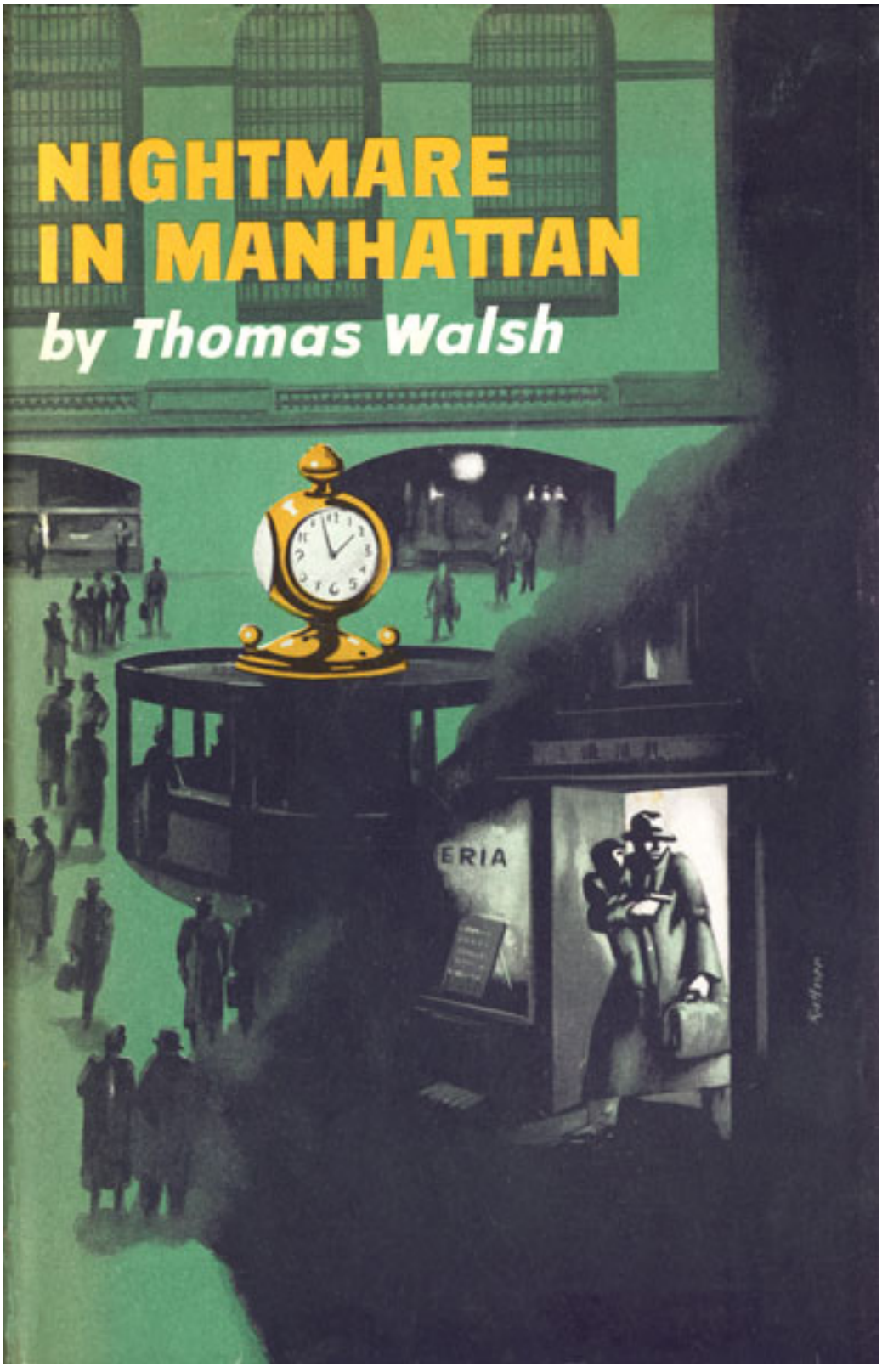
NIGHTMARE
IN MANHATTAN
by Thomas Walsh
ERIA

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Boston

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MANHATTAN

PART ONE

Tony muechison had lunch with her. He was a shy but well-behaved little boy, six years old, who studied Frances during the meal with cautious interest; and what she remembered of him afterward was a round face, an earnest manner, a blue and white checkered shirt, just like a cowboy's, and one of those enormous Uncle Sam pencils. Later on, when he heard the typing begin again just as he was going off to school for the afternoon session, he appeared in his father's study to observe soberly, but with obvious fascination, the soft clicking and flashing of the typewriter keys as Frances manipulated them.

He came no closer to her than the hall doorway, and then looked away very solemnly, without the least smile when Frances detected him in that position. He stayed there, as if altogether unconcerned with her, for several minutes, and finally he came in a step, still watching her fingers. He came in another step when Frances pretended not to see him. He came in two steps.

"I could do that," he said, almost his first words to her.

She thought he could too, Frances said; it really wasn't awfully difficult. But could he make soldiers?

"Soldiers?" Tony Murchison said. Again she was observed solemnly. "On that?"

Then she tapped out, with what must have seemed magical quickness, a diagonal column of guardsmen, all with muskets, and all at right shoulder arms.

"Oh," Tony Murchison said.

He buttoned up the blue overcoat slowly and competently, inspecting the guardsmen first, and then her. He said nothing; he remained solemn as ever; but when he came back to the study several minutes later she understood that she had made a conquest for herself, because he was

carrying with him a new picture book, one that had a magnificent black and yellow tiger as frontispiece.

He wanted to know, putting it with impressive earnestness, if Frances supposed that a tiger like that could kill an elephant. A boy had said so, Frances was informed, but of course there were boys who said anything at all, weren't there?

"Indeed there are," Frances said warmly. "And I wouldn't believe them. You don't have to, you know."

"Oh, I don't," Tony Murchison said. "Not always. Do you want to know something? I'm in the first grade. I go to school. Did my daddy tell you about that?"

Frances was suitably impressed about school, and Tony Murchison was apparently impressed by her. At ten minutes to one, after a short but friendly conversation, he tucked the guardsmen into his pocket next to the Uncle Sam pencil, and prepared to go off to that very important first grade of his at St. Hilary's Day School. Then, from the study doorway, he confessed something which pleased Frances inordinately.

"I like you," he said, nodding at her very seriously. "You're nice — and I think you're pretty, too. Where do you live?"

She did not see him again. He went off to school wearing the blue overcoat, red mittens and a blue school cap, and Frances had finished with her work twenty minutes or so before he was due home from St. Hilary's. She had come up to North Rhinehill that morning to type at home for Mr. Murchison a long and important memorandum on Coronet Oil; and she left the house hurriedly now, with the completed report, in an attempt to catch the 2:55 down from the North Rhinehill railroad station.

It was a gray February afternoon, bad for driving, with thick flurries of snow evident now and again in a bitter wind; and once Charles, the elderly Murchison chauffeur, was almost maneuvered into an accident on the ridge road leading down past St. Hilary's Day School to the village.

They had just passed the big gray buildings there, where Charles was to pick up Tony Murchison on the ride home, when a gun-metal sedan raced

up back of them out of nowhere, swerved to the right or else skidded, and forced Charles into deeper snow at the edge of the road.

There were three men crowded together into the front seat of the sedan, but the one nearest her was the only one Frances saw at all clearly. He examined the Murchison car very quickly, with cold-looking and unpleasant blue eyes, and then he spoke to his driver. They sheered off at once.

That was the first time Frances saw him. She saw him again about an hour afterward at Chester Falls, which was two stations on along the line. The same gun-metal sedan skidded in recklessly there to the upper end of the passenger platform, and two men jumped out of it, ran diagonally across the platform, and swung themselves up onto the steps of the last coach — Frances's coach — just as the 2:55, which had been forty minutes late at North Rhinehill, was pulling out in a hurried attempt to make up for some of its lost time.

The blue-eyed man — very big and powerful-looking on his feet, Frances noticed, with a wide, harsh mouth, flat jaws and red hair — opened the coach door a moment afterward from the vestibule side; and then the other man squeezed in past him and against Frances, who was sitting in the first seat on the aisle. This man, who appeared to be extremely nervous and upset, had his hand under his overcoat, as if holding onto something; and it was only when the train lurched him against Frances that the overcoat swung open an inch or two, and she saw what he was holding under it — a gun. She saw it for no more than a second or so; then the smaller man was by her, into the car; and the big redheaded one, who did not appear to know the other at all now, had taken the first seat that offered, just across from Frances.

She began watching him covertly, uneasiness in her. It seemed odd that if they had wanted to catch the 2:55 they had not caught it at North Rhinehill, instead of racing down all the way to Chester Falls on icy and dangerous February roads. Perhaps they had done something up in North Rhinehill, Frances found herself thinking rather slowly and unwillingly; that

could be why they had split up on the train as if they did not know each other, and why the smaller one was carrying a gun. They would have no desire to be noticed, remembered and described afterward; so they had driven to Chester Falls, and two of them had got on the train, and the third one, the driver…

The big man with the unpleasant blue eyes must have felt her watching him. He turned suddenly, with a kind of savage and alert quickness, and Frances looked away from him. She felt her heart beginning to pump rapidly, and she was foolishly relieved, even in that day coach filled with passengers, when he did not appear to recognize her from the Murchison car.

The big man looked at her for a moment or two, with the flat jaws squared, the wide mouth set; then he turned back to his window. They slowed for Ballerton. And Frances got up, her heart still beating quickly, and went out into the vestibule and ahead into the next car.

Of course, she told herself, she wasn't going to do anything about those men, and about their gun. She had just wanted to get away from the big fellow, and from the other one with the gun. They were not her business, after all. No. She was very logical about it, and very cool now that the big fellow was not watching her with those unnaturally pale blue eyes. She sat down. And then the conductor came along and demanded her ticket, and began to fuss with her because she had not brought the seat check along from the rear coach.

She must have been more upset than she thought, because she began to fuss with him also. She said, in what was probably an excited and breathless manner, that instead of raising a commotion about things like seat checks he ought to watch what was going on in his train. Because —

The conductor, who probably had his own worries in looking after Train Number 52 in weather like this, put his hands on his hips and stared down at her.

"Like what things?" the conductor said.

So she told him about the gun, and about the men, but perhaps she was

not too convincing in her exposition. The conductor made one brusque movement.

“Sure,” he said. “A lot of people see a lot of things happen on trains, or from trains — or imagine they do. You know what you want to do here, lady? Forget it. Just forget it. Do me that favor, will you?”

There was an elderly man sitting next to Frances, and he and the conductor exchanged knowing glances in a superior masculine manner that absolutely infuriated her. She said some things; the conductor said some things; and then she followed him out to the vestibule and argued with him there almost all the way from Ballerton to Millvale Center.

“Now look,” the conductor said, putting his lips together for a moment. “Don’t keep yapping at me. I’m warning you, understand? Or you’ll get into something you don’t like. The only thing I do in stuff like this, I wire ahead and have a cop waiting for you at Manhattan Depot. That’s all. That’s the way I’m told to handle this stuff. Do you want that or don’t you?”

Frances, who did not want it, hesitated and bit her lip. She had a suspicion what a policeman at Manhattan Depot would mean: questions for her, perhaps surliness, perhaps serious trouble if the gun was found, or even if it was not found.

“Well,” she said, “I don’t know that I — ”

The conductor grinned there at just the wrong moment.

She caught his arm.

“I think so,” she said quietly. “I think perhaps we’d better.”

“Okay,” the conductor said. He was thinking to himself, with a very grim sort of satisfaction, that he’d let Willie Calhoun take care of this thing; and that she might learn a little sense and manners, and not to bother people who only wanted to mind their own business, when Willie Calhoun got through with her.

“Okay, lady.” He bawled: “Millvale Center” into the coach behind her, swung up the floor partition, swung back the outside door and stepped down to the platform. Snow whirled around him; he looked back at her

once and then stepped through into the ticket office.

From there, and in this manner, a message went off from Train Number 52 at about twenty minutes past four. It was relayed through to Manhattan Depot almost immediately; and it was handed on there, in a small upstairs office, to a Lieutenant William Patrick Calhoun, who was acting head of the terminal police from four every afternoon until twelve midnight.

Lieutenant Calhoun glanced at the official but unilluminating demand that Train Number 52, on arrival, have a member of the railroad police waiting for it; and then, because the information had caught him at an exceptionally busy moment, just as he was about to start on his first evening inspection of the station area, he adjusted his gray hat irritably and buttoned up his unobtrusive gray overcoat. He was known as Tough Willie in some quarters. He looked it now with his chest out and his jaw up, when he tossed the flimsy sheet back to his desk man over the top of the telephone switchboard; and he acted it on the concourse balcony, just outside his office, where he stuck his hands into his hip pockets around under the overcoat, and eyed moodily what could be seen of Manhattan Depot from this vantage point.

Just under him, on the other side of a low railing, lay an enormous rectangular chamber that was almost four hundred feet long, and better than a hundred and twenty wide. Far above him, at the east and west ends of the concourse, were twin sets of arched windows pressing back the early darkness of that February day; and over and between these, sweeping from north to south in one great flying arch, was a complicated network, shadowy from below, of threadlike steel beams.

Everything down there on the concourse was brilliantly illuminated; and everything at this time, and on this Friday evening — the first of a long holiday week end — was just about what Lieutenant Calhoun had expected it to be. He received a familiar impression of glass, marble, glitter, polish and people; of noise, luggage, confusion and redcaps; and of a four-sided golden clock, the heart and mainspring of Manhattan Depot, rising with detached serenity from inside the besieged circular

fortress of the information booth.

Impatient lines had been forming up all afternoon at the ticket windows across from Calhoun, on one of the long sides of the rectangle; and the first thing he noted, after checking the big clock over the information booth, and then his wrist watch, was that these lines were being augmented constantly now, and from half a dozen different approaches. Some of the newcomers poured in from an escalator and two archways on Calhoun's left; still others from two more archways, a wide marble stairs and an upper street entrance far to Calhoun's right; but perhaps most of all from a tremendous ramp, broadening out at the base, that cut the long row of ticket windows opposite him into equal halves, and led down past them from the main waiting room.

Calhoun paused just long enough to examine all those details stolidly and yet carefully; and, afterward, he walked around his side of the balcony and down the west stairs to the floor of the concourse. First, in the way of routine supervision, he checked the signal lights under the big clock which flashed on and off, on and off, when a railroad policeman was wanted anywhere in Manhattan Depot; then he inspected the ticket windows, the main ramp, and the vicinity of the incoming and outgoing baggage rooms, to see that all his patrolmen had posted themselves at their designated stations; and then he inched and angled his way up the ramp, past heavy incoming traffic, to the main waiting room.

He moved around very casually through the benches and aisles up there, a burly young man with impressive shoulders, a heavy fighter's jaw and a curt, competent and unshakable manner; and on the other side of a newsstand he gazed blankly, but without showing the least recognition, at a railroad patrolman who was carrying on some lighthearted conversation with a pretty girl at the Travelers Aid booth. The patrolman noticed him presently; and then the patrolman flushed, straightened at once and resumed his proper position over in front of the street doors.

Calhoun went around him, not pausing, but sending over a few low and effective remarks in that direction. An inside stairway in one corner led him

down into the overheated tile and bustle of the men's washroom; and from there, when everything appeared to him much as usual, he continued down another ramp onto the lower or commuters' level.

His daily task, at this time, was to inspect both station levels, and all arcades and passages, for known pickpockets or baggage thieves; to observe conditions in the waiting rooms, the washrooms, around the track gates, and near the information booth; to make such prompt physical intervention as might be required by any suspicious person, place or thing; and to satisfy himself, during the busiest hour of the day in Manhattan Depot, that everything was quite in order.

