

Chapter One

I always knew when Dr. Mausestod was going to call me, because the brown hat started to float a block behind me all day for three days. I had considered many times telling him to take steps to solve this little problem of obviousness, but he wouldn't have listened to my advice. I'm sure he would've thought I was up to something.

At first, I used to shake the hat off my trail, no great feat under the circumstances, even though it would turn up like a bad penny at the places I had to go back to: my apartment, my office. I even started drinking in different bars every day to avoid the dismal sight of the hat loitering outside the Ten High Club with a threadbare pretense of not being seen, and once I just lost it in the car and then holed up in a motel in Santa Monica for three days, smoking on the beach in my wrinkled suit.

Then in the middle period of my dealings with Mausestod I became determined to turn the tables, and after the three days were up I let the brown hat float a block before me and I floated lazily behind. As it turned out, there was a man attached to the hat, which came to me as a bit of a surprise. An air of failure clung about him like the odor of unwashed clothes, and he was pale and gelatinous-looking and snuffly, and in every way he seemed less real and vital than the brown hat did. There was also a name attached to the man -- and to the hat. I knocked it off him to look inside and the name embroidered on the band came wafting out from its brown felted depths with the unmistakable smell of head sweat: Harry Martin.

"So, Harry, what gives?" I asked the hat in my hands, glancing from time to time at the gelatinous man who seemed liable to dissolve completely without its protection.

He coughed apologetically and ran his hand through his thinning, colorless hair like he couldn't believe his head was bare. His voice was broken up with phlegm the way a shallow stream would be broken up by debris.

"Everybody's got a job to do, Mr. Stevens. You work for the Doc same as me." He looked from my face to the hat in my hands; I was treating the brim a little roughly. "Same as me." I could see his Adam's apple like a piece of gristle working under his translucent skin.

"Sure, bo, we're just a couple of pals, aren't we? Co-workers." The empty bowl of the hat stared at me in Cyclopean appeal. I was suddenly moved by the absurdity of the situation.

"Oh, what the hell, Harry. Fine. I won't lose you anymore. Just float along behind me, that's fine." He didn't even look skeptical, just ready to be disappointed; his life so far had taught him that much. "No, I mean it. You should just come in the Ten High and have a drink next time, on me." I smoothed the brim back into place and returned him to the hat.

From that day on I began to regard it as a little luxury that I always had three days to consider whether or not I wanted to take the job with Mausestod. I never tried to shake the hat off any more, and I even had a little feeling of homely recognition when I saw its battered brownness reflected in the glass of a diner window as I ate my breakfast. I figured that Harry wouldn't tell Mausestod the jig was up and put himself and the hat out of job. I didn't tell Mausestod for the reason

that now I was one-up on him when he thought he was one-up on me. But Harry was always nervous around me and he never would accept my offer of a friendly drink, even when I told him it was the kind of bar where you could keep your hat on.

Once, around Christmas time, I offered to just write down my daily activities and hand them to him, to save him the trouble of pretending to tail me, but he wouldn't go for it. I think he thought I might be putting him on, and at the back of his mind he probably wondered whether Mausestod might not have detailed a grey hat to keep track of him, and so on in an infinite regress of floating hats.

The general effect of all this was that even though I often resolved not to take any more jobs with Mausestod, usually after three days of the brown hat treatment I somehow came around, and so it was on this occasion, which I was determined would be the last job.

Dr. Mausestod always liked to keep me waiting when I came to see him, not so long as to be rude, but long enough to remind me that he was a busy man, and -- for the moment, at least -- my employer. With his patients he was punctual to a fault; I had once seen him wait by the door of his inner office with his hand on the knob as he watched the second hand on his pocketwatch sweep towards the appointed hour. I had to leave by the other door, so I missed the actual entrance of the next victim. Mausestod undoubtedly ushered the patient in with a flourish, because he was addicted to grand and somewhat outdated gestures.

