out. I made the original contacts. I arranged for the advance. What Cain says makes sense to me." Moran

looked at the men milling restlessly around the big table. "What do you think, fellows?"

The silence broke as the men voiced their views. Tocko shouted, in vain, to be heard. The men moved up in arguing knots.

Tocko struck one in the face. "Shut up and keep out of this or you'll wind up on a mud lump." He resumed his effort to be heard. "Men. Listen to me—"

Cade hit the window screen hard. For a sickening moment he thought the copper wire was going to hold, then his body catapulted into space. The dry sand under the window seemed to rise to meet him.

Behind him he heard Janice scream. The flat slap of a fired pistol followed. A second, a third, a fourth report followed the first shot.

His nerves tensed against the expected impact of the bullets, Cade zigzagged desperately, but there was no familiar pacing whine of lead as he ran on.

The moon had risen. He was a perfect target, but whoever had fired the pistol hadn't been shooting at him.

The radio shack was the last in the row of separate cottages. Cade paused in the shadow of the tower to pant for breath. The lack of pursuit worried him. Tocko couldn't permit him to live. Even Moran's men, realizing they had been tricked, should be boiling out of the window by now.

Through the lighted windows he could see figures moving around in the lodge but the wind whipped away their voices before they could reach him. The only sounds were the slap of the water on the beach, the *thud thud* of the power plant and the chirp and thumping of the night things in the swamp.

Cade rounded the radio shack cautiously. There was a small angle iron leaning against one of the concrete piers. It wasn't much of a weapon. It was something. Cade picked it up and turned the knob of the closed door. The door seemed to be unlocked. Cade gripped the angle iron and walked in.

His upturned white monkey hat cocked low over one eye a gum-chewing youth in blue dungarees and white skivy was covering the radio operator with a .45 caliber service automatic. He included Cade in the coverage.

"Come in," the youth said. "Who are you?"

17 *The Scattered Scum*

A bead of sweat dripped from Cade's nose to plop inaudibly on the floor of the shack. After all he had been through, this was an anti-climax. He knew who the youth was, at least whom he represented. He'd seen similar gum chewing youths in blue dungarees and web gun belts before—a lot of them.

The youth noticed the iron. "Put it down, fellow."

Cade put the angle iron down carefully.

"Okay. Now I ast you a question."

"My name is Cain," Cade told him.

"The former Air Force colonel who's been kiting all over the Delta with that skirt from Venezuela?"

"Anyway my name is Cain."

The youth was still skeptical. "I betcha. You don't look like no colonel to me. Anyway, we can find out. The lieutenant says he is acquainted with you personal."

A second youth stuck his head in the doorway. "You have any trouble with the sparks, Chuck?"

"Naw," Chuck said scornfully. He looked at the sallow-faced radio operator. "I point the thing at him and he almost heaves his Hershey bars."

"Who's the other guy?"

"He says his name is Cain. You'd better take him up to the lodge and let the lieutenant look him over."

"Sure thing."

"You guys have any trouble?"

The second youth grinned. "Naw. They were so busy fighting among themselves they didn't even know we were there until the lieutenant blew his whistle." He covered Cain with the gun in his hand. "Let's take a walk, fellow. And don't give me no trouble."

As a precaution against the seaman's youth, Cade held his palms shoulder high as he waded the loose sand along the beach. There was no big boat made fast to the T of the pier. "Where's the cutter?" he asked.

"We didn't come in a cutter," the seaman said. "We came down fast, in a crash boat. And just so you guys wouldn't scatter we heaved-to around the next bend and walked down along the beach."

"I see," Cade said. He wished his knees would stiffen. He felt as if he were walking on rubber legs.

The cypress-paneled lobby was filled with men, most with their hands in the air. An alert and armed Coast Guardsman was posted at every exit. As Cade and the youth guarding him entered the room a grizzled chief whose bare arms boasted a colorful gallery of anchors and entwined hearts and lush beauties in scant bathing suits looked up from the collection of pistols and knives and revolvers he was making.

"Who you got there, Hanson?"

"Chuck says he told him his name is Cain."