To do this, he had personally to inspect every station area, and every station business establishment. There were a good many of these last — barbershops, newsstands, telegraph offices, phone booths, restaurants and cocktail lounges; and of course, buried cosily in long interior passages, attractive bookstores and candy stores, florists, luggage shops and soda fountains. But still he was done with all of these about five o'clock; and then, swaggering a little, but altogether unconsciously, in that rather heavy-shouldered walk of his, he entered another marble chamber over in the northwest corner of the station.

Here the arrival time and track number of all incoming trains were marked up on a huge blackboard; and here, after inquiring again about Train Number 52, to make sure of it, Calhoun used an ornate marble doorway with the word Taxicabs inscribed over the arch. Beyond this was a long, narrow platform, where it was much colder than in the announcer's room, and much windier. Cab after cab raced down a narrow vehicular tunnel on Calhoun's right, popping suddenly around the street turn with their hoods and fenders snow-covered, and their windshield wipers clicking from side to side in impatient sweeps. Redcaps and passengers jostled each other for first chance at the cab doors; many different kinds of traffic noise and human commotion bounced back over Lieutenant Calhoun from dirty brick walls, from a low ceiling; and out in the center of the tunnel, where he stood straddle-legged as if braced on a concrete safety island, an undersized man wearing a starter's cap was attempting, with savage

downward gestures of both arms, to guide the incoming traffic up to and then past the terminal platform.

Out here it was even more overcrowded than the main concourse, in proportion to size, and so Calhoun moved along very slowly, gray eyes everywhere — at the piles of luggage, principally, at the people who were hovering around them, at cabbies and redcaps, and at excited female passengers who would dash out into the road in order to wave at some taxi, and leave a hundred- or a hundred-and-fifty-dollar suitcase absolutely unguarded in back of them on the platform.

Calhoun tightened his lips at these females, because it was always Calhoun's habit, during his first hour or two on duty, to become irritated at a good many station incidents, and a good many station people; but at the same time Calhoun also watched their suitcases for them. At the lower end of the platform he exchanged a few words with another of his patrolmen; and finally, at just ten minutes past five, re-entered the main concourse of Manhattan Depot by another passage. This time he crossed it diagonally from south to north, and left it by a track gate opposite the information booth. Beyond the gate, it was much darker, quieter and emptier than in any other part of the depot. At Platform 24, from which the advance Buckeye Express had just departed for Buffalo and the Midwest, the lights had been left on; but all the others, even where trains had been made up for later this evening, looked shadowy and deserted. A few voices rang and echoed in a curious disembodied fashion under the subterranean train shed. Sacks of mail were piled up, apparently at random, where a row of chutes had dumped them from the beehive of the Manhattan Depot post office; and the illumination there enabled Calhoun to make out an intricate complexity of tracks gleaming and narrowing away from him into a black underworld.

A baggageman riding in from one of the platforms floated sedately past on an empty electric truck, after which Calhoun settled himself behind the proper track bumper for the arrival of Train Number 52. In the shadows now he seemed to acquire more bulk than he actually possessed, perhaps

because of his solid, chunky build, his broad shoulders and his impressively powerful arms and legs. He was thirty years old, but in appearance and manner one of those rugged and self-confident individuals who give the impression more of competent adult maturity than of any particular age. His hair was black; his jaw the prominent bulldog type; his gray eyes deeply socketed, like a prize fighter's, around a stub nose; and his complexion — it often shamed him — almost childishly clear, soft and delicate. He walked usually jaw out, chest forward, with a noticeable rock or swagger, as if he had to do that in order to balance the shoulders properly; and he dressed always, as now, in a neat, clean and inconspicuous masculine manner. The idea most people got of him, and at first glance, was one of dogged stubbornness, watchful pugnacity and rocklike physical strength and endurance.

At twenty minutes past five, when there came a slight vibration underneath him, he removed a cigarette from his mouth with a dainty gesture, dropped it from between two fingers, stepped on it, put his hands on his hips and faced the passenger platform. He remained in that position while an electric engine glided around a signal arrangement out on the track, drawing behind it day coaches that rolled in with increasing slowness under the overhead platform lights, which had gone on a moment ago. Then Train Number 52 slowed, slowed — finally stopped; and car after car jerked laboriously back along the rails, and afterward settled themselves as if heaving a deep sigh.

Two people hurried down to the track bumper from the first day coach. What Calhoun saw then, beside Conductor Goggins, was a young lady wearing a small hat and a dark fur coat who was obviously distressed and upset about something; and what Frances saw was a short but solidly set young man with a square chin, sharp and quick gray eyes, and one of the toughest and most cynical facial expressions she had ever seen. He did not change the expression in any way for her; he did not tip the hat, smile courteously or remove the hands from his hips.

The conductor muttered to him in an undertone; and the tough-looking young man, scrutinizing her all the time in the most forthright manner,

listened without a word. Then suddenly, with a very abrupt kind of nod to the conductor, he took Frances by the left arm, turned her and started her up toward the track gate.

“Now I suppose you wouldn’t want those fellows to see you,” he growled in the most unexcited basso profundo, being logical enough about it. “Okay, then. Let’s get outside. Let’s take a look at them where they won’t notice us. Now come on, come on, lady; speak up. What’s all this business about a gun?”

Frances tried to explain to him.

“I imagine you think I’m a fool,” she said, desperate there because in the familiar environs of Manhattan Depot she was beginning to have serious doubts on that matter herself. “That I’m — ”

“What’s the story about the gun?” Calhoun demanded — curtly, crisply. “That’s the thing, lady. That’s what matters. What’s all this about?”

“I don’t quite know,” Frances admitted, stopping beside him off to the left of the platform gate, where they were protected by three or four redcaps. “The whole thing happened in such a way that — ” She drew back quickly. “There he is now! The big man in the brown overcoat. Can you see him?” Her voice tightened up; she was as breathless at this moment as she had been back there in the day coach, when the redheaded man first glanced at her. “I know it’s a stupid thing to tell you that he has a bad look to me. But — over there, just in front of the gate. Two of them. They’re talking now.”

Calhoun turned as if casually, putting the broad shoulders — and very comforting broad shoulders they were to Frances just then — between her and the man in the brown overcoat. They conversed, the big fellow looking around and seeing Calhoun, but not the girl in back of him. Then they went by Calhoun, who did not appear to be facing in their direction, but who would remember them both very distinctly from now on, and turned right toward the train announcer’s room and the taxicab platform.

Calhoun hesitated, not having heard the complete story yet; and then, because the big redhead had rather a bad look to him also, he muttered a

few words hurriedly to the girl.

“Wait here,” he said. “Wait right here. I’ll be back.” He went after the big fellow in the brown overcoat, but with very little to act on at that point. He followed him and his friend out to the cab platform, and down to the lower end of the cab platform, where there was row after row of public lockers. The big fellow put a gray overnight bag into one of these, inserted a dime in the slot, turned the key and pocketed the key. He spoke to the other one again. They went on to the lower passage, and back through it to the main concourse. Calhoun hesitated once more, knowing that all he could afford to do here, on very little factual evidence, was to find out what these men were up to in Manhattan Depot. He was a railroad employee, and not a city detective; and he was not empowered, unless presented with incontrovertible evidence, to detain or question anyone so long as he behaved himself on railroad property.

But in the end he went after them to the concourse — a little uneasy, a little curious. They did not pay any attention to him, did not notice him, because at half past five in Manhattan Depot, on Friday night, the difficult thing was not to follow people around without being detected, but to move fast and agilely enough to keep them under observation. Twice, in the almost solid mass of holiday travelers wedging itself around between the ticket windows and the information booth, Calhoun lost them for a moment or two; and twice, by plunging that chesty physique of his past and in front of indignant bystanders, Calhoun succeeded in picking them up again.

Over in the southeast passage, which led to one of the Manhattan Depot subway stations, and also to one of the three terminal hotels, the men stopped at a wall counter, and the big fellow took an envelope out of his breast pocket. Calhoun, who was now level with them but keeping on the other side of the passage, accepted the opportunity to study them in the mirror facing him, and facing the men also, from in back of a soda fountain.

An exceedingly peculiar thing happened. The big fellow put his locker key into the envelope, addressed the envelope and dropped it into one of the nearby mail slots. Calhoun did not like that at all. His idea — and a very

natural one for a man in Calhoun's position, and with Calhoun's depot experience — was that the big fellow had got rid of something illegal or incriminating in the bag locked out there on the cab platform, and had now disposed of the key in such a way that it could not be traced back to him without great trouble and inconvenience, if at all.

So Calhoun was annoyed with himself; and when they started on again for the subway turnstiles, the little one showing open relief now, the big one watchful but stolid, Calhoun had determined what to do about them. Near one of the subway change booths was a middle-aged man reading a newspaper; and Calhoun, on the pretense of hunting for change in one of his pockets, stopped close enough to this man to address him guardedly.

"The big fellow in the brown overcoat," Calhoun muttered. "Catch him, Eddie. Take him and that friend of his, and find out where they're headed for, and what they're doing. I think they just dumped something — a gun, probably — in one of the lockers on us. Watch yourself now. The big fellow's keeping his eyes open."

A few minutes later, after the middle-aged man, the little fellow and the big redhead had all vanished in the crowd pushing downstairs to one of the Bronx subways, Calhoun discovered that the girl in the dark coat appeared to be a sensible and reliable sort of girl, because she was waiting for him exactly where he had told her to wait for him. He explained a few matters to her in his usual direct way. He hoped to pick up some information on those fellows, Calhoun told her, without going into particulars; he thought he would; and, if he succeeded, the information would be passed on to the nearest precinct house for appropriate action.

Meanwhile, without making any attempt to conceal what he was doing, he inspected Frances in great detail. A medium-sized girl, Calhoun saw, with dark hair and complexion, good teeth, no distinguishing marks — none that were visible, anyway — brown eyes, small ears and erect carriage. No engagement or wedding ring. Good, slim figure. A hundred and twenty pounds, probably, and about five four and a half high. Manner? Just a little bossish, Calhoun decided. General impression sensible, determined and

businesslike.

“Now,” he said. “What’s your name, lady? What’s your business?”

“I don’t see where that matters,” Frances said, very distant then. “I certainly don’t intend to get mixed up in this thing. All I — ”

“I don’t think you can help it,” Calhoun told her, sure about the bossishness then, and making a very slight chewing motion of the bulldog jaw. “And I don’t want no argument here, lady. You’re in. You want to know why? I’ll tell you. You come to me with some information; I stick my neck out on it; and now I’m gonna find out just what kind of a source that information comes from. It’s all nice and simple, lady, if you take the trouble to think about it. Let’s try it again, huh? Let’s pretend nothing happened. Okay. What’s your name now? What’s your business?”

Frances flushed; but Frances gave him his answer this time. And yet, even when he had learned how the gray sedan had almost rammed into Charles up in North Rhinehill, and that she was Miss Frances Kennedy, the private secretary to Henry L. Murchison, of Murchison Oil, his manners remained just as curt and decided as ever. A very uncouth and unpleasant individual really, Frances thought him.

“So now we got something,” he said. “So now we can see about locating the gun.”

He took her out to the cab platform, to Locker 572, where the redhead had left his overnight bag a few minutes ago.

“In there,” he said, looking at her but jabbing a forefinger at the locker. “Right in there.”

Then he was annoyed that she did not comprehend him immediately.

“What do you think I’m talking about?” he grunted at her. “Use your head. The gun, the gun! You’re the one who saw it, aren’t you? I’ll tell you something.” Now he was pointing the forefinger at her chest. “We have to open and inspect these lockers every twenty-four hours, because they’re the best place in New York to get rid of something you don’t want. I could curl your hair with the stuff we’ve picked up out of them. Ask me

sometime."

He whisked her back up the cab platform, and into a small, glassed-in office where there was a desk, a phone and a few chairs. He used the phone. "Calhoun," he said, when his connection had been put through. "I'm down in the slot, Howie. Look. I want you to call around and get Tom Nelligan to open a locker for me. Yeah, I'll wait. What's goin' on up there?"

There did not appear to be anything much going on. He offered Frances a chair — or at least waved in an offhand way in the general direction of one, leaving it up to her as to whether she wanted to sit or not — and sat down himself. He was a very homely young man, Frances noticed; and very rude, too, because, once seated, he folded his hands high up over the barrel chest and made no attempt to initiate a conversation. He whistled between his teeth, though. His hat was pushed up and he had placed his feet on one corner of the desk. The smart and superior type, Calhoun was deciding. Well, let her wait. Let her sit here now, and stew in her own juice. The private secretary to Mr. Henry L. Murchison, of Murchison Oil, seemed to have the idea that she was something extra fancy. Hah! Calhoun thought. He should let anything like that impress him. He —

A tall, elderly man wearing a railroad coat came in and nodded at him.

"Now what's up, Willie?" the man said.

It was the last name Frances would have selected for him; probably he suspected it. He gave her one quick, almost abashed look.

"Yeah, yeah," he said, tougher and curter than ever. We're going to find out right now. Got your keys?"

He went away with the man. In two or three minutes he came back alone, carrying a gray overnight bag with a blue handle. There was a zipper on it, closed but unlocked, and he slid that up deftly. Then from inside the bag he took out a boy's school cap and a boy's blue overcoat. He felt around in the bag, upended it and shook it. Nothing fell out. He looked at Frances. He looked at her with a rather tight and unpleasant expression.

"No gun," he said. "Not even a peashooter. Now just what do you suppose

happened to it, lady? I'd like to know."

But Frances was looking at the school cap. She could remember one that was just like it.

"I didn't tell you it was in an overnight bag," Frances said.

"So you didn't," Calhoun agreed, beginning to remove various objects from the coat pockets. "Now I bet we got some pretty important stuff here. Let's see. One clean handkerchief. One mitten — one red mitten. Eight cents in cold cash. Probably counterfeit, hah? One Uncle Sam pencil. And — "

"One Uncle Sam pencil?" Frances said. She remembered one which had been exhibited to her during lunch that afternoon up at North Rhinehill; and she remembered red mittens also.

Calhoun eyed her.

"That's right," Calhoun said. "One Uncle Sam pencil. And initialed, too. I bet that's significant. A.T.M."

A.T.M., Frances thought slowly; that could mean Anthony Theodore Murchison. But how, why —

She put one hand on the desk to steady herself.

"No," she whispered. "Nol"

Calhoun, although no more than two or three feet away, seemed now to be at an infinite distance from her.

"What's the matter?" he asked. Some of the toughness dropped away from him; concern replaced it. "What are you looking like that for?"

She made an inarticulate motion at him with the school cap.

"But it's Tony," she whispered, her face the color of gray wax. "It's Tony! Don't you see? Those men wanted him this afternoon; they thought he was in the car with me and Charles after we drove past the school about three o'clock. That's why they tried to force us off the road. They thought we'd picked him up then. And that they could… Oh, my God!"

Calhoun grabbed for her, and barely in time, too. It was just ten minutes of

six Friday night.

Afterward, in the cab starter's office on the taxi platform at Manhattan Depot, Frances endured a kaleidoscopic and only half remembered effect of people, movement and conversation. Probably the first thing that happened, in time order, was when Lieutenant Calhoun attempted to shake some sense into her, and then began to ask question after question as to just what had happened up in North Rhinehill this afternoon. And she must have answered those questions, although she could not remember answering them, because almost at once this Calhoun tried hurriedly and anxiously, his face glistening, to contact Mr. Murchison up in North Rhinehill over the starter's telephone.