So, once again I was cooling my heels in his reception room. I examined the panoply of framed certificates on the walls for the thousandth time, each bristling with crowded, illegible German and gold seals, as if a colony of black ants was swarming in a bank vault. There was a letter from the master himself, apparently felicitating Mausestod on the end of their analysis, from what I had puzzled out on a previous visit. All the framed documents came from the era before Mausestod had been excommunicated from the Freudian fold for his unorthodox practices, so they looked a little forlorn, like old graduation photos of children who had failed in life.

I looked out the window. The stucco apartment buildings across Church Street, flattened against the sky by the harsh afternoon light, struck a discordant note. They seemed years away from this silent room, with its oriental rugs and leather-upholstered chairs. There was a little coal-burning fireplace, with a cast-iron grate and a vast hod, filled to the brim with greasy chunks of coal. I had never seen a fire in it. Above the mantel hung a portrait of a somber-looking woman in grey silk, executed in a watered-down version of the style of Klimt. All this, and the curio case filled with porcelain figurines of simpering shepherdesses, was evidence of the early date of Mausestod's departure from Germany. Luckily for him, he was a pessimist.

I was just beginning to hate myself when the heavy oak door to the inner office swung open. It was so quiet that I could hear the soughing of the fibers in the plush rug as they flowed beneath the edge of the door. "Ah, Mr. Stevens. I very much regret having kept you so long. You see, I am dreadfully behind in updating my files and transcribing my sessions..." He waved vaguely towards the steel filing cabinets that lined the rear wall of his office. His accent was not unpleasant, being a deep dye of cultured German on a base of perfect British english; he had had an English tutor as a youth.

Mausestod was a short man in his early sixties, nearly bald, with gold-rimmed glasses that seemed unusually reflective, so that his eyes were nearly always hidden

by a flash of light or by my own image. He had the shape of a sturdy, somewhat plump man, but there was a vein of illness in him that undermined the plumpness, as though he were a very thin man inside. When his eyes could be seen they revealed themselves as mottled green, intelligent and sad. I did not dislike him, even though I disliked working for him. He paid very well.

"I have been behind on my other work because I am entirely absorbed in the case of one of my patients, and in another problem," he said, seating himself behind his desk and gesturing to me to sit down. I dragged a chair over from the wall because I didn't like to sit on the couch. It was really a chaise-lounge anyway, with no back. The doctor watched me with his head cocked to one side, and a smile on his thin, sensual lips.

"Can I offer you a drink?" he asked. He had a superior little smile on, probably because he knew I never turned down a chance to dip the bill. The Doctor poured a beautiful drink. He poured a short one for himself and a long one for me, which was okay as far as I was concerned. "Cigar?" He took one out for himself and left his pudgy hand hovering over the open box. I accepted, and settled back in my chair. There was no point in asking him a lot of questions, because he would tell me whenever he felt like it. We busied ourselves a little while with preparations for smoking, and then, "have you been having any unusual dreams lately, Mr. Stevens?"

"No more unusual than usual," I said, sipping my Scotch.

"It may seem a strange question, but I ask you because..." he began shaping the ash at the tip of the cigar into a more perfect cone by drawing it over the lip of the ashtray. "...Because I have had a strange experience. I had been turning this problem over in my subconscious for some time, I see now, but only today, just as you arrived, did I have the realization." He began shuffling through the open notebooks on his desk. They were backed in black cardboard and the paper was ruled into a tiny green grid. He had begun using them as a young man and even now had them specially imported from Germany. "Look here." He pushed a notebook across the desk, so that it faced me, and stabbed at it with his pale fat finger.

I peered at his copperplate hand and began to read.

"I was in a garden that had been neglected...it was full of weeds and puddles...I was afraid I would step on a frog. I went a little further and saw that there was a little clearing, where the grass was mown, with a table in it. I had to cross a sort of street to get there. The table was set beautifully, and there was a whole breakfast there, with eggs and sausage, and a steaming cup of Postum. It smelled so good...I had never smelt anything so delicious. I started to reach for it but somehow I couldn't find it. It was maddening. I could still smell this incredible aroma and I thought I would die if...and then I fell onto the grass and I saw this flower.' [He cries.] 'Doctor, I can't possibly describe it to you. I looked at the petals more and more closely and they seemed shimmering, alive. And then the flower started to unfold...everything else was stripped away, torn, like a blanket off a sleeping man. There was only this joy, and the unfolding flower. Then a strange thought came into my mind, almost like a slogan: 'It's never too early to wish for an early grave.' I awoke at first very happy, but then I began to feel anxious and strange. In the morning my coffee seemed repulsive somehow.' I: 'have you ever drunk Postum before, as a child perhaps?' He: 'No, never. It isn't very good, you know.'"

