



## CHAPTER IX

—15—

Tuesday

WHEN daylight began to heat the sky outside, Hal still lay awake and sweating on his bed, with only his coat off. He had meant not to doze, so that Crack, in the next room, shouldn't have a chance to send his telegram without Hal's knowing it.

He couldn't think of Barry except as he had last seen her—golden head a little bowed, staring over her satin knees into the corner. And though he kept putting the dark portrait from him, he found himself later regarding it again, intently, without knowing how it had come back, or why.

Then the light was broader over the wide street. He heard the creaking of Crack's bed next door, light steps, and then the running of water. Crack wouldn't send the telegram now before he found an open office somewhere. In Las Vegas probably, where—with luck—they would eat breakfast. With luck? What did so slight a thing as luck on the road matter? It didn't. But, yes, it did. There was Sister Anastasia and her serene, beautiful acceptance of sorrow. She counted most in this day, rather as if she had always counted most and Hal had not seen it for the glare and dazzle of his moonstroke.

Hal washed without refreshment and went down to unlock Rasputin.

He sat on the running board eating one of Mrs. Pulsipher's oranges, when Kerrigan came down, brown eyes bright in a combination of greeting and alertness for signs of news.

"Don't look as if you'd slept well," he said, his voice dubious in disappointment.

"Plenty," said Hal. "Wasn't as tired as I expected."

Hal watched him, tasting—still through that internal numbness—his rich affection for the quick, kind eye, the tough cheeks with their labyrinth of minute red veins, the straight lips with their implication of readiness and gusto. Then the Pulsiphers came out, not wholly awake but bustling in tandem already. Then came Crack, his bag in one hand, golf ball loose in the other; he pushed the ball nervously into his side pocket as he made his insecure good morning to Hal. And after him came Sister Anastasia and Barry. The cool peace of the nun's face was softly animated in the prospect of this last day between her and her brother, and Hal knew Barry hadn't told her everything. Barry, simply groomed as ever in her creaseless tailcoat, gave him acknowledgment of nothing—nothing. The defensive mistrust of the journey was her brief look; no suggestion of a smile framed her curt good morning; even Doc's lead was held short, as if to keep him from friendliness.

Rasputin put behind him the hundred and thirty-odd miles to Las Vegas in less than two hours and a half. The telephone office was across and down the street from the place where they stopped to breakfast. Hal saw Crack's careless looking for it, saw him find it and stand for an indecisive moment before starting toward it. Hal drank orange juice and wolfed a bowl of cereal at the counter; it was natural enough he should pay his bill and saunter out to the street when Crack should return.

In the telephone booth next door, he called the telephone office, and putting a shade of flat slowness in his voice, he had the girl accept him promptly as the person who'd just handed in a telegram for Frederick Ireland, in New York. Hal said: "I'd like to make it clearer in that part where it says he claims he is your son account trouble which will explain after we wire . . ." I want to say, "Claims he is your son because asks credit for five hundred dollars to cover expenses including transportation to San Francisco stop." After that it goes on the same: "Wire Martin Crack, Grand Hotel" and what you've got there."

Hal went back with a certain small, grim elation to look at Rasputin's old gauge. Poor old Pop; free, honest anger for a little while wouldn't hurt him much, wouldn't be new to him; and his prompt denial of parenthood would give Hal more time in Los Angeles.

When his numbed mind began to respond to old disciplines, it might try to tell him that the idea of his—Hal Ireland's—taking the soft throat of another human being in his hands and extinguishing the life that breathed there—that it was fantastic, preposterous. Would Crack, dead, still look old-fashioned

and tidy, indolent and secret, sexless and immature, subtly and slyly hateful? If you beat a basking viper dead in the dust with a stick, it didn't look pitiable at all, surely.

California welcomed them officially at its agricultural quarantine station, where the luggage had to come down off the roof and be opened for an inspection. Dropping the bags to Kerrigan and Crack, Hal didn't resist the temptation which the last two offered. "That—" he said to Crack in a voice casual enough, but plainly audible: "that's Kerrigan's and that"—when Crack reached for it—"that's your wife's." He knew Barry wouldn't turn; but Sister Anastasia and Kerrigan both looked up at him as if he had cursed, and he had to drop his eyes to hide deep self-disgust.

In the middle of Mrs. Pulsipher's statistics on the thyroid Hollywood ladies took to keep their figures, John broke into frustrated sounds. He snapped his fingers in a moment and said, "It-tit-tit-tit said that way. It-tit-tit."