The Coast Guard lieutenant (jg) who was questioning Moran turned and grinned at Cade. "Hi, Colonel. Remember me?"

Cade couldn't be certain after the years but the lieutenant looked like one of the Mitrovica boys of the family which had changed its name to Morton. He had the same friendly white-toothed smile. "You wouldn't be Skip Morton, would you?"

Lieutenant Morton was pleased. "You do remember me. And I was just a squirt when you went away." He offered his hand. "Glad to see you, man. I'm glad you're back in Bay Parish. Welcome home."

Cade shook hands, wondering how long his knees would continue to hold him. He felt as he had on his first night back in Bay Parish, suddenly humble and shy. The lieutenant meant what he said, just as Miss Spence and old

man Dobraviche and Mamma Salvatore and all the others had meant it.

Some strength returned to his knees as he accepted a cigarette from the package Morton offered him. "And am I glad to see you. But how come the raid right now. Who tipped you?"

Lieutenant Morton grinned. "Who didn't? We've been keeping our eyes on this place and laying for both Tocko and Moran for a long time, see? Then about fifteen hundred this afternoon the tips began to pour in. Mamma Salvatore was worried because you'd come down to the Bay and hadn't shown up again. Immigration was raising hell because you were supposed to have a girl stowaway on your boat. About the same time the crashed 'copter pilot the boys on the cutter fished out of the drink this morning loosened up enough to tell how he got all the bullet holes in his plane."

Lieutenant Morton continued. "It wasn't any one thing." He nodded at a small knot of men still huddled together in one corner of the lodge. "Then there were our alien friends there. We've had undercover agents in Havana tailing them for quite some time, waiting for them to make a break. We knew they'd made a contact. We suspected it was with one of Tocko's captains and when they disappeared last night an all-out alert was sounded." Lieutenant Morton's grin grew even more expansive. "Then just to make it official one of the seamen off a converted cutter one of the big oil companies is using to smell around these waters got drunk in a Royal Street bar. He sounded off about a big gun fight that had taken place between Moran and Kalavitch's boys down here last A.M. So the brass put it all together, I got the nod—and here we are."

The chief dumped his assortment of confiscated weapons on one of the tables. "All clear, sir."

"Good," Morton said crisply. "Now you and Jack go back and get the boat and bring it down to the pier."

"Aye, sir."

"As soon as you make fast we'll start loading."

"Aye, sir."

Moran's voice was bitter as he suddenly spoke up. "Sure. You'll tell the truth, Cain. You'll swear it in any

court. The hell of it is, from what the lieutenant tells me, some pair of punks in Bay Parish saw me shoot Joe Laval. I'd have done better to have strung along with Tocko." Moran's mouth twitched in a nervous tic. "Well, no, not exactly."

Cade tried to hate the man. He couldn't. He felt drained of all emotion. He didn't hate anyone. All he wanted to do was rest. He looked for Mimi and found her sitting with her bare feet curled under her in one of the oversized leather chairs. Cade sat on the arm of the chair. "You're all right? You weren't hurt?"

Mimi shook her head. "No. Just frightened. That was all."

Her voice sounded strained. It was almost as if they were strangers.

Cade glanced around the room. "Where's Tocko?"

"Dead," Lieutenant Morton told him. He nodded at one of the men. "As I get it, Kalavitch slapped that man and got four slugs in his guts just as we came in the door." Morton shook his head. "Tocko made a mistake when he tried to climb into the big time as far as aliens are concerned."

Two seamen came out of the dining room carrying a canvas-wrapped bundle between them.

"Take him out on the pier," Lieutenant Morton ordered. "The chief's gone to get the boat."

"Aye, sir."

Lieutenant Morton snuffed his cigarette in one of the clam shells serving as ash trays. "Do you notice anyone else missing, Colonel?"

Cade looked at the faces in the lobby. "My former wife."

"That would be the blonde who went out the window on your heels."

"And the Squid."

"I forgot the pinhead," Lieutenant Morton admitted. He nodded to the seamen guarding the prisoners. "All right. Let's take them down to the pier, boys."