I looked up in confusion. "Well?"

"I would be violating my patients' confidentiality if I were to tell you more, but I assure you it is quite an interesting problem. And he is right about the Postum you know, it is awful."

I sighed and took a pull at the cigar. It was excellent. That Mausestod was suddenly stricken with concern for his patients' confidentiality was unlikely, to say the least, but obviously he didn't intend to tell me anything more.

"I can see that you are wishing I would 'cut to the chase', as you say?" His glasses blazed with light from the window behind me. He took one notebook from the scattered pile and shoved the others aside. As he returned the notebook I had been reading to the pile I noticed the name 'P. Ashland' on its frontispiece.

"I have called you to do some research, of the usual sort, on a Miss Evelyn Callaway --the full treatment." He formed the sounds of her name with evident pleasure, like a man savoring wine. I judged from this that Miss Callaway was an attractive girl.

"Yes, she is quite beautiful, of course"

I started a little. The Doctor's mind-reading act was his claim to fame among the patients, but usually I knew perfectly well how it was put across. I had obviously allowed some tiny leer to flicker across my face, or so I hoped.

"Additionally, I would like you to work on her father, Judson Callaway." The name was vaguely familiar to me, and I said as much.

"He is a real-estate developer, very successful, very well respected. When his wife was still alive they were fairly prominent in San Francisco society." Mausestod's neutral tone seemed to mask some deep hostility, even contempt.

"This is beginning to sound like a good way to get arrested," I remarked.

"Now, Mr. Stevens, it is not like you to be unduly impressed with money and social standing. I am surprised, and perhaps a little disappointed. I consider you a very...unconventional person in many ways." I reflected on all the laws I had broken in Mausestod's employ and decided this was about fair.

"It doesn't matter whether *I'm* impressed with Callaway. I'm thinking about John Law. Houses and offices like that, they tend not to want them to get broken into. And your lawyer might not seem so convincing under those circumstances, although..." I puffed at the cigar reflectively, "...he is a damn good lawyer."

"The best that money can buy, as the saying goes. Nor have I noticed many attorneys to be available on other terms. Mr. Stevens, you and your associate are competent professionals, as I well know. I will reward you handsomely for your efforts and I accept that it will take some time. Additionally," he reached into the narrow top desk drawer and pulled out a plain keyring with four or five keys on it, "I have the keys to Miss Callaway's house, and, I believe, to her father's."

I stared blankly at the keys and allowed ash from my cigar to fall onto the carpet. I rubbed it in guiltily with my foot. "How in hell?"

"I extracted them from her purse while she was under hypnosis and sent my assistant Jules to copy them. I returned them to her purse before the fifty minutes were up. Simplicity itself."

I thought that under the circumstances he might have let her have the full hour, but I didn't say anything. I picked up the keyring. Five keys. One had the distinctive shape of a Packard ignition key. I held it up. "Nice car. What are the other ones to, do you know?"

"No, I do not. Naturally something must be left for you to discover, Mr. Stevens." He cocked an ironic brow at me and then stubbed his cigar out. A watery

bluish haze hung around his domed brow like the outward manifestation of his schemes.

I sighed. "So, we'll bug the girl's house, the father's. Do you want his office?"

"Yes, I do, but it should not be your first priority, as most of what is said in the office will undoubtedly be of little interest to me. You should concentrate on tailing her, although you may detail another man to the father if you think it is needed." He drew a heavy manila envelope from a lower drawer and handed it to me. I peeked inside and saw a list of addresses, some handwritten notes, and the reassuring color of a good stack of bills. I partially extracted one and saw it was a double sawbuck. I returned it to the stack with a little grunt of satisfaction. It seemed like a good reason to finish my drink.