He did not succeed. And Frances knew it was true then, it had to be true then, when Mr. Murchison refused to talk to Calhoun, or to give him any kind of information about Tony; and she broke down suddenly and completely. Everything seemed to stop in her when Calhoun put the phone down slowly, after a last futile attempt to speak to Mr. Murchison, and rubbed the bulldog jaw slowly; and she could only stare at him from the other side of the desk, her mind frozen on the one realization that the men in the gray sedan had wanted Tony. Just before three o'clock, when Charles had driven her to the station, they had been on the lookout around St. Hilary's School for the Murchison car; they had forced Charles into the snow to stop him; the big fellow with the cold eyes had seen then that Tony was not with them; and so they had waited until Charles had returned from the station, and picked up the boy, and started home with him. The second time there had been no failure. Then…

She closed her eyes. Then the men had driven to Chester Falls, so that they would not be described afterward at the railroad station in North Rhinehill; and the third one in the car, the one who had Tony with him… She broke down again. By that time, apparently summoned by Calhoun,

there was in the starter's office a big, shambling man named Inspector Donnelly, who had a flat voice, a firm mouth, a round head and small, oddly unemotional black eyes; another man named Lieutenant Nolan — tall, grim, ascetic looking; and many others who came in to talk to Donnelly or Nolan, who went away hurriedly, and who vanished at once into the continuing turmoil of the taxi platform. During most of this period Frances could hear the things that were said around her, the instructions that were being given, the demands that were being made; but only long after she had heard a particular phrase would it come back to her, and add a small or perhaps very important detail to whatever took place in that cab office between six and nine o'clock Friday night.

She held on to Tony's Uncle Sam pencil, and she would not let anybody take it away from her for some reason; and yet all the time, even when Inspector Donnelly was questioning her, she could feel her mind swinging back in a fixed pendulum stroke to that big man with the red hair, the flat jaws and the harsh mouth.

What could she remember about the car? Donnelly would ask her, time after time, and in the most callous, patient and unexcited manner. What make was it? Could she say? What year? What color? What model? Had she noticed anything at all about the license plates? A letter, perhaps? The first number? The last number? Were there any marks on the car? Were there any details about it, or about the men, which she might have forgotten until now? Had she ever seen the car before? Had she ever seen the men watching her, following her? Could she think of anyone else who might have seen them, and who might know them? Had she ever noticed the car up in North Rhinehill — at a gas station, on the road, or parked somewhere near St. Hilary's Day School?

And she could only shake her head at him mutely; all she could remember was that the car had been a gray two-door sedan — and of course the big redheaded man. Inside her, at least on occasion, was a desperate and futile struggle to remember, to describe, to see back and to see clearly. And then, minute after minute, Donnelly pushing her on in the most stolid fashion, Nolan getting impatient with her, Calhoun trying to quiet her; and

nothing to tell them, nothing at all to tell them, save that one of the men had red hair, and that another was small and frightened-looking under a gray hat, and that the driver was someone she had never seen, not even a glimpse.

At what might have been eight or half past eight a middle-aged man named Eddie something, whose appearance seemed to excite Calhoun very much, came out to them from the main concourse, was questioned by Donnelly, and was sent off almost immediately in one of the police cars with Lieutenant Nolan and several other men. And then it was Donnelly again, making phone call after phone call; and then it was Donnelly shambling away somewhere, and only Calhoun and a dapper little man with shrewd features and pop eyes who remained with her in the starter's office.

Calhoun asked her to stand with him at the glass wall looking out toward Locker 572. The lights were all turned off, another inexplicable action to Frances; and Calhoun began to talk to her very steadily and very quietly without ever shifting those gray eyes of his from Locker 572.

Now, Calhoun said, they had been given something very important to do, he and she. Would she listen to him? It was something she could understand easily, if she managed to get hold of herself. It was this way. She knew, of course, that those men had kidnaped little Tony Murchison, and that two of them had left his clothes in the locker outside; and after that they had mailed the key, most probably to Mr. Murchison up in North Rhinehill, because Calhoun had watched them do it.

They wanted to identify themselves to Tony's father, Calhoun explained; and they had attempted to do that by leaving the coat and the Uncle Sam pencil right here in Manhattan Depot, in the locker. They must have decided that it would be much safer than mailing the articles from a post office, where a clerk might have remembered and described them individually; and they had probably felt sure that no one would remember two men who had used a public locker in Manhattan Depot at rush hour.

Frances nodded at him. Yes, she said; she understood that. She saw

why… She stopped then. The deadness had all come back on her.

She didn't have to talk, Calhoun said, using with her a kind of awkward gentleness; she could just listen. Those men must believe that they were perfectly safe, and that no one had got a description of them; and of course they must also believe that Mr. Murchison would not get the locker key through the mail until sometime tomorrow morning. So it was quite possible that one of them, or perhaps both of them, would come back to Manhattan Depot to see how things looked around Locker 572. People like that were jumpy; they would want to know if anything happened yet; and perhaps they wouldn't be able to leave well enough alone. So now this locker was going to be watched all night if necessary by him, and by her too, since no one else would be able to identify the men — except perhaps the conductor of Train Number 52. Was all this clear to her? Did she have any questions to ask about it?

She was in no condition to observe that Calhoun himself, around the mouth and eye corners, was beginning to look very strained and miserable; and of course there was no way for her to suspect that during this period Calhoun was finding a good many things to ask of himself, and had much trouble in throwing up the proper sort of defenses against them.

Who, after all, had seen two of the kidnapers, had them pointed out to him, had them dropped into his lap, practically? And who had permitted them to walk out free as air from Manhattan Depot after they had stopped the Murchison car this afternoon, beaten the Murchison chauffeur so badly that he was still unconscious in the North Rhinehill hospital, and then taken a six-year-old child on his way home from school, and probably…

Calhoun would not finish the sentence — could not; but Calhoun understood how probable it was that the child had been disposed of during that first dangerous half hour, when everything must have been touch and go between Rhinehill and Chester Falls. After the other two had caught the train safely, there might remain a bare chance that the driver would have been the only one of them to risk his neck by bringing the child somewhere. If, indeed, they had not taken the child immediately, and

in the woods somewhere, under snow, got rid of him before even a first whisper of what had happened could be made known to the Rhinehill police.

Calhoun had those thoughts; and now, if not to himself, to Mike Frost and the girl, Calhoun attempted to defend himself against them. He muttered at them, feeling and looking physically anguished, that he had done all he could on this thing. Hadn't he sent Eddie Mather after the big redhead and the other one? And hadn't Eddie Mather followed them to a Bronx subway station before they vanished on him? And wasn't Lieutenant Nolan scouring that neighborhood now, with plenty of help, for a trace of their hide-out apartment? They had two chances, Calhoun added thickly, explaining it to the Murchison secretary where he did not have to explain it to Mike Frost; here, at the locker, and uptown in the vicinity of Fordham Road. One of them should work out. Had to! Calhoun found himself insisting passionately.

"Take it easy," Mike Frost said. "Nobody's blaming you, Willie. Six o'clock was just too late to do anything. I'd say the minute they got hold of the kid __ "

He stopped then, looking uncomfortably at Frances; but she knew how he had intended to finish his sentence. All this wasn't really happening to her, she thought quietly; not to her, and not to a little boy who had admitted shyly to her, the first time she had ever done any work for his father in North Rhinehill, that he liked her very much because she was pretty, and because she was nice, too. It was the way he had always come out with things — shyly, directly. Then why couldn't she feel something? Why was there nothing but this dead stop in her, this complete mental rigidity which seemed to accept the facts without quite believing in them, or becoming emotionally affected by them?

She did not know. On the cab platform the overhead fans droned on and on with a nagging sensation of insistent and overpowering urgency; but even there the urgency appeared to be in the fans themselves, not in her. Taxicabs were lined up outside in a reversal of earlier conditions, waiting

for passengers, and drivers chatted together in small groups, or read early editions of the morning tabloids. It surprised Frances to discover that it was ten minutes past ten; it might, just as easily, have been ten minutes past eight, or ten minutes past twelve. She was watching the drivers when Calhoun muttered suddenly at her that there were men all over the station by this time; and that Conductor Goggins of Train Number 52 was stationed out in the main concourse, watching that part. Everything covered down here, Calhoun insisted to her, in a foolish attempt to convince himself also — everything! And all they needed was for one of those fellows, the little one or the big redhead, to come back and…

He pushed up his hat; he wiped his mouth; he put his hands on his hips in that ready and aggressive gesture, although at the moment something seemed to be sadly missing from it. Time passed; more time passed. A quarter of eleven came, and people trickled out of Manhattan Depot at longer intervals; and then at five minutes of eleven Captain Rousseau, the head of the terminal police and Calhoun's superior, came out of the depot passage with Inspector Arthur Donnelly and a couple of other men.

Mr. Murchison was one of them. Frances saw him, and Frances made an attempt to go to him, feeling that there was something very important which she had to say or do now; but Calhoun detained her.

"Don't bother him," Calhoun said, not too steadily. He had recognized that man almost as soon as Frances had. "And don't try to talk to him when he comes in here. You wouldn't do any good. I'm telling you. Stay with me."

But he was perspiring a little himself; because, if he did not know just how Donnelly had induced the father at last to come down here and talk to him, he knew why. The father would want to pay the kidnapers, and to keep Donnelly out of it; only for those reasons would he have refused to talk earlier on the telephone. And what would Donnelly want him to do now? Talk quietly to the father; show him the boy's clothes, the Uncle Sam pencil; and make him see — Calhoun shifted a little. Of course!

He appreciated the necessity for Donnelly's action; but at the same time he did not intend to have any part in it for himself. He had one look at a

slim, distracted-looking man in the early forties, deathly pale, wearing rimless eyeglasses and a precise businessman's mustache; then they were all in the starter's office, in back of him, and Calhoun could fix his attention the other way — on Locker 572.

Apparently Donnelly displayed the clothes first, since a strange voice which seemed composed enough, if very slow and careful in what it said, identified them. The Uncle Sam pencil, Calhoun heard, was one the boy had seen advertised in a magazine, and had wanted very much. Yes. And the coat…

There was a little difficulty there. Calhoun detected it, and put his hands in his pockets, clenching them; but Donnelly picked up the slight break before it could gather too much significance.

"We knew they were," Donnelly said, his voice deeper than it had been a few hours ago, but just as unemotional. "Now, I'm afraid it's my business to warn you about some pretty unpleasant possibilities, Mr. Murchison. I'll not take time about it. First. The people you're going to deal with from now on are the kind who never kept their word to anyone, about anything, in their lives. They never have and they never will. They won't to you. Will you believe that from me, sir? Will you believe that I know what I'm talking about?"

Someone again turned off the lights in the starter's office. Captain Rousseau planted himself by the door with a detective sergeant; and another man standing beside Calhoun — probably someone important on the District Attorney's staff — began to alternate his gaze between the father and Arthur Donnelly.

There was a brief pause.

"I'm going to pay them," the father said then, still very slow, very careful. "I'm sure you understand my position, Inspector. I don't want police interference, and I didn't ask for it. I'll do this in my own way. I've got to."

"You haven't heard me out, sir," Donnelly said. "All I want you to do now is to promise me one thing — that you don't mean to protect these men. That's what they're looking for, remember; that's what they're counting on.

Of course you'll pay them, if they'll give you a chance to pay them; that should be understood between us right now. Will they give you the chance? That, sir, you don't know; and that you can't know — not yet, anyway. All this isn't my idea of it, Mr. Murchison. It's God's truth. Will you answer me one thing, frankly and honestly? D'ye suppose that you understand these men any better than I'd understand so many African savages?"

There was another pause.

"Perhaps not," the father said. He seemed to be having a little difficulty with his breathing. "But I don't see that it changes anything."

"It's in my mind," Donnelly said, quietly but impressively, "that it changes everything. Listen to me. You'll get the locker key through the mail tomorrow morning — that's the plan, the schedule, that they're figuring on in this thing. Now. That time element is very important to us, Mr. Murchison, and to you, because we know what to do about it. Everything was supposed to start after you got the key tomorrow morning, and not now. All right. Can you take in what it is that I'm trying to tell you? We're hoping that one of them might come back here tonight to check the locker. I think that could happen very easily. If it does, we'd like to put the man under observation, and to keep him under observation until he leads us back to wherever it is they have your son. It's no great matter, not in itself, and it's not half as difficult as you'll probably think it. We've got men in here waiting for them — good men. And I think I can guarantee you right now — "

"And the boy?" Murchison said. "You'll guarantee the boy?"

"No," Donnelly said. He made it a plain statement of fact. "I'm afraid not, sir. I'm afraid nobody can do that for you — nobody in God's world. Not now, and not five minutes after they got him into their car this afternoon. I'll not lie to you, sir — but I'll talk sense. Let the men handle these people who know how to handle them — who've spent their lives handling them. Let us use what we know, and let us use it now before they're ready for us. That's what I want to say to you; and that's what I want you to think

about. And take your time on it, sir. There's no one here pushing you."

Calhoun, who did not have a six-year-old son, but who understood very well what was going on in back of him, squeezed the fingers inside his overcoat pockets until perspiration came beading out between them. Leave him alone for a minute, Calhoun thought savagely. What the hell was Donnelly throwing it at him like this for? Why didn't they give him a chance to get hold of himself?

The man standing beside Calhoun cleared his throat, and then suggested reasonably enough:

"Take the contact. Have you thought about that at all? Do you have any idea as to just when they'll consider it safe to collect their money? Maybe tomorrow — we hope that; and then maybe in two or three days; and then maybe never. That's happened before now; and it'll happen again, too.

"They won't risk themselves to protect the child; I think you grasp that much already. So well suppose something; the child cries, or the child gets sick, or somebody happens to get a look at him, and wonder about him. That's why Inspector Donnelly thinks you won't get the child back simply by paying out the money for him. It's never that simple for some reason. Either they dispose of the child first, since they know you'll have to pay them anyway; or else — "

Donnelly moved; Donnelly moved very quickly.

"Here," Donnelly murmured. "Here, sir." He sounded concerned, anxious; and then, swinging on the District Attorney's man, he exploded in that restrained manner of his. "Don't let all of us keep after the man," Donnelly said. "Let's give him a little time and a little room, for God's sake. Rousseau. Can you get him a drink of whisky down here?"

Rousseau turned. At that moment someone walked out onto the cab platform from the depot passage — a small man wearing dark glasses and a gray hat and overcoat. Calhoun, who had never taken his eyes from Locker 572, never once during this conversation, looked out at the man and felt as if a vise had been tightened around his chest. Frances made some sort of meaningless sound at the same moment; but it was Calhoun

who announced sideways, without turning his head, and while using a voice which did not seem to have anything important to do with him:

“Wait a minute now. Everybody away from that door. We got one of them right outside here — the little one. What do we do?”

Donnelly came up into position behind him. Twenty yards away, at the lower end of the cab platform, the man in the gray overcoat stopped in front of Locker 572, but without appearing to pay any particular attention to it. He must have been impressed by the fact that everything appeared quite normal out here — a line of taxis, a few passengers, and a couple of garage mechanics, two of Donnelly’s men in coveralls, who were racing a cab motor and speaking wisely to each other around the hood. Even if the man had glanced up at the starter’s office — and he did, presently — it was impossible for him to see anything suspicious up there. There were no lights visible inside it, and also, because of Calhoun’s warning, no stir or commotion to indicate human occupancy.

“You’re sure of him?” Donnelly said. But he must have been sure himself; and he grasped something at once which Calhoun came to realize a bit late — that the most unfeeling and cowardly action they could take here would be to ask the father to make their decision for them.

“Rousseau,” he said, in that tone of his that was flat and lucid as standing water. “You’ll phone Jack Egan for me out at the information booth, and you’ll tell him to flash everybody on those signal lights you have under your big clock. Now.” He moved a step, giving Calhoun’s arm a slight tug. “All right,” he said. “Let’s get after him, Calhoun. Let’s get started on it.”

PART TWO

So they had no decision to make the way Donnelly handled it. He acted then without giving the father an opportunity to protest or even discuss the action; and he and Calhoun were outside the starter's office immediately afterward, as if that was the only sensible thing to do here — as indeed it was, in Calhoun's estimation.

The two pseudo mechanics saw them. One of these, after Donnelly nodded, raced up the cab platform and around into the main concourse by way of the train announcer's room at the north end of the station building. The other ripped off his coverall in two motions, and got a coat and a felt hat out of the repair truck. He followed, at a dozen paces, Donnelly and Calhoun, who had now entered the depot passage after the man in the gray overcoat.