Morton opened the front screen door to permit the men to file through. As he did, somewhere out on the moonlit bay a balky motor coughed as if reluctant to start. "How

many cruisers were there in the slips, Cade?" Morton asked.

"Three," Cade told him. "And mine."

"One of them is gone," Morton said. He swore softly. "Of course. The girl and the Squid. They must have cut loose and let the wind and the tide drift them out into the Bay."

The balky motor caught and turned over. There was the throb of an underwater exhaust. Cade joined Morton on the front steps of the lodge. A quarter-mile out in the Bay one of the three fishing boats were silhouetted briefly against the moon. Cade glimpsed, or thought he glimpsed, Janice's wheat-colored hair, then a huge bulk intervened.

One of the seamen asked, "Shall we try to get them, Lieutenant?"

Lieutenant Morton shook his head. "No. Let them go for now. Neither are very important. We'll put out a pick-up on them, but I doubt if they'll get very far in that tub. If they do manage to get through the pass they'll probably hang up on one of the lumps."

Cade watched the fishing boat blend with the moonlight. His stomach felt slightly queasy. It was, he thought, ironic that Janice, whose specialty had been giving pleasure for gain, should escape with the Squid. Of all people. He hoped they had fun.

As the last of the men filed past him, Morton asked, "Now about this other girl, Colonel?"

"You mean Miss Esterpar?"

"If that's the name of the girl who jumped ship."

Cade looked at Mimi. She hadn't moved. She was still sitting white-faced and frightened in the big leather chair. "What about her?"

"Well, Immigration has alerted us to pick her up."

"What happens then?"

"The usual, I imagine. There'll be a hearing. Then they'll hold her for deportation."

"They'll send her back to Caracas."

"If that's where she came from."

"What if she can't go back? What if her family won't receive her?"

"Immigration isn't concerned with that."

"No," Cade said, "I don't suppose so." He tried to imagine what it would be like without Mimi and his imagination wouldn't stretch that far. He asked, "What if she was to marry an American citizen?"

"Who?"

"Me."

The situation was new to the lieutenant. "There you have me. I never came up against one quite like this before."

"I'll marry her in Grand Isle, now, tonight, in the morning, whenever we can find a priest."

Lieutenant Morton was dubious. "Now, look. I don't know about this, Cade. My orders are to pick her up."

Cade continued earnestly. "I'll be responsible for her appearance at any hearing that may be held. I'll sell my boat for whatever I can get and post bond if necessary."

"You must think a lot of her."

"Let's say I'm sorry for her."

"And you'll bring her to Bay Parish as soon as possible?"

"On my word of honor."

Morton watched the nose of the crash boat round the point of land above the pier and mentally computed the meager deck and cabin space aboard the boat.

"Well, in that case," he said. "I suppose it will do until we can get a ruling from Immigration. We're going to be pretty full up going back and I hate to crowd a nice kid—and she must be nice if you feel the way you do about her—in with the scum we're carrying."

18 *Come and Get It*

The day as a wedding day, left much to be desired. Morning was hot, as only the Delta can be hot. Then there was the matter of the priest. The priest in Grand Isle was visiting a colleague in Golden Meadow and Cade had been forced to rent a car to drive the thirty-one rutted miles separating the two towns. En route he'd had a puncture and a blow-out. Then when they had reached Golden Meadow there had been the matter of a license and the aged priest's natural reluctance to marry a couple dressed as they were dressed.

Despite the fact they were of a size, Mimi had flatly refused to wear any of the dozens of dresses Janice had left behind her. Nor had she been willing to move from the chair until dawn. She'd sat most of the night crying softly while Cade, his feeling of trying to climb a glass wall returned, had drunk too much rum.

Now, with night falling again, Cade still had a sour taste in his mouth. He sat in the dinghy on the shore of the small bayou in which he'd anchored the *Sea Bird*, trying to catch fish he didn't want, wishing despite the lateness of the hour that when he had concluded his business in Golden Meadow and Grand Isle he had pushed on for Bay Parish. At least Mamma Salvatore and Miss Spence and old man Dobraviche liked him. There would have been

music and lights in Sal's and endless bottles of chilled orange wine.