"Capital for the equipment. I expect a detailed inventory. I want you to start delivering the tapes as soon as possible, along with a report on her movements. My next session with her is" he glanced at his worn leather appointment book "Tuesday afternoon." It was Thursday.

"Finally, I should mention something, although you'll find it there in my notes to you. Miss Callaway is a drug user." I laid one finger along the side of my nose and sniffed questioningly. "No, she smokes opium. I know that she acquires it somewhere in Chinatown, but I want to know more details. Some of the things she has told me about her sources seem... fantastical. I must know the truth so that I can factor out her fantasies. This is a business in which it is very difficult to learn the truth. That is why you have proved so invaluable to me in my aletheiotherapy, Mr. Stevens." His words were complimentary enough, but his wan little smile did not seem hopeful. I thanked him for the cigar and stood up. As I left the office I could hear the tape on which Mausestod had recorded our conversation whirling back to its starting point.

I sat in my flivver and rested my hands on the wheel and thought about what to do first. The sky was a glazed blue and the sun shone down hard on the street without warming anything. As I started the car I noticed the brown hat floating down the steep hill of Clipper street towards me from Diamond Heights. Harry didn't glance at me as he passed, but just before turning into the entryway of Mausestod's building he looked around furtively, as though he feared pursuit. I guess he was going to confirm to Mausestod that I had just been to visit him, unless he was about to start tailing someone else. It occurred to me that I didn't know whether he did other work for Mausestod than keep an eye on me. If he pretended to do the same kind of work I did he sure didn't deserve to get paid as much. Harry and the hat functioned beautifully as a kind of apparition, but he was a miserable dick.

I decided to go straight to Berkeley and see Ted Standish. As I crossed the bridge I could see the ruffled surface of the bay was dotted with sails, their slants indicating that the boats were running before a stiff breeze. I felt a spasm of envy for the men in the white sailboats.

Ted lived on Milvia in a run-down craftsman cottage. I parked on the street and walked up to the front porch. The yard was weedy, and there were broken toys scattered around the dying bushes next to the steps. I could see through a screen door into the dim interior, where someone was cooking onions. I knocked on the door frame and waited.

"Teddy, will you get that? Teddy?" I waited a little longer. Finally a woman's form emerged from the gloom, holding a wooden spoon that was wet with grease. She muttered imprecations under her breath as she stormed along the hallway. She was schooling her face into polite refusal when she saw who it was.

"Hello, Marisol," I said, donning my best smile. She opened the door and looked at me warily for a moment. She was pretty in a sullen way, and she held her body awkwardly under her loose shift, as if it were dangerous or breakable. Her skin was a pale olive, her eyes so black that the pupils could not be seen. Her face was surmounted by a jagged part in her black hair, where she had pulled her hair back into a low ponytail without bothering to comb it. A dull flush rose to her cheeks under my appraising gaze, and a baby's fretful crying began in the room behind her. Then, as if she had made up her mind to retreat, she shrugged and turned back to the kitchen, saying over her shoulder, "I guess he's in the shed."

I walked through the house and out the back door. A weather-beaten shed stood next to a camper in the back yard. The camper had not been towed in many years and a thicket of blackberry bushes had grown up under it. The berries had just formed, and they hung on the thorns, dusty green and inedible. Music was blaring from the open door of the shack into the blue shadows, as the slanting sun glittered off the quilted aluminum surface of the camper. I stuck my head in the door. "Hey, Ted."

Oblivious to me, a thin man with fiery red hair was crouched over his workbench with a small soldering iron. I moved closer to look at what he was working on. He had an array of little vacuum tubes, and he seemed to be attaching them in series to a metal plate chased with copper. "Hey, Ted," I said again, gently, so as not to startle him into messing something up. He looked up. His pale blue eyes were set wide apart in his freckled face, and they seemed to be looking at me from a thousand miles away.