Halfway through that passage, in a very low aside, Donnelly muttered with a good deal of contemptuous scorn:

"D'ye know I admire the mentality, Calhoun. Dark glasses — that's something I wouldn't have believed possible. It's better than we could have… Here. Watch yourself now. He's getting ready to pull up at that newsstand on us."

He did; but by this time the beacon lights under the big clock at the information booth had flashed on and off four times, in the prearranged alert signal, and all of Donnelly's men in this part of Manhattan Depot were ready for him. The one in the dark glasses bought himself a newspaper. He unfolded it, turned, scanned the headlines and looked up boldly from them to Donnelly and Calhoun. When they had gone on into the main concourse, without so much as the briefest glance at the little man in the gray coat, one of the mechanics from the cab platform caught them up.

"I tipped Collins," he said. "So we're all set, Inspector. We're fine. I'll tell

Egan.”

In this way, by changing the relay on him three times in the first two minutes — Donnelly and Calhoun to begin with, then the mechanic, then Collins — there was no chance for the man in the dark glasses to suspect anything. It was now twenty minutes past eleven, a time at which the main concourse, although illuminated as brightly as ever, was nothing like it had been at half past five. There were people moving around in it, but not too many, and hence without the earlier effect of confusion and nervous irritability. Most of the ticket windows were closed and dark, the main ramp was practically deserted, and even the information booth had no more than half a dozen belated customers. Calhoun stopped there as if to get himself a timetable; Donnelly paused, glanced up at the huge golden clock and then behaved as though adjusting his wrist watch to the time indicated.

Behind them, briskly slapping his newspaper against one thigh, the man in the dark glasses started downstairs for the commuters’ level. He must have felt that he had handled everything neatly and carefully; and now, again, there was no reason for him to suspect that there was a headquarters detective named Collins in front of him, and a good-looking young policewoman in back of him. That arrangement, while uncomplicated enough, chalked him off for Donnelly’s men on the main concourse of Manhattan Depot as unmistakably as if he were on a lighted stage during a police line-up.

He went downstairs to the lower level. The policewoman and another detective followed him, apparently just a young married couple on their way home to Westchester, and Donnelly and Calhoun used the stairway on the east side of the concourse, just across from the incoming baggage room. They were downstairs perhaps thirty seconds after the man in the dark glasses; but they were protected from him, and from the entire commuters’ concourse, by a marble partition occupied on their side by a bakery shop, a row of phone booths, and the rear wall of the longest and narrowest newsstand in Manhattan Depot.

Once safely in through the rear door of that newsstand, where they had the entire lower level spread out in front of them, but where they were protected, in turn, from any save the closest and most unobstructed observation by stacks of newspapers, and by attendants who were making change for cigarette and candy purchases, Calhoun began to feel savagely confident of himself — ice-cold inside, solid as rock. Commuters were filing through onto an open platform just right of the newsstand; and other people, while waiting for other trains, sat on marble benches against the wall and read their papers. There was one gate over which the destination was being marked up, and the man in the dark glasses stood a few feet away from it. The train was an 11:40 Westchester local. Calhoun took thought with himself about it; and Calhoun got an idea. Suppose, he muttered at Donnelly, they could turn up a few facts about this fellow right now — his name, where he was going?

Donnelly hesitated for a moment.

“I don’t know,” Donnelly said. “He’s not to see us, Calhoun — or to suspect us. Can you manage that part?”

Calhoun lifted his right forefinger without a word, but grimly and significantly; then he called his office upstairs on the newsstand telephone. Shortly afterward, outside the stand but in back of it, he held a brief conversation with one of the conductors on the 11:40.

“In a minute,” he informed Donnelly, after the conductor had gone off again. “Here’s the way it is. Most of these fellows are regular commuters out of here — on the late trains, anyway; so they have monthly tickets with their names on them. That’s the angle, understand. I thought we should check on it.”

They waited, and then the conductor reappeared presently. Following Calhoun’s instructions, he had taken a guarded look at the man wearing the dark glasses; but he admitted uncomfortably now that he was unable to place him — by name, at least. Three or four times a week, however, he caught the 11:40 out of here up to Dover Village. Did that help?

Calhoun, who thought it did, glanced at Donnelly; and Donnelly gave him

a very slight nod, which might have meant anything, before availing himself of the telephone.

“Thanks,” Calhoun told the conductor fervently. “Thanks a lot, Walter. And listen. Get the name for us on the train, when you look at his ticket, but don’t let him see that you’re getting it. And don’t talk to him. Understand? Don’t start any conversation with him. Now come over here. See that little guy with the pop eyes standing just this side of the information booth? Tell him Donnelly wants to talk to him for a minute. And tell him where.”

So Mike Frost received his instructions from Donnelly; and at half past eleven, ten minutes before the Westchester local would leave Manhattan Depot, and more than an hour before it was scheduled to arrive at Dover Village, two police cars nosed quietly out of the vehicular tunnel upstairs into mid-town traffic.

Calhoun’s small coupe, which he was allowed to park at one end of the cab platform, trailed them. He had the girl with him. Dover Village, Calhoun informed her, was just eight miles inland from North Rhinehill; and so it must have been very convenient this afternoon.

“Just about perfect,” he declared grimly, hunching his big shoulders into position over the steering wheel. “But we got them now, you understand; and we got them good.”

Frances put her head back against the seat, feeling nothing at this moment, and not quite sure that she was ever going to feel anything again. Ahead of them the first police driver touched his siren. They raced west, eventually swinging up onto the West Side express highway where the big police cars pulled farther ahead of them every moment; and where Calhoun, making a not too effective attempt to reassure her about little Tony Murchison, rumbled that of course the third one of the gang, the driver, must have taken the boy to Dover Village this afternoon. That was why they had split up, so that no one in Dover Village would remember the three of them riding around together. Now how did she feel? Any better at all?

“All right,” Frances said. But her voice seemed to be oddly detached from

her; she listened to it, as if idly, while it asked Calhoun why that man in the dark glasses had ever been stupid enough to come back to the cab platform. She had hoped he would, Frances said — prayed he would; but somehow she had never been able to quite believe that he would.

“Didn’t I tell you?” Calhoun growled, Tough Willie Calhoun then to the life, because that was just the way he felt when he thought of the little man in the gray overcoat. “Yella and jumpy. He had to come back to catch his train; and then he couldn’t resist taking a look for himself. He thought he was pretty cagey about it. They all do. The crummy, rotten — ”

He stopped there. But the tone he employed, the expression of his mouth, the deep, tight lines around his bulldog jaw and square chin, conveyed to her an overpowering quality of physical ruthlessness and undersurface violence. Something broke in her after the intolerable strain of those fifteen minutes in the starter’s office, when neither she nor Mr. Murchison had known what was going on outside; and she put a hand up to her eyes and kept it there.

Calhoun, who was groping for something else to say to her, and who could not find it, decided correctly enough that she must be thinking about the child. She knew him; and of course that would make everything ten times more difficult to endure. He kept his eyes on the road, not on her, and began to think about the boy also. Was he still alive and unharmed? Calhoun was not sure; but Calhoun pictured him now in a strange room up in Dover Village, perhaps whimpering in his sleep, and the redhead coming in at him quickly, with hand uplifted. Was he going to stop, the redhead would ask him. Was he? Was he? Before…

Calhoun muttered a few words to himself — savage words in a savage tone; and Frances heard them. Getting excited now, she thought drearily, all nervous and tensed up like a fighting animal. They rattled and banged past the Medical Center, the two police cars away out of sight now, and past the intricate approaches to George Washington Bridge, glittering over them in great sweeps and whorls of light. She did not say anything more to Calhoun; and of course what she wanted, and what Calhoun was

uncomfortably aware that she wanted, was a kindly and understanding person with a quiet voice and a very gentle manner. Calhoun did not think that he was equipped to manage that very well. Calhoun did not believe that he could even begin to try for it.

Now Kingsbridge and Van Cortlandt Park dropped in back of them. Woods and fields appeared, high banks of snow, scattered colonial homes; an underpass now and again, where the motor noise was gathered up and flung back at them, and then absorbed instantly into open country, into the darkness and desolation of a bone-bitter February night. At twenty minutes past twelve, not too far behind Donnelly's time, they slithered around on the traffic circle at Dover Village; and presently Calhoun located the police cars at the far end of the railroad station, parked there behind a freight office and a freight loading dock. One of Donnelly's men trotted over to them.

"We got his name," he informed Calhoun hurriedly. "Carl Rothman. They phoned it through to the state troopers up here from along the line, and one of them happened to know the guy. We're going right up to the house, Willie. Keep after us."

So Calhoun drove in back of the police cars past a village green, where only the brightly lit Dover Village tavern showed signs of weekend activity and jollification; up a steep hill, where his back wheels spun helplessly on ice for a moment; and then, over the hill, onto the circular concrete approach of the Dover Village high school. At this point the railroad station was a quarter of a mile below them, with the road curving around to it in an irregular arc fringed by trees, by open and snowy fields, and by scattered suburban residences.

There was a conference around Donnelly's car, this one attended by some of the state troopers who had been keeping the Rothman house under observation for the past few minutes. It was decided that the secretary would sit this part out in the police sedan, with Tony Murchison's father; and Calhoun, who had to give her those orders — give her the worst job of all, in his estimation — decided at once that he could not

afford any open expression of sympathy. She looked much worse now than when they had left Manhattan Depot; and so Calhoun, after getting her out of the coupe, shook her bodily by the two arms.

“Wake up,” he growled at her — very tough there, very menacing. “We don’t want any noise or commotion around here. Wake up! Are you okay, or aren’t you?”

“Leave me alone,” Frances whispered painfully. “Don’t touch me again. Don’t put your hands on me.”

Savages, she thought. Who among them had mentioned Tony — had ever expressed any sort of personal concern for him? Never a thought for that child; never a word. So she shrank away from Calhoun, who was rather worried about her, but who only made another menacing gesture from her to the police car; and who then vanished like a shadow back toward Maple Avenue.

His position there was with George O’Mara at the lower end of the street, near some woods, with the Rothman house up on the slope about seventy or eighty feet distant. It was a small wooden house, isolated at the west end of the school playground; and it was dark too, all dark, so that it did not seem to Calhoun that there was anybody at all in there.

On this side of Maple Avenue there were no street lights, as in the center of Dover Village, and consequently most details seemed to be either solid black or ice-coated white — a path under the trees, shadows along the school roof, a few scrubby pines, starlight glittering in sharp, jeweled facets from the top of a stone fence. Far below Maple Avenue, and perhaps because more distant, there were finer and colder shadings — the blackness not quite so heavy and solid down there, but almost powdery blue, the roofs silver-blue, a few lighted windows under them, and a few street lamps suspended magically, like globular yellow drops, against ink-black air.

The waiting began. Now and again trees cracked suddenly under the pressure of that intense and penetrating cold; now and again Calhoun had to rub his face to get warmth and feeling into it. It seemed an exceedingly

long time before they heard the 11:40 from Manhattan Depot rumbling away at the next station down, panting at them as if from an incredibly remote point in empty space; but then almost at once toy cars and toy lighted windows appeared in the valley, vanished behind a low ridge, and appeared again much larger and closer.

Headlights were turned on in the Dover Village parking lot after the 11:40 had pulled away from it; but none of them could have been Carl Rothman's because none of them headed past the tracks and up the hill toward Maple Avenue. Walking, Calhoun decided. He waited some more.

Not a sound anywhere after that, not around Maple Avenue; no visible movement of any kind; no wind, but the persistent and bitter cold. Something wrong now? Calhoun asked himself anxiously. He moved deeper into the woods, with George O'Mara turning his head to watch him; he studied the hill road, saw nothing of importance, and looked over at the school, at the valley sloping away beneath it, at the station.

He was struck by one detail: the school lay almost directly between Maple Avenue and the station. And he began to worry about it. Would Carl Rothman, much more familiar with Dover Village than they were, attempt a short cut across empty fields, up the back of the hill, and on over the school grounds? They had assumed, of course, that Rothman would come up the long way from the station, using the road. But would he?

Calhoun thought about it; then he slipped away under trees and over hard snow to one end of the school playground. He wished that Donnelly were available for consultation. It was true, no matter how Rothman approached 24 Maple Avenue, that there would be several of Donnelly's men in back of him. But suppose he came up this way, using the school grounds, and seeing the police cars just around the turn in the school driveway? He would be warned then, certainly. Had Donnelly anticipated a development of that kind?

He did not know; but he was insisting to himself that Donnelly must have anticipated it when someone wearing a gray hat and a gray overcoat appeared below him. This man cut across the circular ornamental plot that

looked out over Dover Village, reached the drive and saw the police cars and Calhoun's coupe parked together just in front of the playground. He stopped.

Perhaps then, because it was difficult for Donnelly's subordinates to climb an unfamiliar and icy hill without making some noise at one point or another, he heard something in back of him. He seemed to listen intently, head cocked. Calhoun recognized him. There was shrubbery alongside the school drive, and Carl Rothman slipped over to it, listened again and melted himself into velvet blackness.

Three of Donnelly's men, who must have come up on the train with Rothman, moved up to the edge of the circular lawn, studied it and began cautiously to advance across it.

They were seen. They were understood also, because Rothman's shadow, darker and a little more solid than the hedge shadow, moved down soundlessly on this side of the building, Calhoun's side. Then it was not going to be done any more the way Donnelly had wanted to do it — all at once, so no one would have a chance to harm little Tony Murchison, Carl Rothman entering 24 Maple Avenue without hindrance, then everyone relaxed in there, the lights going on, and then a sudden rush in when the men were gathered together in the kitchen or the living room, when they were all placed, and when none of them would have a chance to get upstairs again to the Murchison boy.

So Calhoun showed himself on his hill, not shouting at Donnelly's men, but waving his arms out and back frantically at the other end of the school building. He also was seen and understood, because Donnelly's men ran back that way in order to come around again and head off Carl Rothman from that direction. Calhoun himself, losing balance momentarily, crashed through low bushes to the school playground; and Carl Rothman darted out suddenly from the hedge toward higher ground and a patch of woods.

Donnelly, however, had not forgotten anything after all. A state trooper sprinted into view from behind one of the baseball backstops, and headed rapidly down the short side of the triangle between the woods, the

backstop, and Carl Rothman. Then the man in the gray overcoat attempted to stop himself too suddenly. He slipped. He got up and ran back at the school building, very foolishly; but that way there was no salvation for him. He stopped again, sliding on the immaculate surface of the snow with his arms flung out. He turned south. No one was there yet, he ran for it — and then Donnelly's men came around in front of him at just the right moment.

After that it was all dumb show, a pantomime of increasing terror and desperation on a white field cut jaggedly across one corner by the motionless shadow of the school building. Carl Rothman could not have understood in a coherent way what was happening to him, since all this began and developed with the greatest rapidity. He was not shouted at, either; and he was not warned to do this or that — to stop, to put up his hands, to surrender himself — because it was very important, for the child's sake, not to alert 24 Maple Avenue until Donnelly could be informed as to what was happening down here.

Five men, all bigger and stronger than Carl Rothman, and all moving with speed, silence, precision and deadly purpose, sprinted in at him from five different angles — and it must have been their silence, most of all, that confused and terrified him. What he felt then, if there was time to feel anything, was probably something very like the bewilderment and terror which a six-year-old child must have experienced earlier in the afternoon.

How could all this have happened to him with no warning? What had caused it? How had he betrayed himself? He could not have been able to answer any of those questions. He fell, or else he attempted to kneel. He took a gun out of his pocket, dropped it, sobbed brokenly, sprawled after it. He lay rigid, facing Calhoun but not pointing the gun at him.