Cade was bitter. He was no better off emotionally or financially than he had been when he'd first returned. He was still hungry and his hunger wasn't for food. He wanted love, friendship, tenderness, all the things he'd gone without during his time north of the Yalung.

With Tocko dead and Janice gone and his property recorded in Tocko's name, not forgetting the advance against possible royalties the oil company had made to Moran, the situation was typical Army. His property was so fouled up it would take seven chicken colonels from the Provost Marshal General's office and the same number from the C.I.D. to unscramble it. When the various lawyers were finished fighting it would probably turn out that Jean LaFitte still owned the land.

"Rest and quiet," the medic had told him. "Buy a boat."

Cade scowled through the purple shadows settling on the bayou at the ugly scar plainly visible on the rail of the *Sea Bird*. Mimi was supposed to be cooking supper. Not that he was hungry. He and Mimi had eaten in Grand Isle and also in Golden Meadow. Once the fatherly old priest had gotten over the shock of marrying a bare-footed couple, the man with assorted bruises and a black eye and the girl dressed in a pair of much too tight men's pants and shirt, he had insisted he and Mimi stay for lunch. He had even wished them numerous progeny. And that was a laugh. A real laugh!

Cade jerked the bait from the mouth of an eager two-pound grunt that was attempting to hook itself and pulled in his line wondering if Mimi held Janice against him, wondering just why she had agreed to marry him.

To stay in the country? It seemed the most logical reason. Was it that important to her? Was it the only reason?

With the deepening dusk the mosquitoes droned out of the marshes. Cade was relieved when he heard a jangling of ship's bells from the *Sea Bird*. He rode toward it slowly. His position hadn't changed. He still felt the same way about Mimi that he had when he had found her almost

nude and dripping in the cabin of the *Sea Bird*. Mimi was a nice kid. She was people. She had guts. Anything that eventuated, if anything ever did, would have to originate with her.

She was leaning with her arms on the scarred rail of the cruiser. Her eyes were still slightly slitted and sullen. As Cade started to make fast, she said, "Could I ask you some questions before you come aboard?"

Cade looked up at her, puzzled. "Ask away."

"Why did you marry me?"

"That's a hell of a question."

"I have to know. Was it because you feel sorry for me? Because I would have to go back to Caracas?"

Cade started to say "partly" and thought better of it. He sat in the bobbing dinghy looking up at her. *Why had he married Mimi?*

Still leaning on her elbows, Mimi asked, "Was it just because I am a woman! Because I am young? Because I have the pretty body?"

The cool and deep peace of early evening spread slowly over the bayou. The night wind began to blow. Cade looked from Mimi to a great white heron winging its way through the deepening dusk back to its nest and all of his bitterness left him. It was good just to be home. He knew why he had married Mimi.

"No," he said. "I don't think so. That is, not entirely."

"Then why did you marry me?"

Cade told her. "Because you're the girl I thought I was marrying when I married Janice. Because I love you."

Cade realized, shocked, it was the first time he'd told Mimi he loved her.

Her eyes no longer slitted and sullen but big and black and luminous, Mimi smiled down at him. "Then, how you say, come an' get it." She added softly. "This you not 'ave to ask how to say. I love you, too."

Her face disappeared from the rail. Cade made the dinghy fast. Of course. Every woman had a right to know she was loved. He pulled himself over the side of the cruiser into the cockpit.

The table was set but there was no light in the galley.

The only light came from the open door of the forecabin. Her borrowed white shirt and pants folded neatly on one of the bunks, Mimi was sitting on the other bunk, waiting, smiling, combing her hair, making her sweet self beautiful—for him.

Cade took a deep breath and held it. He'd been right after all.

From here on in he had it made.



A HERO'S RETURN

Cade Cain was back in town after two years in a Communist prison camp. His first night home he'd been beaten by a sadistic hoodlum and warned to get out of town fast. Now someone had planted a bullet-riddled corpse on his doorstep.

Three people in town hated him—his greedy ex-wife, her wheeler-dealer boyfriend, and the big muscle man in the local Mafia. But which of them had ordered MURDER—and signed Cade's name to the tab?

A MACFADDEN-BARTELL BOOK

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