"Hey, Mel. Just let me finish this, OK?" He returned to his work. I looked around at the controlled chaos. There were plywood shelves covered with electronic equipment of every imaginable kind, and some which had not yet been imagined. Some of the components were straight from the manufacturer, but others had been cobbled together from the guts of old radios and television sets. There were coils of copper wire, some coated with black rubber, boxes of vacuum tubes, tape reels of every size, a new automatic splicer. Several old-fashioned wall phones, still topped with their twin black bells, stood naked on an upturned milk crate, their wooden cabinets stripped away. Next to them was a green combat radio marked "Property of the US Army", its hand crank detached and lying beside it. Ted had a friend who had stayed in the army after their service together in Italy and had become the supply sergeant for a communications and recon outfit. He was evidently not the most honest supply sergeant in the army, but I reflected that he probably wasn't the least honest, either. The radio was playing the beginning of a popular big band show; I tried remember the bandleader's name and failed. "Let's dance, even if it's a sma-a-a-ll room...make it your ballroom! Le-et's da-ance."

Ted turned the soldering iron off and set it down next to his project. "There."

"What is it, anyway"

"Well...I've been trying to think of a way to get my bugs to make simple decisions about what to do." He grimaced a little in embarrassment. "You know, when to turn up the recording levels if the subjects move away from the mikes, or when to switch between the mikes. A more complicated version of the feature that

starts the tape when someone's talking." He shrugged. "Simple algorithms. I think I can get it to work eventually, but the units will have to be pretty big at first."

"Could be pretty useful. It wouldn't be the craziest thing you ever tried." We both knew I was referring to the ill-starred 'dream machine', which was supposed to record the subject's dreams. Mauseotod had been very interested for a while, interested to the tune of over five hundred dollars, but it had never panned out. I had served as the experimental subject, trying to fall asleep on the narrow bed out in the camper with wires taped all over my head while Ted watched needles jerk up and down on a big paper roll. The needles had tiny pieces of graphite attached to their bottoms, and left swooping marks as they passed. The truth was, he *had* been able to figure out *when* I was dreaming, which was pretty impressive and a hell of a lot more than I had expected. He called it 'wave state three.' All his attempts to correlate the graphs with the content of the dreams had failed, though, and that was all Mauseotod cared about. He wanted to be able to catch his patients out when they reported their dreams inaccurately, or, even better, know the dreams that they had forgotten in an attempt at self-preservation.

Ted blushed. "So, what's up. Another job?"

I got out two gaspers and offered one to him. He lit them both with a battered chrome lighter. I happened to know it was also a camera. He was justifiably proud of the fact that it did both; usually those things were only cameras and you had to pretend to have just run out of lighter fluid or something.

"Well, it's Mauseotod."

Ted recovered his equilibrium a little. "I thought you weren't working for him anymore," he said, smiling.

I'm not the blushing type, but I didn't meet his eyes. "Well, I guess I was wrong."

"What's the story?"

We were returning to firmer ground. I cleared my throat and gave him the lay. "A girl, 20, Evelyn Callaway, and her father, 51, Judson Callaway, a real-estate developer. She lives in a house in a new development, one of his, up on Twin Peaks," I got Mauseotod's notes out of the inner pocket of my jacket, "the Aquavista Estates, number 7. No live-in help, but a maid comes in to clean and cook. Probably not every day, I'd guess. She's kicking the gong around, and a head case, obviously. Daddy lives in Cliffside, 23 Seacliff Ave."

"That's cold work," he interrupted. This was true enough, and I hoped we wouldn't have to stake the place out too long. It was the most expensive, foggiest, and coldest real estate in San Francisco. A beautiful view of the Golden Gate, about one hour every couple of days. Perfect for raising well-bred seals. I continued, "he's got a butler, maid and cook, who live in the rear of the house, kind of another wing, Mauseotod thinks. Also, his office, downtown in the Wilshire building on New Montgomery." This would be a job, but not impossible. It's often easier to get into someplace when there are a lot of people around.

"You figure phone repair, then?"

"Yeah. We've got keys already, at least to her place and car, and probably his house, too."

Ted raised his sparse, ginger eyebrows and exhaled a ribbon of smoke. "That's convenient."

"Yeah. You want to come case them with me or are you busy?"