Hal half turned toward John with a feeling near absolute tenderness for him and said: "These darn signs seem to point in any direction for Los Angeles. What place is this, d'you know?"

"Pasadena," said Crack warily. "You can run out to Hollywood this way if you want." And he added, the insinuation of his voice unsure of its own shyness, "Why'n't you drop—us off there on the way?"

"Do that," said Hal briskly. It averted him a little to think again what might happen if Crack used that "us" when they were alone.

Guiding Rasputin to Crack's directions, Hal made a final attempt to fancy how it would be to put Barry's bag down on the sidewalk and leave her there with her husband. Something might move and give him a remembrance other than

## THE STORY FROM THE OPENING CHAPTER

Following his father's criticism of his idle life, and withdrawal of financial assistance, Hal Ireland, son of a wealthy banker, practically without funds but with the promise of a situation in San Francisco, which he must reach from New York at once, takes passage with a cross-country auto party on a "share expense" basis. Four of his companions are a young, attractive girl, Barry Trafford; middle-aged Giles Kerrigan; Sister Anastasia, a nun; and an individual whom he instinctively dislikes, Martin Crack. Barry's reticence annoys him. To Kerrigan he takes at once. Through a misunderstanding, Hal is directed to Barry's bedroom instead of his own. Her apparent unfriendliness disappears, and they exchange kisses. The following day Hal tells her he loves her. She answers that she mustn't love him, without giving any reason. On his insistence, Barry tells Hal that shortly before his death her father had urged her to marry a man many years older than she. Trusting her father implicitly, she did so, and on his deathbed her father secured her promise to stick to her husband, "no matter what happened," for ten years. That was four years ago, and though she knows of her husband's unworthiness, she is determined to keep her promise, while admitting her love for Hal. So argument Hal can make will move her. That night, though she tries to dissuade him, he goes to her in her room and he secures again the admission of her love for him. Crack appears, and at once makes his position plain. He is Barry's husband, and finding her and Hal together, his object is blackmail. Hal, appalled at what he can only consider Barry's duplicity, laughs at him and his threat to go to Hal's father with the story, to secure "hush money," and takes an anguishing leave of Barry.

the fixed image of last night. It might be the last time he saw her. Some little thing should happen, must happen, to show him where he was.

But it was nothing. Hal, on the roof, heard the good-bys said below him and saw Barry go a little apart with Sister Anastasia, write something on a slip of paper and give it to the nun before she kissed her. Her blue eyes came slowly to his, the hostile unremembering screens fixed against him. Perhaps she watched an instant longer than suited her negligence, but that was all. He knew she wouldn't speak; and he looked away first, bending over to take Doc's muzzle in his hand and shake it gently. "Bye, poodle," he said. And then he was watching the ingenious, unsurprising grace of her boy's stride take her away, beside the terrier's bright trotting.

And this might be the last he ever saw of her! Good G—d, why did that still mean nothing?

The room was nondescript and comfortable and Kerrigan, in shirt-sleeves by the window, swept his paper down when Hal came in, smiling a faintly disturbed welcome, and said, "Well, here we are. When d'you shove off for Santa Barbara?"

"In a while," said Hal. "She's seeing a priest who knows her brother—what's on his mind, how he is and all. You knew her brother was dying? He is. That's why she's in a rush, bless her heart. She's going to call up when she's ready. When do you have to be on the job, Colonel?" he asked.

"The End of the Trail?" he said, his eyes barely lived for a moment. "No hurry. Any time this month."

Hal watched him consider an opening for what he had to say and carelessly thought to head it off with: "Colonel, if you got the

chance to round out your collection of experience, how would you do your man in? Knife, I mean? Or gun? What?"

"Would depend," Kerrigan said cautiously. "Why?"

"Interest," said Hal. "Interest." A bad poke; try something else, quick.

"Look here," said Kerrigan, sitting forward with a slight jounce of decision, "do you mind if I ask if you're making a fool of yourself?"

"No," said Hal, pretending coolness. "Not a bit. But you don't expect me to be an authority, do you? Or do you think I'm such a fool that I make one of myself consciously?"

"I don't like butting into other people's business," Kerrigan went on. "The curse of the world is people trying to run other people. And I'm not asking you this for fun, or because I like to hear myself talk."

Hal looked at Kerrigan's complete, quiet gravity and felt the disrespect of being stretched on the bed while his senior sat solicitously forward. He raised himself from the pillows and swung his feet to the floor. "I'm sorry, Colonel. I don't see why you should give a curse about my business. I'm thankful that you do." He'd tell Kerrigan all about it—everything. That might be good to do; perhaps, telling him, his blood and his brain would rouse out of their coma.