Calhoun, racing desperately now, bulldog jaw set, eyes glittering and arms extended and curled in front of him, made one last headlong dive at the man in the gray overcoat.

Carl Rothman shot himself.

Then Calhoun hit him, driving him forward into a basketball upright; and

then Calhoun pushed the body away quickly, and got up with his stomach feeling empty and upset, his lungs and his left shoulder hurting him. The trooper and Donnelly's men ran up, stopped and stood around aimlessly for a few seconds. Not one of them touched Carl Rothman, and not one of them, in an uneasy and covert manner, could avoid looking at him.

Calhoun croaked out of that dry throat of his:

"Somebody get up there and tell Donnelly about this. Before — "

But of course Donnelly had heard it. There was noise up at 24 Maple Avenue, and one of the police cars, which had been facing in that direction, roared around to it from the school drive. A spotlight came on, and harsh white illumination burst out suddenly over the Rothman house. Three men ran down from the upper road and stationed themselves just a bit out from the back of the house. They waited there. Nothing else happened.

Calhoun, who had a peculiar mixture of physical sensations now — the nausea, first of all; after that a feeling of extreme flesh heat; and after that another impression of the intense outer cold smoothing the heat away, working constantly on it — trotted a few steps toward Maple Avenue. Still nothing happened — no yelling up there, no shots, no excitement; and then suddenly Calhoun understood that nothing was going to happen. He stopped. He turned back.

One of Donnelly's men kicked a small hillock of clean snow over a patch that had begun to form near a basketball upright, near a gray hat that was lying drunkenly on its crown, near a pair of dark glasses which had been upended in front of it. The hillock became stained again, slowly. Donnelly's man left it alone. George O'Mara came down presently from 24 Maple Avenue.

"Nobody inside," O'Mara said. "Nothing. Not even the kid's body. I guess they never brought him up here at all."

There was a long silence. Then Calhoun fought against it in the only way he could think of to fight against it.

"But they had to," Calhoun insisted huskily, as if insistence could help

them. “I tell you they had to.”

“Did they?” O’Mara said. “I wouldn’t say so. They got rid of him first thing this afternoon, Willie. Think it out.”

It was about ten minutes past two when Calhoun started the coupe away from Dover Village. One of the police sedans had been detailed then to drive the father over to North Rhinehill; but, when Calhoun left, the police car was still in front of 24 Maple Avenue, and Donnelly had one arm around the father beside it, and was talking to him quietly and earnestly in the Donnelly monotone.

In swinging around, Calhoun’s headlights passed over them, so that Donnelly blinked and turned his head away for a moment, although the father did not appear to be affected by them, or even to notice them. The last thing Calhoun saw up there was the father standing beside the big police car with a cap — the boy’s cap which Calhoun had found in Locker 572 earlier — in his left hand. Apparently he was listening to Donnelly, and nodding at him. Every so often, however, he would touch the cap, smooth the top of it, and then start turning it over and over again.

Mike Frost, who was going down to headquarters now, and the Kennedy girl, who was going home, rode along with Calhoun. She did not say anything to either of them. She did not show anything. Later, when they turned right at the foot of the hill for the Dover Village traffic circle, she kept her eyes fixed stonily ahead through Calhoun’s windshield.

Mike Frost, addressing himself to Calhoun, but of course for her benefit, announced that in his opinion this thing had just started. Donnelly would get hold of some information by the time he was done with 24 Maple Avenue, and Donnelly was the man to know what to do with it. There was, consequently, no reason to feel upset or discouraged yet. Why should there be?

But Frances said nothing to that argument; nor did Calhoun. Of course, Mike Frost added irritably, a lot of people did not understand how a police organization got things done; but he hoped no one here would entertain the idea that what had happened to Carl Rothman tonight was going to be made public information.

The other two men could find out about him if they came up to Dover Village in person, or if they attempted to phone the house; but if they did either of those things they were going to find a lot of trouble waiting for them. A phone call from New York, Mike Frost pointed out, could be traced almost instantaneously with the police watching for it; and if the other two men were reckless enough to show themselves at 24 Maple Avenue they would be just where Donnelly wanted them. So all in all, Mike Frost said… Still nobody responded to him. He stirred restlessly, looked at the girl, and looked at Calhoun.

“All right,” he said, as if he was very much annoyed with Calhoun. “What are you sittin‘ there for like a dummy? Why don’t you say somethin? Why don’t you open your mouth?”

Calhoun made the effort. The best thing that could have happened, Calhoun declared; the house at 24 Maple Avenue would probably lead them right to little Tony Murchison. These affairs were all built up bit by bit; and in the long run —

“I suppose that’s the best way to look at it,” Frances said quietly. “In the long run. That’s what matters. Not that we should have paid them, and that you both know we should have paid them.”

Mike Frost blustered at her. He said that he had been in this business for twenty-four years, and that of all the stupid things to do, paying the ransom was just about —

“Don’t lie to me,” Frances said. “Don’t bother.” Her breathing had become difficult. “Why don’t you think of the child, if he isn’t too unimportant? I know what it is. You’ve all got to prove how smart you are, how much you know and tough and curt you can be. Well, go ahead, if that’s what bothers you. A little boy who likes picture books — he’s nothing at all. He’s

only — ”

“That’s not the truth,” Calhoun told her, just as quiet as she was. “And nobody has the right to say those things. If they do, they don’t know what they’re talking about.”

“Oh, of course,” Frances said, her voice openly shaking then. “No right at all. But I’m afraid I can’t quite manage the beautiful detached viewpoint. That little boy matters to me. And that’s stupid, isn’t it? That’s simply — ”

Mike Frost made one or two awkward attempts at comforting her; but Willie Calhoun did not. Those heavy features of his never looked at her all the way down the West Side highway; he said nothing, and even when they stopped outside her apartment house on East 58th Street he let Mike Frost get out and open the door for her. Savages, Frances thought blindly — all of them; and the worst this chunky and powerful young man with the ugly face, and the very small and very hard-pupiled gray eyes.

She was not afraid of him any more. The idea she had of him at that time was not so different from the idea she had of the big redheaded man; she even insisted to herself, not too logically, that anyone as unfeeling and as tough-looking as Willie Calhoun could be on her side, and on little Tony’s, by nothing but mere chance. There was no word, really, for what she felt in regard to him; and of course she never suspected that there was no word for what Willie Calhoun was again beginning to feel in regard to himself.

The old questions were back. Why hadn’t he stopped those two men in the station at half past five? Why hadn’t he taken them upstairs, worked them over a little and made them talk? There seemed to be no defense for him at all; and no reaction but an almost unbearable sense of shame and anguish. Live with it now, Calhoun thought dumbly. Why not? Hadn’t he earned it?

He drove down to Manhattan Depot with Mike Frost, where they found that nothing new had developed. Locker 572 was still under observation, but with no further results so far; and up near Fordham Road Eddie Mather and Lieutenant Nolan were still trying to locate the big redhead.

Nothing anywhere, Calhoun told himself; and so that six-year-old boy —

They went on into the depot for a cup of coffee. Now the ticket windows were all closed and dark, the train gates deserted and shadowy, and most of the overhead lights off, so that the main concourse was not as Calhoun saw it usually. A few footsteps, the remote echo of a few quiet and leisurely voices, composed themselves, up there under the high vault of Manhattan Depot, to a ghostly whispering.

The big clock over the information booth showed that it was twenty-five minutes to four Saturday morning. A crew of men were swishing soapy water across the floor from the outgoing baggage counter on the west to the incoming baggage counter on the east, and then returning to mop up with effortless skaters' gestures. The main ramp was as empty from end to end as the concourse; and in one of the subway passages only two belated drunks conversed argumentatively. Even the escalator up to the east arcade had been turned off; and right of the escalator, in one of Manhattan Depot's perennial balcony exhibits, Calhoun happened to see tiny mountains covered with artificial snow, over and through which a model railroad was operated in the terminal every day from twelve noon until nine p.m.

Just now those mountains gleamed in a very pale and unreal way from heavy shadow; and Calhoun reminded himself that little Tony Murchison would have thought the whole display very wonderful, with the model trains chugging around, and the block signals flashing on and off. But now, because Willie Calhoun had failed him, that child would perhaps never…

He looked dully around the main concourse, knowing that every night during these hours Manhattan Depot dozed briefly in an attempt to freshen itself up for the next day; and yet missing the strong light that blazed down ordinarily on polished green marble, on noise and confusion, and on countless hurrying people. All those details, against common sense, he wanted to pop up suddenly and miraculously from the concourse floor. He felt exposed and isolated in all this unnatural quiet;

and he had the fantastic idea that there were beings watching Willie Calhoun, and whispering scornfully about Willie Calhoun, from the balcony shadows.

“Let’s get out of here,” he muttered at Mike Frost. It’s like a morgue. Come on!“

They had some coffee, and after it they drove down to police headquarters, where Calhoun attempted unsuccessfully to identify the big redhead from the pictures which Mike Frost made available to him. And then at six o’clock on a gray February morning, when the possibilities had been pretty well covered, he went home and slept for several hours.

His phone woke him about noontime.

“Here it is,” Donnelly said, no greeting at all, no lengthy explanation, expecting Calhoun, who had just wakened unrefreshed and disheartened, to be as ready for this as he was. “They got the locker key up in North Rhinehill this morning, and a note with it. Could you guess where they want to get in touch with Murchison? At the information booth in your main concourse at six tonight. Hello! Are you here?”

Calhoun nodded foolishly; he was trying to gather himself together. The main concourse! he thought. But why? What was —

“At six,” he said, repeating the words because he wanted to be very sure of them. “At the information booth. Yeah, I’m on here. Go ahead.”

“Get your lunch,” Donnelly ordered. “I doubt if you’ll have a chance presently. I’ll be looking for you in Captain Rousseau’s office at half past one. At half past one, Calhoun. We’ll have things to do.”

He rang off; but Calhoun replaced the phone with one hand, and then kept the hand on it for a full minute. Manhattan Depot, Calhoun was thinking, with that peculiar clarity of mind occasionally associated with sudden awakening; of course! Where was a better place for the kidnapers to make their contact? Last night everyone had assumed that the big fellow had used a locker on the cab platform not out of deliberate forethought, but from sudden inspiration as to how he could get the boy’s clothes back to Murchison safely and anonymously. But was that true?

It was quite possible to fit together another explanation, and one which would suppose that the big redhead had been figuring on using Manhattan Depot all the time, very shrewdly and carefully. Wasn't it perfect for what he wanted to do? At rush hour last night he was, or he should have been, the invisible man in there, so that at no other place, and through no other method, could he have identified himself to Murchison with less risk.

And of course, Calhoun realized, the terminal must seem just as perfect now for what the kidnapers had to do. The big redhead could have no idea that he had been identified last night, not unless he had noticed Eddie Mather following him; and Eddie Mather had been very positive that he had been eluded up in the Bronx accidentally, and not through intent. Which meant —

Something blazed up in Calhoun, so that he clenched one of his big fists, half raised it — and then unclenched it because there was nothing to do with it. What did this mean? It meant that they had the big fellow. And why? Because he must be positive that no one had any idea of his physical description, and positive, therefore, that he could walk into Manhattan Depot at six o'clock tonight, mingle in with thousands of innocent people, watch Murchison and what Murchison did, and walk out again if any detail appeared at all suspicious to him.

Got him, Calhoun decided exultantly — got him! Because of course he must have decided that, even if the police were working on it, even if the police had been called in by Murchison, there would be no way for them to pick him out from all the other people who would be in Manhattan Depot tonight on legitimate business. Yesterday the Murchison chauffeur could have seen, at best, only a big man with a handkerchief over his face; and who else was there to connect him with the kidnaping?

Nobody, at least as he saw it. And now perhaps he intended the depot to be the center and hub of this whole business from now on. Why not? The depot offered him certain unique advantages. It was big, safe, crowded and anonymous for him — or so he figured. Then, too, if the police knew he was in a particular street, even in a particular city area, they could

block it off; but no one, not even Donnelly, and not even in something like this, could block off Manhattan Depot for any considerable period. Impossible, as the redhead would see it. Let the police know that he was going to be in Manhattan Depot at six tonight. Fine! What could they do about it? How, with no description, could they possibly pick him out from perhaps fifteen or twenty thousand legitimate travelers?

At that thought Calhoun scrambled out of the day-bed. Maybe the police could do a little more about it than he figured, Calhoun advised him grimly, happily. There was one fact which he didn't seem to suspect yet. A railroad detective named Willie Calhoun knew him; so did the Kennedy girl; so did Conductor Goggins of Train Number 52; and so did Eddie Mather.

So Calhoun shaved now in half a dozen impatient strokes, everything bouncing up in him just as it had been dragging down in him in Manhattan Depot last night. It might be possible, even, that the Murchison boy was still alive. Why couldn't it be? This big fellow was no panicky amateur, whatever he was; and so the big fellow would want his money before getting rid of his investment. If he had the child, and if something went wrong with the ransom negotiations during the next few days, he could wait and try again just so long as he could prove to Murchison that the child was unharmed. He would protect the child, therefore, not out of consideration for little Tony Murchison's welfare, but for himself. The big fellow knew his business. He had to. Anyone who figured out Manhattan Depot for his contact, and probably for his ransom, too — the one perfect place in a city of seven or eight million people — was working this whole thing with extreme care and shrewdness.

Calhoun decided that much to his own satisfaction while he was flinging his clothes on anyway at all. He forgot lunch because of all that inward excitement, and he almost forgot a necktie; but he was down in Manhattan Depot long before half past one, so that when Donnelly and Nolan appeared he and Captain Rousseau already had started to organize things for six that evening. They had obtained an architect's plan of Manhattan Depot from the stationmaster's office, and on this Calhoun was

marking and numbering all the ways through which the public was permitted to enter or leave the terminal.

“Here’s a pretty wise guy,” Calhoun declared tightly, squaring that bulldog jaw first at Donnelly, and then at Nolan. “The kind who thought he was just picking his time on it. But that’s all right, understand; that makes it perfect for us. Look here.” He spun the architect’s plan around with one finger, so that it faced Donnelly, and then jammed a thumb down on the information booth.

“I’ll tell you something. The more people there are around here at six tonight — and I’ll tell you right now that there’s going to be a hell of a lot of them — the more men you can use. Of course it’s going to be crowded — worse than yesterday, maybe. It’s a holiday week end. Well, so what? That means you can scatter an army down there, if you want to. Who’d notice them? Who’d pay any attention to them?”

Arthur Donnelly, who looked as if he had not slept very much last night — certainly he had not shaved — put his head forward in that slight pushing gesture he had at any time when he was required to make a decision about something.

“I don’t know,” Donnelly said. “Let’s think about it. Rousseau. You know this place better than we do. What’s your idea? How would you cover it?”

Rousseau, a mild, elderly man, glanced at Calhoun; and Calhoun, hands on hips, head back, stared up narrowly at the ceiling over him. He was Willie Calhoun again — abrupt, aggressive, decided. He was ready for the big redhead then — ready for anyone. The gray eyes glittered.

“Two men on every subway platform,” Calhoun said. “Two more at every street entrance; two more in each passage; half a dozen up on the balcony watching things; and half a dozen down on the concourse. That’ll do it —for the big guy, anyway. We got four people who can pick him out in here easy. Let each of us take one side of the main concourse. All right. Then he’s done; he’s got to be done. The only one I’m worried about is that driver. Nobody saw him, remember — not even the Kennedy girl. Suppose he comes in here? Then-”

Donnelly gave him a very grim nod.

“Suppose he does,” Donnelly said. “We’re still all right. Take a look at this, Calhoun.” He handed over a snapshot of a plump, blond young man in a sport shirt, who was grinning impudently at the camera. “There’s our friend. Louie Rothman, the third one in the clique — Carl’s brother. We got this picture up in Maple Avenue last night, and we had a neighbor identify it. Tell him about that, Nolan.”