"Let's eat here first, we're having chili. I'm sure Marisol won't mind."

I wan't so sure about that, but I didn't say anything.

We turned off Castro and up the steep slope of 17th. The engine in my Ford sedan started laboring and I downshifted again. Ted had been silent for the whole drive. He was probably moping about Marisol. I looked over as we swung onto Twin Peaks. The night was clear under a cloud ceiling which started just above the crest of the hill. Beneath the low roof of grey we could see all the lights of the city stretching down to the bay, the downtown to the left, the garland of the Bay bridge across the black water, the further hill of Potrero, and the twinkling gleam of the Alameda and Oakland beyond. A huge ship was moving under the bridge, heading out towards the sea.

Ted sat with his head resting against the window, his fine red hair falling over his forehead. "You're missing the view," I pointed out. He looked, but without enthusiasm. To get to Aquavista we had to drive south along Twin Peaks and then double back on the ocean side of the ridge. Here the view was more somber, just a continuous slope down to the Sunset district, which was totally fogged in. Between the ceiling of clouds and the floor of fog, in which sunken lights could be seen, was a thin visible strip of night.

I slowed as we turned off Skyview onto Aquavista Way. To the left of the road the ground fell steeply away. Trampled weeds and churned earth could be seen, although it was hard to imagine earth-movers on that slope. Probably a minor mudslide. On the right a low chain-link fence cordoned off a construction site, at the far end of which ten or so completed houses could be seen. The unfinished skeletons of others rose from the rutted soil, and they looked somehow abandoned, as if they were being destroyed rather than created. We parked down the road a little ways past where the fence began, in front of a house set back from the street, and under a tall eucalyptus that was tossing its branches against the pinkish clouds. Its medicinal smell followed us to the gate, which said "Aquavista Estates--the Latest in Luxury Living. Inquire inside -- Model Home open weekdays, 10-5."

Ted perked up a little. "Model home, huh. I wonder if they're all the same."

"Let's get a slant." The gate turned out to be superfluous, because there was no fence on the side nearest us, just low scrub. We walked around the gatepost and onto the lot. The houses were very modern, two stories high but somehow still low-slung, with lots of glass, and windowframes of steel ribbon. They were set along a small street which wound up the hill into a pointless cul-de-sac. Only two of the completed houses were definitely occupied, with lights showing in the windows. The model house was closest to the gate, and dark. The closer of the two lit houses turned out to be hers, number 7. The other was comfortably up the hill, at the end of the street. There was no car under the cantilevered porte-cochere of number 7. We walked cautiously around the downhill side of the house. I had put a dark coat on over my tan windbreaker and we both had our hats pulled down low, in case anyone should be looking out his window.

Pale drapes were drawn away from the huge window, and we could see into a large living room, partially lit by the light burning near the front door. It was furnished with a strange combination of minimalist modern furniture -- all chrome and white leather -- and almost lurid Oriental touches. Directly facing the window, on the wall between the archway leading to the front hall and a closed door, there was a whole Chinese altar. The ebony table was draped in red silk and held a large carved statue, bowls of oranges arranged in pyramidal piles, fat red candles, and a

bronze trough full of sand and forested with joss sticks. It was jarring against the cool white walls and wall-to-wall carpet. We continued our circuit, noting the location of the various rooms. The room upstairs over the living room, almost certainly her bedroom, had a wide balcony. There was a deck on the end of the house, with chairs and an umbrella-covered table.

"Not bad," Ted said. "Now for the model. I think it's just a mirror of this one." His surmise was correct; the empty model house had the same floor plan, but inverted, so that the deck was on the right-hand side of the house as you looked out the living room window downhill, the kitchen on the left, and so on. It was a cheap way of suggesting a little variation between the essentially identical buildings. "Shall we?" he asked. "We could just go into her place but we can't be *certain* the maid isn't there and we don't know when the girl'll be back. No one will be coming here and it'll do just as well."