Kerrigan began soberly. "If you don't want to tell me what's happened, say so. But if you want to break it out, I want to hear it. And I said 'want to' not 'willing to.'"

"Colonel, I want to tell you," said Hal, a gentleness on his mind as well as on his voice. "I—just wanted to wait, that was all. Here—if you'll listen—here's the whole thing: start to—finish."

Hal told him a story so orderly and simple that he surprised himself—from the first hour in New York, when Larsen had been so sure Barry and Crack were together, from his first sense of something wrong that rode with them in the car through to watching Barry go up the walk to the hotel in Hollywood. And all the while he spoke, Barry sat in shining green satin, holding herself hard on that bed four hundred and more hot miles away, staring darkly into the shabby corner. Would she move if he told, too, how he meant to go to Crack later to be alone with him? Could he, having told it, keep Kerrigan from the disquieting duty of opposing him—uselessly?

"That's it," said Hal in quiet conclusion. "And I can't tell you—can't tell myself—what it was

backed into the slimy corner where he wanted me, she never said a word, never made a sound. She went over and sat on the bed and stared into the corner, and I don't believe she even listened. G—d, Kerrigan, d'you think I wanted to believe it?"

"Believe what?" said Kerrigan, still gravely waiting. "Mind telling me what's this 'it' you didn't want to believe?"

Hal curbed his miserable exasperation. "I didn't want to believe what I had to believe—that she didn't mind her rotten little husband's catching me; I didn't want to believe that it meant more to her to keep her promise, her rotten bargain with Crack—much more—than to—to—"

"Hal," said Kerrigan in an unloved voice of voice that left Hal's insurgent anger dangling. "Have you thought back? Have you thought of what you have a right



"When D'You Shove Off for Santa Barbara?"

to think? I tell you you sound as if you were talking just to hear a noise, sticking up for what you've done just because you did it."

"Stick up!" said Hal, leaning forward to look at Kerrigan from under drawn, incredulous brows.

"What the devil d'you s'pose I've been doing for a day and half a night except thinking back? What—" He jerked his head aside, a sound of exasperation breathed in his throat. Think back! As if he needed to, supposing he could. Coming back from Santa Barbara he'd think—and find his rightness twice as strong.

Kerrigan said, politely, "Will you listen to me a little longer?" and waited for Hal to answer.

"Certainly," said Hal, with an ironic inclination of his head. "She made no secret of being married?"

"No," said Hal. "That wasn't so stupid, either."

"Did she ever want you to leave her alone, ask you to make up your mind to separating—here?"

"Yes," Hal agreed readily. "And of course it was to be expected I'd do it right away—especially after she'd told me she cared for me."

"Mm," said Kerrigan. "Telling you she loved you made it harder for you; but your telling her she shouldn't've amounted to—"

"The point is," Hal interrupted in listless quiet, "she never did care."

Kerrigan started into something vigorous, but he took palpable hold of himself before his breath was fully drawn. And his voice was leashed to some fragile stanchion of patience as he said: "All right, she didn't care. But it's not impossible to think of somebody in her place who would've. Take another girl, then, with a built-in feeling about a promise to her dying father. She's got warm, quick blood in her veins, not New England spring-water. She fails for a fella as she never expected to—a fella in just your position. She wants to find some way out for both of them, and she wants to keep him out of harm. But she isn't any more super-human than she should be; she's made of flesh and feeling, weakness and desire—not billiard-ball composition and missionary tracts. How would you have that girl behave?"

"I s'pose she should've told you it was Crack she was tied to, right at the beginning. That would have made everything simple, wouldn't it? You could've wrung his neck in Iowa somewhere and gone to jail with the happy knowledge that you'd made everything perfect for both of you."

"I couldn't've bought him, could I?" said Hal, his hot tone just off trembling. "Wringing his neck would've been the only thing in the world to do."

"Sure you could have bought him," said Kerrigan. "And he'd have stayed bought, too—never bothered either of you again. You could have bought him, and a dead man's dread of shame and a last promise and fifteen or twenty years of love and care and teaching. And with all that bought and paid for, she wouldn't feel that somebody'd shoved dirt all over her in a thing she wanted to keep decent."

"When that—that lazy spider came in and locked the door," said Hal; "when he stood there as if he owned her, as if he had me

backed into the slimy corner where he wanted me, she never said a word, never made a sound. She went over and sat on the bed and stared into the corner, and I don't believe she even listened. G—d, Kerrigan, d'you think I wanted to believe it?"