He went back to the architect’s plan, leaving Nolan to pass on the ascertained facts about the second Rothman brother, who had worked as a chauffeur-gardener over in North Rhinehill last year. He must have arranged the setup for the other two, Nolan explained; and of course they would have let him drive the car yesterday because he knew the roads in and around North Rhinehill better than either of them.

“A bad egg,” Nolan grunted. “Not tough, you understand. Just bad — sly, mean, sneaking. He went out to San Francisco last year after some trouble about stripping his boss’s car, and when he came back he had this big redheaded fellow with him. There’s a woman, too — the redhead’s girl friend. They were all seen up in Dover Village a couple of times. My idea is that the woman is taking care of Tony Murchison for them. I’d say —

“Would you?” Donnelly put in. He must have been listening with half an ear. “Why, Martin? What makes you think that they’re taking care of him at all?”

He looked sidewise, above his glasses, at the floor between his desk and Lieutenant Nolan.

“I don’t think there’s any way of even guessing at what happened yesterday — not yet. But I’ll tell you this much. I wouldn’t be lifting a finger now, not one finger, if I could make myself believe that the child was still all right. I can’t, somehow. God knows why. But it’s in my mind that he didn’t live ten minutes after this fella got hold of him yesterday.”

Calhoun rubbed a forefinger along his jaw, and examined the forefinger. It was something to do. Six years old, Calhoun remembered; but still, if he had given the redhead any trouble or difficulty… He began to lose his own

conviction about the boy's safety. His expression remained unchanged, but a small muscle in that big jaw made itself very evident.

"Now I might be wrong about that," Donnelly admitted, looking at Calhoun this time over the spectacles. "I hope I am, d'ye see. But it's in my mind — and that's why this bucky boy with the red hair will never put his hands on a penny of that blood money, not if I know it. The low scum. The miserable, sneaking cur."

He again nodded, just as grimly.

"And I don't believe that they're going to talk to the father in here tonight, either of them; it's too risky, because they don't know the lay of the land yet. But there's no reason why they wouldn't show up for a few minutes, just to see what the father does, and to sniff around after us. They'll want to know whether or not we're taking any part in the thing; that's important to them, and they might think they're safe enough in just coming in here and inspecting the place. Well —" He repossessed himself of the architect's plan. "Sit down, Calhoun. I want all of us to get to work on this thing right now."

They did, and that first meeting broke up about a quarter of three. After it, Donnelly went over to the Hotel Belvidere in the southeast corner of the terminal to get some sleep, and Lieutenant Nolan took over for him.

There were a good many things to be done within a few hours. Copies of the Louie Rothman snapshot had to be distributed to the men who would be on duty in Manhattan Depot tonight, and these men had also to be familiarized with the interior layout of the terminal. Afterward, too, Calhoun had to seclude himself with a police artist, modifying feature after feature, in sketch after sketch, until a first rough outline of the redhead became a fairly adequate representation of the flat jaws and the harsh mouth. San Francisco, early that morning, had been contacted in regard to him; but so far San Francisco did not seem able to place the physical description, which was all they had to go on at this time.

Then at half past four, when Calhoun had finished with the artist, Frances Kennedy appeared with George O'Mara. She had been studying pictures

downtown all afternoon, but with no more success than Calhoun had had with them last night; and now Nolan explained to her that she was still one of the four people who could be depended upon to recognize the big redhead at sight. They could use her tonight, therefore, if she felt at all up to it. Did she?

“Of course,” Frances said. She was very quiet and firm about it. “Anything. Just what do you want me to do, Lieutenant?”

A fist was checked, and Nolan assigned her a position on the west balcony, overlooking the concourse. He also inspected her rather critically.

“She needs some food,” he instructed Calhoun. “Take her downstairs and see that she eats something. You’ve got an hour.”

So they had to sit across from each other in one of the Manhattan Depot restaurants; and presently Calhoun broke a rather strained and difficult silence on Frances’s part by giving her the news about Louie Rothman, and by explaining the precautions which were being put into effect all over the station area for tonight.

“I thought they’d be worried about Carl,” Frances remarked, with something to say then. “They’d be expecting him sometime today, surely.”

“I think it all depends,” Calhoun said. There was no more pugnacity about him, no hands on hips business; he was serious, direct and straightforward. “Donnelly figures they mightn’t expect him until sometime tonight. That could cover it, you understand. We hope so, anyway.”

“Oh!” She cut into her steak sandwich. “I didn’t see anything about it in the newspapers, either.”

She wouldn’t, Calhoun informed her, because the note had warned Mr. Murchison against any kind of publicity; and the thing here was to make the kidnapers believe that he was doing exactly what they had told him to do. Donnelly could keep the thing under cover for several days; he had done it so far, at least.

“I see.” She cut again into her steak sandwich, but without eating anything.

“Don’t push it around,” Calhoun muttered at her. “Eat it. I think we’re all

going to have a pretty long wait upstairs.”

But still there was very little appetite in her. When she thought of the redheaded man, a small but hard lump gathered itself together in her stomach, the instinctive fear and repulsion she had felt previously for him intensified now, because now she knew what he was, and what he had done yesterday afternoon up in North Rhinehill.

She did not expect this Willie Calhoun — or Tough Willie, as someone had referred to him last night — to sympathize with or even to understand how she felt; but apparently he did, because he glanced at her several times in a very sharp, guarded manner.

“Now listen,” he said finally, rasping again. “That isn’t any good. You’re letting yourself get all worked up about this thing, aren’t you?”

Frances shook her head quickly.

“Oh, no! It’s just — ”

“Stop it,” Calhoun said, fixing her with steady and sensitive gray eyes, much more sensitive, indeed, than she had thought them last night. “And don’t worry about that cheap, yellow — well.” He nodded at her. “Do you think he’s going to get away with anything in here if I get so much as one look at that ugly puss of his? Do you?”

It was true that Tough Willie Calhoun was now looking and conversing tougher than ever; but Frances discovered something new about that. He had in him, at this moment, and for her, a very solid and reassuring masculine comfort. She knew that she was physically afraid of the big redheaded man; and she knew that Willie Calhoun was not, and never would be. Upstairs, on the west balcony, he took the time to indicate to her two of Donnelly’s men — one in civilian clothes, one in railroad uniform — who were to share this part of the watch; and then he gave her some very quiet and sensible advice.

The whole thing was nothing to get excited about, Calhoun said. Of course it might look dangerous and complicated at first, but it wasn’t really. If she saw the big fellow come in up here, all she had to do was to wave at Donnelly’s men with her right hand. That was simple enough,

wasn't it?

"Oh, yes!" She nodded at him; but then she shivered. Willie Calhoun — Tough Willie Calhoun — understood that also. He sat down with her for a few minutes, and he told her that she was going to do all right on this thing. Why? Because he knew she was. It was all kind of a business, he said, but all she had to remember was that the thing to do was to watch yourself from in back somewhere; you had to know what you were doing every minute, and why you were doing it. Perhaps some people couldn't manage it, but she could, and he knew it. She had struck him as that kind of a girl.

He seemed quite serious.

"I wish I knew it," Frances declared miserably. "I wish I thought it."

"Now I'll tell you something," Willie Calhoun said, in his old manner, and using his old phrase. "You're going to find out tonight just what kind of a girl you are. Wait and see. You're going to be looked out for, remember. There'll be a lot of people watching for those fellows — me, too. You're not going to be alone up here for so much as half a second."

She was fine then, she almost believed him, she almost felt like the sort of girl Willie Calhoun said she was; but then at a quarter of six, when he had to go away and leave her up there, she missed the broad shoulders, the bulldog jaw, the stubborn, homely and dependable face, in a way she would not have believed possible an hour ago.

Behind her, at the other end of the concourse, the model railroad chugged and whistled on its treadmill journey. She knew a small boy who would have studied the cars and the engines very carefully, very seriously; but she must not think of him now. If she did, Frances demanded of herself, and in the most natural and instinctive way, what idea would Willie Calhoun have of her?

She took one very long breath, held it, and felt better and more comfortable; and then exactly as Willie Calhoun had advised, she began to watch the street doors, and also to watch herself very carefully from in back somewhere.

Ten minutes to six came.

Downstairs in the information booth Willie Calhoun, dressed in a blue railroad coat, busied himself by walking around inside the counter and distributing timetables. At a desk under the golden clock George O'Mara, also in railroad uniform, concealed under a freight atlas an open phone that was connected through to Captain Rousseau's office on the concourse balcony.

Donnelly was in that office with Lieutenant Nolan, two or three other men and Captain Rousseau.

"Five minutes of six," Nolan said. "Maybe we'd better send Murchison out. All right, Arthur?"

Donnelly, who was sitting back in the swivel chair with closed eyes, gave a brusque nod without opening the eyes. A detective sergeant who was standing in back of them cleared his throat quietly and settled himself with folded arms. No one else said or did anything. Six o'clock came.

PART THREE

Calhoun's most persistent worry in Manhattan Depot at six o'clock Saturday night was not the twenty or twenty-five thousand people who were then in one part or another of the station area, but the very complicated interior arrangement of the station itself. There were almost numberless street approaches, some of them offering direct access from the surrounding neighborhood, and others that wound in crookedly toward the main concourse, if one knew the way, from under hotels and office buildings, through stores, and from a honeycomb of subway platforms, all with terminal connections, where trains pulled up minute after minute from Long Island, the Bronx, the West Side and lower New York.

It was possible, in addition, to approach the concourse through an involved network of subterranean walks from three blocks north, or one east, or one west. Cabs arrived in an unending stream at all the principal street entrances, at the vehicular tunnel downstairs, and at the open-air platform just west of the balcony overlooking the concourse — Frances Kennedy's position. So all these presented innumerable ways, even to Calhoun, of slipping unobserved into a particular area of Manhattan Depot; but at the same time there were only seven public approaches to the information booth in the main concourse.

There was the escalator on the east; the two passages leading away under it; the stairs and two more passages on the west; and the tremendous ramp on the south that led up to the main waiting room and street entrance. The north wall of the concourse, lined from end to end by the track gates, was not considered a very feasible means of entry. Early morning through twelve noon were the busiest arrival hours at Manhattan Depot, as the time between four p.m. and nine made up the busiest departure hours; and now, consequently, if outgoing trains were leaving from behind the track gates immediately adjacent to the main concourse, the few incoming ones were shuttled down to the lower level, or over to

what was called the arrival station in the far northwest corner of the depot.

From either area an interior approach would have to be made to the concourse and the information booth, and these approaches were all covered by neighbors of the Rothman brothers whom Donnelly had located in Dover Village. If Louie Rothman attempted to enter Manhattan Depot tonight he should be recognized at some point or other by people who had known him for many years; but for the other one, for the big redheaded man in the brown overcoat, Donnelly's lines had to be thinned out considerably.

There were only four people who could be relied upon to identify him, and each of these had to be placed in a different station area. Conductor Goggins was posted east, near the foot of the escalator, and between the passages on that side; Eddie Mather south, by the main ramp; Frances west, near the upper taxi-cab platform and the avenue entrance; and Calhoun, as a sort of safety man, in the center of things at the information booth.

Others of Donnelly's men moved back and forth through the concourse, singly and in pairs, from five-thirty on; and what might be termed a flying squad of immediately available reinforcements were spaced lounging upstairs at the balcony rail, from where they could overlook the information booth and all the possible approaches to it. The arrangements had all been put into effect by five-thirty. They were to remain in effect until the redhead or the second Rothman brother showed himself, or until other conditions warranted a concentration in strength at one particular depot sector.

Now five after six ticked away.

The father was in position by that time. He had been instructed by Donnelly to station himself as close as possible to Calhoun's side of the information booth, and not to move from there under any circumstances. He did what Donnelly had requested him to do; but very shortly after taking up his place at the busiest point in one of the busiest railroad terminals in the world, Donnelly's precautions began to appear very remote to him — theoretical fancies which could have no effective application at this spot and under these conditions.

People pushing their way to or from the information booth shouldered him, bumped him and resented him. Porters edged past with laden handcarts; and trains were being called, one after another, on the Manhattan Depot public address system. Crowds shoved and jostled around the track gates, and a sea of voices and faces surrounded Mr. Murchison, all indistinguishable from one another, and all appearing and disappearing from minute to minute. There seemed no possible way to keep any sort of check on them.

But only one question concerned the father now. Would the men come? Perhaps; but perhaps, too, they had learned by this time about Donnelly, and about Carl Rothman. And what would that mean to Tony? What would they do to Tony? The intolerable thing there was that he did not yet know whether in co-operating with Donnelly he had betrayed his child or protected him.

Five minutes passed — ten, fifteen. No one, in all this crowd, seemed to look with any particular attention at the father. He waited there. Presently he began to fight waves of savage physical nausea.

Calhoun was still moving around his side of the information booth and distributing his timetables. He was also beginning to argue within himself.

Of course, Calhoun insisted stubbornly, the kidnapers would trade on the supposed fact that the police had no description of them; and of course at least one of them would appear in the main concourse any minute now to see whether Murchison had followed instructions, and to determine for themselves whether or not there were any signs of police activity.

They had to do that, Calhoun told himself, because it was the safe and logical action for them to take under the circumstances. But still, at twenty minutes past six, Calhoun had to slip a handkerchief out of his pocket, and wipe his mouth and behind his ears with it. Could the big redhead have given the whole thing up for some reason? Had he killed the child yesterday, after all, and now was he afraid to show himself? Or had he sent the woman in here, whom no one had ever seen close enough to describe adequately? There was no way to tell, and so —

Calhoun distributed more timetables. Now, out on the concourse, the father was beginning to look white as death.

In Captain Rousseau's office Arthur Donnelly was sketching out box within box on a sheet of scrap paper.

"Half past," Nolan announced, breaking a rather long silence. "What do you think, Arthur? Do you still believe they're going to show up here?"

"We'll wait for them," Donnelly said. He wrote the name Louie Rothman twice on his bit of paper, and underscored it with a couple of savage pencil strokes. "We expected to wait for them. What's the matter with you, will you tell me? Are you in a hurry to get somewhere?"

Nolan looked at him as if he resented the remark very much; but he did not resent it by pursuing the conversation. The detective sergeant stood in back of them with folded arms, aloof from everything. Captain Rousseau went on nursing the open telephone.

Up on the west balcony Frances was still keeping a bright and expectant smile fixed in the general direction of the street doors. Just as if she were waiting for someone — just that; and of course it was still early yet, she reminded herself. Plenty of time. Probably no later than…

A few minutes ago she had resolved not to look at the big clock over the information booth any more; but she did now. It was six thirty-two. But the kidnapers had to come, she thought numbly; why else would they have made that appointment with Mr. Murchison?

One of Donnelly's men, the middle-aged one in civilian clothes, sat on a marble bench in front of her and turned over a page in his evening newspaper. He did not appear to be disturbed about anything. More people streamed in from the upper cab platform, and Donnelly's other man, the one in the railroad uniform, appeared to be checking some lists over at the street door.

Six thirty-four… That time she looked around at the clock before she could warn herself against it. Behind her, on the east balcony, the phonograph record synchronized with the model railroad went on endlessly — locomotives puffing and panting, car wheels clicking, whistle signals echoing across to her in long, mournful notes. The record had something of the effect on her which the overhead fans on the cab platform had induced last night — nerve-racking urgency. She tried not to pay any sort of attention to it. She did not succeed very well.

Now, at half past six on a very busy Saturday evening, trains were departing from Manhattan Depot at the average rate of one each minute. Passages, ramps, concourse, arcades and waiting rooms were all crowded. There had been more snow upstate that afternoon, delaying all

east- and southbound schedules, and so traffic was beginning to back up in Manhattan Depot — an extremely bad thing from Donnelly's viewpoint, because time was a valuable and carefully allotted commodity in here, with just enough of it to go around, and no more. Even an hour's delay in incoming trains, with harried and intent men in underground signal towers attempting to fix up a new arrival schedule on complicated electric boards, meant that hundreds of people who should have been out of the terminal long ago were still awaiting, and now with bad temper and fretful impatience, the arrival of belated upstate locals, and New England and suburban afternoon trains.