"I'll look-out, and whistle if I see anything. If there's any trouble, you go out the back and cut through there" I pointed to the scrub which bordered the lot "to the flivver. I'll have it running." He gave me the thumbs-up and went to work on the door. He had it open by the time I reached the gate. I got behind a big scotch broom, not blooming now, and settled in to wait. Twice, cars passed, but they did not slow. Ted came out to meet me as I was finishing my third cigarette. We trudged downhill to the Ford.

"Do you mind going over to Cliffside? It's only 10:30," I asked. Ted turned his palms up in a gesture of resignation. "Oke." I steered back along Clarendon to Twin Peaks, and turned left on 17th St. We gathered speed going downhill until we were rushing through the black night towards Stanyan and then along the fringe of Golden Gate park. Ted had his window rolled down a few inches and the cold night air rushed in, permeated with the smell of eucalyptus and salt. We headed over to the Richmond along 19th Avenue, flying through the deserted park. The fog swirled across the road, parted to reveal the shining black pavement and the twisted limbs of the junipers, roiled in our wake.

"Where's the fire?" Ted asked bleakly. I eased off the accelerator a little. He turned the car radio on, and "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" began warring with the rushing air. I've never been all that keen on pug-noses, personally. As we turned onto Geary I was glad Ted had slowed me down; a black-and-white was right behind us. He passed us and we followed him all the way out Geary to 25th. Just before we turned towards Cliffside I noticed the cruiser stop at Trad'r Sam's. Sam's was a downmarket version of the Tiki Room or the Feejee downtown; it had palm-frond-roofed booths and nets on the ceiling and a huge selection of paralyzingly sweet and strong rum drinks with names like 'the Typhoon -- it'll blow you down!'. Paper umbrellas and tired slices of canned pineapple tended to play a starring role in these beverages. It was pretty popular among the bulls who lived out in the Richmond, mainly because of a liberal policy about giving drinks out the men in blue. Just as we passed, the cop was getting out of his car, his hard red face shining under the streetlight. I realized that I knew him from my brief and tumultuous tenure on the force: George Kincaid. Ted noticed I was craning my neck around for a look. "Friend of yours?"

"I wouldn't go that far. Actually, he's a real bastard. A cheap boozehound who'd do anything for a buck." Ted shot me a look, but he didn't say anything. We headed down towards El Camino del Mar.

The fog was thicker here, of course. As we slowed at the corner with Seacliff, a tendril worked its way into the car and blasted us with its cold moisture. If you're skeptical about whether that could happen I'll give you a hundred to one you've never been to Seacliff on a summer night. "Jesus," Ted said, and rolled up the window. "Turn the heat up a little."

"I've been wondering why you had the damn thing open anyway."

"I like the fresh air."

I slowed and began peering through the fog to find an address. I quickly gave up and decided to park. Before I got out I took a look at the map in the glove box. I walked up to an obscured mailbox and learned we were only a block away. Number 23 was on the Golden Gate side, perched over the water. It stood well back from the street, with a circular drive on a wide lawn. The house was surrounded with mature rhododendron, and Monterey cypress that twisted up like black flames in the fog. I took a quick look around and ducked into the yard, dog-trotting across the lawn to the cover near the house. Ted gave a little sigh, barely audible to me, and followed.

The house was in the Spanish mission style popular a generation ago; thick stucco walls topped with red tile, and arrow slit windows on either side of black double doors with oversized wrought-iron rings for pulls. It looked defensible. I stepped behind the rhododendron to the left of the door and began working my way around to a lighted window. The room into which I could see matched the impression given by the exterior: heavy Spanish-style furniture sparingly upholstered in red velvet, a huge fireplace of volcanic rock with a fire guttering at the bottom, twisted spears of black iron above the windows supporting more velvet. Another large room was visible through a wide opening, with black windows looking out over the fog-bound Golden Gate.

There were two people in the room closest to me: a silver-haired man in evening dress and a girl with her back to me, who I figured for Evelyn. I could hear raised voices, and I got out my 'stethoscope' and put it gently against the bottom of the glass pane. She was yelling at him, and it sounded as though she was on the verge of tears.