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## "Dutch Girl" String Holder for Kitchen

By GRANDMOTHER CLARK



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## Accepting a Job

A woman whose dignified and reserved husband was among the unemployed but who, like Mr. Micawber, was expecting something to turn up momentarily, was advised by him each time he left home for the day, that if an offer for any sort of a position at all should come for him to wire an acceptance with speed. And when at long last the wire did come from Washington the wife was so thoroughly imbued with thrift that she couldn't bear to send only a one-word answer like "Yes" or "Accept" to the "Will you accept?" etc. message, so she sent the following:

"Yes thank you ever so much love and kisses."—Miss Ann Thorpe, in the Kansas City Star.

## UNIQUE HOBBIES BEING PURSUED BY COLLECTORS

When an old man died in Chester there were found in his house four large boxes full of tram tickets from nearly every tramway system in the world. For 20 years he had collected every variety of tram ticket he could find, and these he had sorted in alphabetical groups according to the cities they came from.

That old man and his board of tram tickets is by no means the only case on record of strange hobbies invented by ingenious people to pass their leisure hours.

In the case of a well-known K. C. railway tickets are the great attraction—he is reputed to possess more than 20,000. First numbers of newspapers and magazines form a second collection that he prizes highly. Incidentally, a number of people make it a practice to keep copies of papers in which momentous news is given.

A London man who was an ardent theatergoer had a whole library of theater programs—souvenirs of plays he had seen. Each had his remarks carefully noted in the margin. His collection was so complete that if you mentioned the name of an actress he could tell you in a few minutes all the plays she had appeared in since her rise to fame.

Stranger still was the hobby of a sailor. During a storm in the Pacific some flying fish struck the funnel of the ship and fell upon the deck. The sailor, who was ship's cook, had the idea of starting an aquarium on board, and every fish

washed up or caught alive was put into a big tank.

Unfortunately for him, fish caught in the Pacific ocean stand little chance in a European winter, and a week of snow in the Thames killed them all.

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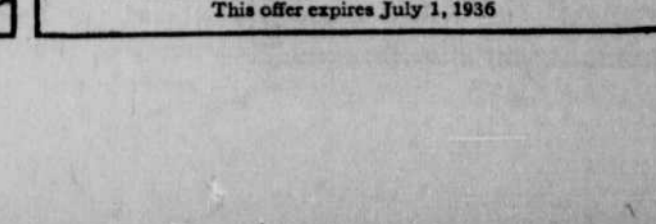
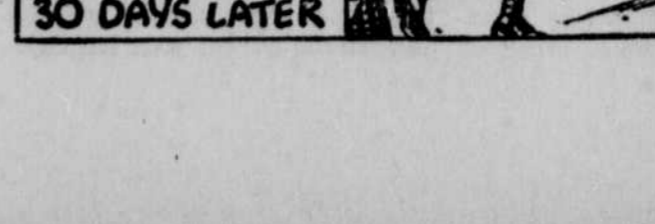
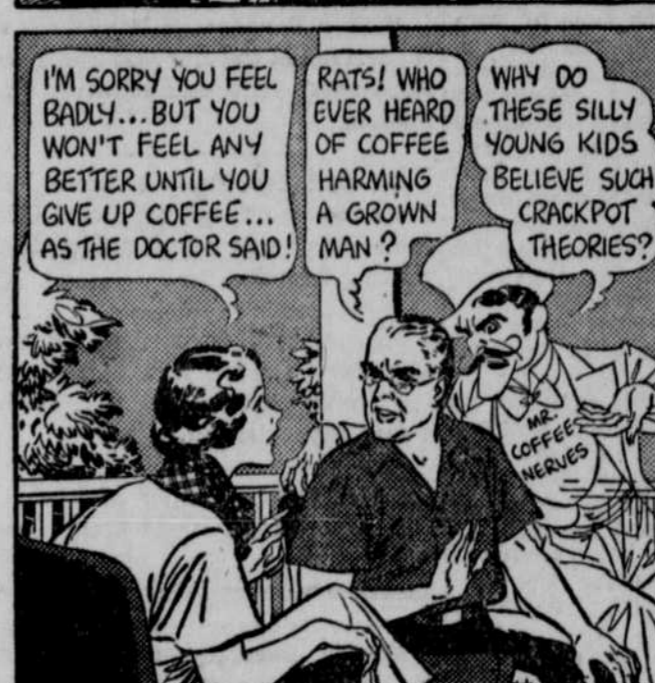
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