Also, because the men in the signal towers had only a certain number of tracks to work with, there was some little difficulty correlating the many departing trains with the less numerous arriving ones. So more people — outgoing passengers this time — were milling around on the concourse in a turmoil of hats, coats, luggage and last-minute exasperation.

The train announcer's room, with its huge blackboard, was packed to the doors, as were the restaurants — there were at least six of these in or adjacent to the terminal — the cocktail lounges, the telegraph offices and the incoming and outgoing baggage rooms. Minute by minute more people were crowding into Manhattan Depot, via subway, to leave through one of the many street entrances for a Saturday night dinner and show in mid-town New York; and of course there were family groups who were waiting to greet someone, or waiting to say good-by to someone, or losing children momentarily, or worrying information clerks, or just standing around and getting in everybody's way.

At twenty minutes of seven Lieutenant Nolan, who had been unable to sit still any longer in Rousseau's office, looked down at all this commotion from the balcony, and gave up on the kidnapers for the first time. What were they expected to do in this madhouse, anyway, Lieutenant Nolan demanded of himself.

What could anyone do in it?

A quarter of seven…

The father was still down there by the information booth, trying his best to remember what Donnelly had told him — to wait, to keep in position, to wait some more. Small groups of people were forming and reforming constantly around him, elbowing him aside and complaining to each other that the 6:00 was almost an hour late now, or that the 6:30 from Rochester was not expected until nine this evening. The father listened to them painfully and intently. Long afterward he could have recalled some of those conversations word for word.

At ten minutes of seven he squeezed his eyelids together for a few seconds, and addressed a petition to someone or something which was not visible in Manhattan Depot. The sense of it, expressed in a very humble and sincere way, was that nothing must be permitted to happen to Tony. For himself, yes. Anything. Anything at all. But for the child…

He was a little sick now — just a little. It did not seem to matter very much. Tony, Tony…

He went on waiting.

Back of him, at the information booth, Calhoun had begun to argue very ferociously with himself, and in this manner. A wait like this should have been anticipated. Why not? The kidnapers, of course, would want the father to accept almost any conditions for the ransom; and now, therefore, they would attempt to increase the pressure on him minute by minute.

What else was it? Calhoun whispered at himself. One of them, or perhaps both of them, would still show in here. Maybe at ten past seven, or a quarter after, or half past… But now he discovered that he had to argue the point vehemently. George O'Mara, at his desk under the big clock, shook his head once at Calhoun and then went on studying the freight atlas and concealing the open telephone under it.

"Ten past seven," Nolan declared. He had been in and out of Rousseau's office five times in the past ten minutes; now he stopped opposite Donnelly at the window overlooking the main concourse.

"We'll wait," Donnelly said.

"Sure, we'll wait," Nolan said. "We'll wait and we'll wait and we'll wait. One hour or two hours or —"

Donnelly, a topheavy and shambling man on his feet, got up quickly and suddenly.

"Or three," Donnelly shouted at him. "Or four. Or five. Or six. Or seven. What in hell is the matter with you? What are you keeping after me for?"

Captain Rousseau attempted to smooth things over. Donnelly cut him off very abruptly.

"That helped," Nolan said, using a satisfied and rather venomous tone. "That helped a lot. Let's all lose our tempers."

Donnelly, from very small black eyes, stared fixedly at the back of Nolan's head. The detective sergeant refolded his arms without the slightest noise and fixed his eyes on a wall calendar. He knew what to do here. His attitude was that he had suddenly become deaf, dumb and blind.

A good-looking and self-assured young man, who had been studying Frances for some time up on the west balcony, removed his hat at a quarter past seven and smiled pleasantly at her.

“Saturday night,” he said. “Saturday night and no girl. Now that’s a fine predicament, isn’t it? I’m afraid I’ve been watching you. And I’m afraid I’ve been wondering whether —”

“No, please,” Frances whispered at him. “Please!”

“Oh, I’d say we ought to consider it,” the young man suggested briskly. “There’s no harm done. A drink, maybe a dance —”

There were reinforcements at hand. The middle-aged man, who had not appeared to pay the least attention to Frances previously, materialized then and hit the young one very hard on the left shoulder with the heel of his palm.

“Geddada here,” the middle-aged man said. “Can you understand what I’m tellin‘ you, stupid? Geddada here!”

The young man got out of there. The middle-aged one without so much as a word to Frances, went back to his bench and his newspaper.

At twenty minutes past seven the father no longer hoped for anything. But he still had the boy’s cap in his right-hand coat pocket, and he was twisting it up under his fingers, and addressing it silently. Everything was going to be all right, he told it. Nothing to be afraid about. The important thing was to do what the men wanted him to do, and not to get them angry with him. A day or so — that was all. And then…

But there were other thoughts in him besides that meaningless effort at comfort and reassurance. The worst, and by far the worst, was an idea he began to have that he had betrayed the boy by listening to Inspector Donnelly. The back of his eyes began to feel unbearably tight and strained. He smiled painfully. Seven twenty-four…

Upstairs Lieutenant Nolan remained at the concourse window, back presented to Donnelly, hands jammed into his hip pockets under his overcoat. Donnelly still looked at him from under heavy eyelids; but presently Donnelly sat back in the swivel chair and closed the eyelids and pressed his lips together. No one had made even the least inoffensive remark for the last few minutes. Now and again Captain Rousseau shifted the phone slightly, to rest himself.

The detective sergeant in back of Donnelly, who was trying to count the slats in the Venetian blinds at the top of the concourse window, was unable to decide whether there were sixteen or seventeen of them. He always became confused halfway down. He started over again. He was sure of nine when Captain Rousseau moved one palm toward Donnelly, patting it at the air in a gesture that called for absolute stillness, and said in almost an ordinary tone, but not quite:

“All right, Willie, Donnelly’s here. What is it?”

Donnelly opened his eyes. Not another muscle in his face moved.

It was, at seven-thirty, just about what Calhoun should have expected it to be. A messenger boy in a gray uniform pushed his way over to the information booth from the main ramp, reached it on the side opposite to Calhoun and the father, and began to page in a shrill and penetrating voice a Mr. Murchison — a Mr. Henry L. Murchison.

One of Donnelly’s men, covering that area, heard and saw the messenger boy before Calhoun did. He moved around at once in front of Calhoun, and blew his nose in the direction of the messenger boy. Calhoun looked

that way. Then, under the pretext of securing more timetables from a drawer in O'Mara's desk, Calhoun put his head inside the freight atlas and spoke a hurried sentence or two into the mouthpiece.

Upstairs Captain Rousseau nodded violently at the detective sergeant in back of Donnelly; and the detective sergeant, with at last something to do, ducked out at once to the antechamber and the telephone switchboard. There he was connected by Calhoun's desk man with the announcement booth from which all public information was broadcast in Manhattan Depot. Following this, and within seconds of the time when the messenger boy began to page Mr. Murchison downstairs, every one of Donnelly's men inside the terminal got the news that now contact was either being made or attempted.

What the loud-speaker announcement said, innocently enough, was that Mr. Nolan from the stationmaster's office was wanted at Track 41; but then Track 41 was only a dead track over in the extreme northwest corner of the station, and on Calhoun's suggestion it had been decided that any declaration in regard to it would replace, as a less noticeable alert signal, the flashing of the beacon lights under the big clock.

Things began to happen immediately. Those of Donnelly's men in the neighborhood of the information booth pushed up towards it; and others, farther back, headed quickly but unobtrusively for the stairs, the escalator, the passages and the ramp — every possible exit from the main concourse. They waited at those positions. They waited for more directions, which would be given to them as soon as the actual details of the contact were made known — and again, of course, through a call for Mr. Nolan of the stationmaster's office, who should be wanted in another part of the depot any minute now.

Upstairs, too, the men on the east side of the balcony readied themselves to block off the escalator, if word came; and the ones on the north shaped up, although not in formation, around the stairway and the street entrance on that side, near Frances Kennedy.

Everything went off without any visible excitement. There was no

commotion, no concerted and obvious rush to any one point; but by the time Mr. Murchison signed for and received a note from the messenger boy all of Donnelly's men were exactly where they had been ordered to be.

The father read his telegram; then, remembering Donnelly's instructions in this event, he crumpled it up and appeared to shove it into his overcoat pocket. But a stout, hurrying individual with a large suitcase, who squeezed past now with the suitcase concealing Mr. Murchison's right hand for a few seconds, accepted the note instantly and deftly. This man continued ahead to the information booth, where Calhoun waited for him with both hands on top of the counter.

That position, perhaps a little too posed and rigid, enabled Calhoun to palm the note without appearing to move so much as a finger. They had all been ordered to be extremely careful here, because it was possible that if neither of the two men they wanted was present at this moment, someone connected with them — perhaps the woman, who could not be identified in here by anybody — was keeping the information booth under very sharp and careful scrutiny.

Calhoun, therefore, raised a finger to the stout man and then bent under the counter as if to locate a timetable for him. He read the note quickly in that position, pocketed it, came up with the first timetable he touched and again went over to O'Mara's telephone. It was still under the freight atlas, and so Calhoun could still speak into it without bringing it into sight.

"They want him downstairs," Calhoun said thickly, pawing around as if to locate something in one of the desk drawers. "At a phone booth behind the newsstand — it has an out-of-order sign on it. If he goes down there alone, they say they'll have something waiting for him. Now look. I can beat him down there — me and O'Mara. Should we?"

He bent way over the desk in order to bring his right ear almost against the phone. There was indistinct conversation upstairs; then Donnelly came on.

"Go ahead," Donnelly said, curt and unexcited as ever — a bit breathless, though, "but don't start anything, either of you, unless you can't help it.

Just cover that passage, Calhoun. I'm on my way."

The most direct route available to the father was by means of a ramp cutting down and under the southeast corner of the depot; but for Calhoun and O'Mara there was a narrow iron stairs coiling around the immense base of the four-sided golden clock to the commuters' information booth on the lower level.

They used it. They separated outside the commuters' booth after a hurried sentence or two, Calhoun heading for the south end of the passage in which the phone booths were located, and O'Mara cutting across the lower concourse toward the north. When Calhoun got there a good many people were moving through into the concourse or else standing around near the row of phone booths; but not one of them resembled in any striking physical detail either Big Red or the second Rothman brother.

Calhoun, still wearing the railroad coat, stopped opposite the third booth in the passage. He became conscious now that his heart had begun to bounce rapidly against his chest, and that he could not seem to do anything effective about it. He pretended to tie his shoelace. Then George O'Mara came along from the north end of the passage, opened a newspaper he had snatched somewhere and settled himself against the wall eight or ten yards away from Calhoun.

The father appeared.

Upstairs a second announcement had been made by this time, declaring that Mr. Nolan of the stationmaster's office was now wanted immediately on the lower level. The announcement was heard, and acted upon, in many different areas of the terminal. Various positions had been assigned by Calhoun and Captain Rousseau earlier in the afternoon in case it would be found necessary to screen off any one particular part of the depot; and now, in the Saturday-night rush at Manhattan Depot, the arrangements

demanded here went off like clockwork.

On the west balcony, near Frances, the middle-aged man and his partner had abandoned all pretense of occupying themselves by the street entrance. They now took up new positions on either side of the concourse stairway, and were joined there by other men from the balcony, and then by Donnelly and Nolan, who came around hurriedly from Captain Rousseau's office.

Donnelly muttered a few words to them, but in so guarded a tone that Frances was able to catch nothing of it. They all left her there, and there was no opportunity for Frances to ask questions of anyone. Donnelly appeared and disappeared in practically the same moment; the rest followed him; and after that, if Frances knew something of the arrangements which had been made, or were being made at this moment, she was unable to see any outward indications of them.

Below her the concourse of Manhattan Depot looked exactly as it did on any other Saturday night. Redcaps were maneuvering across it with sleek luggage, past countless groups and formations of people who were meeting or saying good-by to each other, claiming baggage, asking for information, or heading briskly for a cab stand, a subway station or a street entrance. Of course the kidnapers must suppose that they could move around in here like invisible men; but now, feeling the first stir of a confused emotion made up from hope, excitement and uncertainty, Frances began to understand that the conditions prevailing in Manhattan Depot at this hour might be even more suitable to Inspector Donnelly.

She moved across to the balcony rail. She was watching the concourse now, not the street entrance; Donnelly's men, all of them from up here, were on their way down to the lower level; and so there was no one in position to observe and recognize a big man in a brown overcoat who came in from the upper cab platform at this moment. He eyed the information booth while lighting a cigarette behind Frances; but he was probably unable to detect anything suspicious down there.

He was not worried, at any rate. He skirted a couple of marble benches,

found an empty phone booth in the far corner of the balcony and closed the door. He dialed a number; then he turned his left wrist up and over, and held it that way, so that he could watch the second hand on it.

Hanging from the door of the other booth on the lower level behind the newsstand, and in the most distant corner of Manhattan Depot from the upstairs balcony, was an official company placard announcing that this phone was temporarily out of order. Now the father was waiting in front of it, where he had been instructed to wait; and Calhoun and O'Mara, like two corners of a triangle facing his apex from the opposite wall of the passage, remained in position to cut off at once anyone who attempted to speak to him.

Donnelly and Nolan came around the south corner of the newsstand; but Calhoun, who had been inspecting the people in this passageway with covert quickness, had no information to give them. Nothing yet, Calhoun muttered, pointing toward the ramp in a cover-up gesture, as if Donnelly had asked some directions from him. They had got down here before the father, Calhoun added hurriedly; but so far —

"All right," Donnelly said. His voice was a bit deeper than usual. "Then it's the woman. Don't move from here. Well locate her. Nolan. I'll want you —"

The telephone in the third booth, the one with the out-of-order sign on it, rang insistently. And then Donnelly understood what the placard had really indicated — a bit late, however — and so did Calhoun. It meant that a genuine notice had been obtained from another booth by one of the kidnapers, and placed here; that an unoccupied public phone would be waiting for Murchison in this passage at or about seven thirty-five — one which the police could not possibly have tapped in on beforehand; and that now, from any point in or around New York City, the big redhead or the second Rothman brother would be able to give the ransom instructions to the father directly and safely.

Calhoun, grasping that much after the phone bell had given him a first intuitive comprehension of it, sprinted down the passage toward the telephone office in Manhattan Depot. Donnelly remained absolutely motionless for a second or two; then he stirred himself, his face quiet and grim, his step heavy. He spoke to Murchison, and Murchison nodded at him. Then, after moistening his lips carefully, the father went inside the booth, closed the door on himself and lifted the earpiece.

The big man in the brown overcoat allowed himself just sixty seconds at the balcony phone. He had heard that it was impossible to trace dial calls; he was inclined to believe it, but he did not intend to take any chances on it. For most of that time he spoke in the unemotional manner of someone who had memorized and arranged exactly what he wanted to say; for the last part of it he listened. He spoke once more, curtly, watching the second hand on his wrist watch. He hung up. At seven thirty-eight, after another examination of the concourse and the information booth which could have showed him nothing out of the ordinary, he was walking quite casually toward the street entrance in back of Frances.

He passed her. Neither of them noticed the other. At the street door, however, she got one sidewise glimpse of a brown overcoat with a style and texture she was never going to forget. She froze.

The man’s face was hidden from her.

She got up slowly, after what seemed to be a nightmare struggle to begin physical movement. Was it — was it… She did not know. She ran. Outside the street doors the man in the brown coat was now on the other side of the drive, waiting to cross there against heavy Saturday-night traffic. She still was unable to identify him from her angle. Two or three outgoing passengers jostled each other for one taxi in back of him; a porter bumped Frances out of the way; and a second taxicab swung up to

the curb and completely blocked off that part of the road from her. All of these incidents, happening so precisely that they might have been premeditated and rehearsed, left room in her but for one thought: to make sure about him.