"You're just afraid somebody's going to find out the truth about you! You don't care about what happens to me and you never did. Mother used to say she wished she'd never married you, and I know --"

He cut her short with a slap so hard her legs buckled under her and she half fell to the floor, supporting herself with one hand. Her profile was turned to me for a moment, and I could see a bright bead of blood gathering in the hollow at the top of her lip. Neither of them said anything. She stayed crouched on the floor, looking up at him, and he towered over her, every muscle tensed. For a second I thought he was going to spring at her, force her all the way down to the ground. But when she got up slowly and backed away he made no move to stop her, just stared down at the floor where she had been, clenching and unclenching his fists.

I heard the front door, and I shrank back behind the bushes as she hurried past. She was wearing a white wool coat trimmed with fox that hugged her tall, slim figure. Her hair was chestnut brown and set in glossy waves. I couldn't see the color of her eyes but from the look of her skin they were probably green or blue. She looked strained and pale, and there were hollows under her eyes. In the light from the street I could see a red-black stain that spread from her nose.

When I turned back to the house, Callaway was standing at the far windows, staring out at the nothing. As I watched, he tossed back the remains of his drink. He turned and came back into the room I was looking into, where a bar cabinet stood. He mixed himself a drink that was about ninety percent bonded bourbon and ten percent ice, and then tossed that back too. He looked like the type of guy who's been handsome for half his life and rich for all of it -- in a word: arrogant. I bet his eyes were a cold green. He mixed himself another drink, as before, and got to work on it. Sweat was beginning to glisten on his brow and the muscles of his jaw were slackening. All in all, it didn't seem like Mr. Callaway was having such a great evening.

Another man walked into the room from a door very near where I stood, and I instinctively drew back, although he probably couldn't see me from the lighted room. It was the butler, a Negro man in his fifties. It was unusual for a man like Callaway to have Negro servants.

"Mr. Philip Castleman on the phone again, sir." The man said this as if it were a private joke between them. He had a gentle southern accent. Callaway smiled grimly, and then said in a yet gentler accent thickened by the bourbon, "yes, it would be. Tell him I'll call him tomorrow -- if I have the time."

"I'll do that, sir." It seemed to me that the butler was going to enjoy telling Mr. Philip Castleman to shove off. I turned to look for Ted and realized that he wasn't behind me; he had obviously gone around the house the other way, to check it out. I wrapped my coat around myself more tightly and watched Mr. Callaway plow through his drink. I felt like it would have done me a lot more good than him, at this point, but I didn't plan on asking him to share.

My teeth had begun to chatter when Ted appeared around the corner of the house. He crouched past the big window and jerked his thumb towards the street. I nodded and we headed back through the fog to the car. Just as we got there an unwelcome shape appeared: a bull. In rich neighborhoods like this they amounted to a private security service.

"Looking for something?" He was a young cop, not more than 22 or so, and he examined us, and the battered flivver, skeptically. His black eyebrows were silvered with tiny condensed droplets.

"We're looking for Seaview Terrace," I explained, with as much good-citizen heartiness as I could muster. "Do you know where it is? We can't find anything in this damn fog."

He relaxed a little. Seaview Terrace was more or less impossible to find, which was why I'd chosen it. He described the convoluted route to us and I listened intently, then repeated it back. "OK, back to El Camino, then left on 30th Ave, past Lake, and then right, is that right?"

"That's right. It's really only a few blocks from here as the crow flies. Are you going to the McIlhenny's?" he asked.

"Yes we are, how did you know?" I could hear Ted's sharp intake of breath behind me.

"I saw the lights of the party." The cop said this a little sadly; he was looking over my shoulder at the rolling fog.

"Say, it's cold as a witch's tit out here. Could I offer you a drink? I've got some whiskey in the car." I was overcome with my own routine, full of bluster. Ted looked at me incredulously. The young cop demurred. "I'm not really supposed to drink while I'm on duty. But thanks anyway." He waved us on our way. I made a

point of actually following his directions part of the way, and then headed back towards Geary. I got my pint from the glove box and had several good long pulls. As I was telling Ted about the scene at the Callaway's, I offered him the flask, but he shook his head.

"You know, you're a real asshole, Mel." He didn't say anything else the rest of the way back to Berkeley.