Again she was unable to do that. By the time she had run around the incoming taxi, pushing her hands out at it foolishly, the man in the brown overcoat had disappeared. She ran again. It was so bitterly cold outside, after the light and heat she had just left, that street lights acquired a radiating and golden intensity. Objects blurred under them. She ran down to the corner in front of Manhattan Depot, a very busy corner with busses, taxis, and foot passengers all evident; but nowhere the back of a brown overcoat.

She became frantic. A short thoroughfare ran up from the other side of the cross-town street into the deep shadow of a vehicular ramp that rose gradually there to bypass Manhattan Depot in an immense outside sweep. He had been facing in that direction, Frances remembered, and now he was not east or west of her. So perhaps…

She ran up beside the overpass. At the top of the hill, when she could not see what she wanted so desperately to see, she stopped again. There was a long narrow street up here, lined by office buildings that were all dark and deserted at this hour on Saturday night. There were a few parked cars also. A black coupe, a green pickup truck — and a gray sedan that might, or might not, be the one she had seen yesterday in North Rhinehill before the kidnaping.

She moved up quickly through the shadows beside one of the office buildings. There were two men sitting in the sedan; but the one nearer her was much too small to be the man in the brown overcoat. Louie Rothman?

She could not know. Then she remembered that last night Donnelly had attached great importance to the license plates, and she forced herself closer to the sedan, and began to whisper the license number to herself over and over.

Now get Donnelly, she warned herself; and get him at once, before the

sedan drove away from here. She went back to the avenue corner, trying to move not too quickly and not too slowly, trying not to attract any attention from the men. She thought she failed. The one on her side, on the pavement side, got out and slammed the door after him.

The car motor ground over.

She believed then that in approaching the sedan she had been seen and recognized by the men from yesterday afternoon. Panic smashed at her. Now, of course, Louie Rothman was to catch up to her on foot, while the sedan raced around three sides of the block to cut her off from Manhattan Depot.

She froze herself back into a restaurant doorway around the corner. Louie Rothman passed, not looking into the doorway, not apparently worried by her or by anything else; and she understood then that he was only going back to the depot for some reason. She knew that she had to follow him down there, back to Donnelly; but it was one thing to comprehend that much, and another, the most difficult physical action of her life, to act on it.

She managed. She did not want to, not in that deserted block under the bypass; but she did. Halfway down the hill, in the quietest and most deserted part of that block, Louie Rothman glanced around at her. All he could have seen then, however, since her head was turned low and sideways as if against the bitter February wind, was her hat, the side of her throat, one cheek.

Back in the police office at Manhattan Depot Captain Rousseau had just passed a drink of brandy to Mr. Murchison; Donnelly was swinging around a chair for him; and Calhoun, still breathing in a heavy and erratic fashion, was wiping an overcoat sleeve across his forehead. They had just returned from the lower level, and no one, except the father, knew in detail what had been discussed during that telephone conversation.

Donnelly, with those sharp black eyes of his giving no hint of the maddened exasperation and helplessness he must have felt at what had just happened downstairs, leaned across the desk and suggested in his usual unexcited manner to Mr. Murchison:

“Take your time now. There’s no great rush. And finish your brandy. I might as well tell you we weren’t able to trace the call. Calhoun tried. But by the time — ”

“I know. I think he was afraid of that,” Murchison said. He looked quieter and more composed, Calhoun thought, than he had near the information booth — still pale, but the eyes brighter and harder, the mouth firmer. “He said if I wanted to hear about Tony I’d better listen, and not try to drag things out. So — ” he smiled painfully — “I listened.”

Nolan muttered a few words, not too low; Calhoun put the hands on his hips, set his teeth together and watched Donnelly.

“How much does he want?” Donnelly said.

“Standard rate.” The father’s smile twisted a bit. “Fifty thousand dollars.” He put the brandy glass back on the desk, caught Donnelly’s eye and held it. “Well, that’s all right. The money isn’t important in this thing. It never was.”

“It never is,” Donnelly told him. “Not for what it means. What arrangements did he make with you?”

“Out there.” He nodded over at the concourse window. “Right downstairs by the information booth.”

Calhoun made one convulsive movement of the powerful shoulders, and then became rigid. Again? Calhoun thought dumbly.

“At noontime tomorrow,” the father told them. “I’m to put it in the overnight bag — the one you people found in the locker yesterday — and just leave it down there at twelve sharp. Hell send a messenger for it, but the messenger won’t know anything. He’ll be watched, though; and if anybody talks to him, or makes an attempt to follow him, the whole thing’s off. If it goes all right, I’ll get a message over at the Belvidere by two o’clock telling

me where to find — Tony. That's all. That's about it."

"Did you ask him anything about the boy?" Donnelly said.

"How he was. Fine, he told me. Very comfortable and happy. Nothing to worry about at all. If I did my part tomorrow — " Rousseau gestured at him with the brandy bottle but he shook his head. "Just now, however, I'll have to take his word for it."

"His word," Donnelly said, but in a completely detached way. "The low swine, the rotten, sneaking… Did he give you any warning about us?"

"Not to call you."

"Did he mention Carl Rothman?"

"No. Not a word."

"Then he doesn't know about him," Donnelly said, grimly satisfied there. "Or else he'd have threatened you with the child. Well, a lot of things might happen between now and tomorrow noon —good things. Calhoun. What time is your next train due in here from Dover Village?"

It had been thought earlier that one of the other two might have made an appointment to meet Carl Rothman in Manhattan Depot at whatever hour he was expected from 24 Maple Avenue; and now Calhoun started down to the lower level with Mike Frost to check on another incoming local. It was two minutes of eight when Mike Frost led the way around to the escalator, not the west stairway.

Neither of them thought about Frances Kennedy.

In the taproom of the Hotel Belvidere, back of Calhoun in the southeast part of the station, Frances was keeping ten feet behind a short, plump man wearing a blue overcoat, a white scarf and a gray hat.

In Donnelly's photograph Louie Rothman had appeared much younger than this, had worn no mustache and had been grinning cockily; and so

even at this time, in the soft blue lights of the Belvidere taproom, Frances was not yet certain of him. That took another few seconds, until he had gone out to the depot passage, turned onto the commuters' ramp and, at the end of his turn, was brought almost face to face with her.

She recognized him then. An odd nightmare feeling of safety and help being very close at hand, and yet completely inaccessible to her, made itself felt. Where were Donnelly's men? She was unable to recognize any of them on the ramp, nor even in the people moving around through the lower level, where Louie Rothman stopped long enough to study a commuters' timetable. He gave an attractive blond girl an impudent up-and-down appraisal; and then — the most incredible thing in a wholly incredible few minutes — he walked around Tough Willie Calhoun and Mike Frost, who were standing together near the commuters' information booth.

Both of them glanced at him. Neither of them made any attempt to stop him.

Willie Calhoun saw her also. He looked concerned. What was she doing down here? He wanted to know. She shouldn't be roaming around like this just because —

She could only whisper at them. Hadn't they seen Louie Rothman — the man who had just walked by here not ten seconds ago?

"Who?" Calhoun said. He stared at her; then he swung around quickly. "The little fellow? Of course. But he wasn't - "

He glanced over at Mike Frost, who gave him an abrupt negative movement of the head.

She could have beaten her fists against them. "

It's the snapshot," she insisted breathlessly. "Can't you see? That gray car is right up here in the next street — or it was. Are you going to listen to me?"

"What are you talking about?" Mike Frost said. "Do you mean to say — "

Calhoun was a bit quicker on the uptake. Without asking her any

questions at all, he ducked hurriedly away from her to the other side of the information booth. There remained then one very short but very bad moment when it appeared to Frances that they had been convinced about Louie Rothman not quite in time. She could not see him at the soda fountain, among the people in front of her, or on the upper stairs; and then she could, because in some incomprehensible manner Calhoun and Mike Frost knew exactly where to look for him.

He was sitting on one of the marble benches against the wall, one leg swinging casually over the other, hands clasped on it. His expression was bored and vacant.

“Sure,” Calhoun muttered huskily, putting his back to him after the briefest possible inspection. “It’s the clothes, Mike, and that hat and mustache. But put him up against Carl. Then — ” He took Frances by the arm urgently. “Where’s that automobile?”

She told them; but it was gone now, she said, because the big man had been starting it just as soon as Louie Rothman got out. “We’ll check,” Calhoun said grimly. “We’ll check right now.”

Two of Donnelly’s men joined them. There was a very hurried conference, after which they went off to look for the car, while Calhoun vanished somewhere to phone Donnelly. Mike Frost was already sitting over there on the bench beside Louie Rothman. He did not speak to him, however. He did not look at him.

Calhoun reappeared.

“Waiting for the brother,” Calhoun mumbled at her. “We half expected it. But don’t keep staring at him now. He might notice you, and we got to wait for Donnelly. Here. Read this timetable.”

She did, or at any rate she kept her eyes fixed on it. But even a minute or so later, when Donnelly and Nolan came over to them from the commuters’ ramp, there was no rush for Louie Rothman, and no outward commotion. It seemed to Frances, indeed, that they decided on what to do only after the most intolerable and aggravating slowness. They all murmured to each other — Nolan quick, eager and aggressive, Calhoun

pushing, but Donnelly, as he invariably was, methodical and un-excited.

Frances had regarded that as a callous attitude last night; but she understood him a little better now. She had begun to understand him a few minutes ago, when she had been required to force herself out of the restaurant doorway after Louie Rothman. What had almost betrayed her then? Her own panic, surely, her own emotion. In subduing it she had not, of course, gone over to impersonal unconcern about Tony; she had done her best, rather, in the face of a terrifying personal responsibility, to think intelligently, and to act quickly and decisively. And now it was Donnelly's responsibility, and now he did the same thing she had done — but much better. He'd had more practice.

He thought it out first, rubbing that long Irish jaw of his; and then he made up his mind after he and Nolan and Calhoun had discussed something which she would never have been able to consider under these circumstances — whether it was worth while waiting for the big man in the brown overcoat to appear. Donnelly decided against it.

"They had a parking space already," Donnelly murmured, shoulders hunched, back to Louie Rothman, sharp black eyes a little vacant in appearance, as if he was concentrating inwardly and not outwardly. "That means the two of them would have come in here together if they wanted to meet Carl. No. The other fella's the shifty one. He'll keep away from here. He'll give us trouble. Unless — Calhoun. Is there a place down here where we could have Mr. Louie Rothman to ourselves for a few minutes?"

Calhoun gave her a quick look. She knew what it meant, and she knew what Donnelly had meant. She kept her eyes on the timetable.

"One of the platforms," Calhoun said. "That all right?"

"I think we can make it all right," Donnelly said. He shambled around, a big, egg-shaped man with fleshy features that looked neither certain nor uncertain, that had very little expression of any kind. "Come on, now. But I'm the one who'll do the talking to him; you'll mind that, both of you. Calhoun. Get over there and sit beside him. Close up beside him. Nolan. I think you know what I want."

Nolan must have. He strode over to the bench, stopped there, tilted up Louie Rothman's chin without a word, and slapped him across the mouth, full strength, so that the report sounded like a pistol shot. Two or three nearby commuters moved away hurriedly. Louie Rothman's head went back against the wall and remained in that awkward position for a long moment. He seemed dumbly transfixed.

"No more of that," Donnelly said. "Not yet." He replaced Nolan. Calhoun, also in position, set the bulldog jaw up against Louie Rothman with a very tough and unpleasant expression, and on the other side Mike Frost managed to do something rather peculiar with the pop eyes. He got into them, by drooping the lids slightly, a curious and menacing expression — sleepy and yet alert, ominous, completely relaxed. Louie Rothman stared from him to Calhoun to Donnelly to Nolan. Then he rubbed his mouth clumsily, as if it had only begun to hurt him.

"Heyl" he said. He was breathless from his first word. "What are you doing? Who do you think — "

Frances had nothing remotely approaching police experience; but even Frances understood that he knew what they were; he knew then.

"Where's the child?" Donnelly asked him — quietly, conversationally. "You're in trouble, Louie — bad trouble. I want the truth out of you. What did you do with the Murchison boy yesterday? Did you kill him?"

"The boy?" Louie Rothman repeated. But he must have been expecting that, because he made a creditable attempt at bravado. "What boy? What are you talking about? Who are you?"

He had been smoking a cigarette, and he attempted to put it back into his mouth now. Calhoun, however, slapped it away from him. Mike Frost stepped on it.

"Look," Nolan said, that long face of his grimmer and more ascetic than Frances had ever seen it. "What are we wasting time for? Let's get him inside, Arthur. That's the thing."

"I want the truth," Donnelly said. "And I'll give him this chance to tell it to me. Where's the boy?"

Louie Rothman fixed his eyes on Donnelly's breast pocket. He did not say anything. Not slowly, but all at once, his face turned a very noticeable dirty white.

"Get him inside," Donnelly said, using the same monotone. "Right now. Calhoun. Frost."

More of Donnelly's men gathered around, and a fascinated terminal attendant, after Calhoun muttered at him, hurried over and unlocked Gate 12. The nearest commuters, who were all on their feet now to observe the excitement, moved back quickly, leaving a clear semicircle around the bench.

"No, you don't!" Louie Rothman declared breathlessly. ''Who the hell do you think you are? Take your hands off me!"

He kicked out wildly at Calhoun and Mike Frost, but it did not help him. He was borne over to Gate 12, and through it, with no more trouble than if he had been a bad-tempered child. The gate clanged shut after them, and Frances began to listen for sounds from behind it. Make that man tell about Tony, she prayed fiercely. Make him tell!

Inside the gate, on an unoccupied and unlit platform, Donnelly forced Louie Rothman's chin up to face him.

"Where's the child?" Donnelly said. "What did you do with him?"

They were all standing just a few feet in from the concourse. Five or six men had gathered in front of Louie Rothman, with one behind him; but they wen all dimly concealed, since light from the ornamenta arch over the gate left every detail but Louie Roth man's face, and Donnelly's extended and uplifted hand, in vague shadow. Calhoun, who was standing behind Donnelly, palms damp but throat dry, knew that whatever they did now would have to be done in one headlong spurt, and before Louie Rothman had a chance to collect himself. It was begun in that manner.

“I told you,” George O’Mara said. “I told you all along. They killed him. What else do you think they did with him?”

They would know very soon now, Calhoun told himself; if it had been done, it had been done. Had it? If the child was alive, they might be able to confuse Louie Rothman into admitting it by pretending complete disbelief in the possibility. Donnelly, of course, would continue to ask for the information they wanted from him — but not urgently; and all the rest of them would act as if the information was a favor, not a desperate necessity, which they might or might not allow Louie Rothman to present to them. The idea was to accomplish a subtle reversal in positions without letting Louie Rothman suspect what they were doing — to make him not fight against giving the information, but become frantically anxious to be allowed to prove it to them. An immediate evil, in addition, had to be presented to him as much more ominous than the certainty of a future one. That was Nolan’s job. He was well aware of it. He came up into the light now, beside Donnelly.

“Where’s the boy?” Donnelly said.

“Killed him!” O’Mara insisted. “Didn’t I tell you? Get Nolan to work on him. Get Nolan to give him what he give the brother up on Maple Avenue at six o’clock.”

“What brother?” Mike Frost said. “He don’t know anything about a brother; he don’t know anything about a kid, either. Didn’t you hear him tell us?”

Louie Rothman brought his upper lip away from his teeth. He whispered at Donnelly, apparently the only man who would listen to him:

“I swear to God — ”

Nolan slapped him, just as hard as he had the first time.

“Where’s the boy?” Donnelly said.

Calhoun woke up.

“He don’t know anything about anything,” Calhoun said. He put the bulldog jaw against Louie Rothman. “Carl’s dead, pal. Carl got it a couple of hours ago. You want it? Or you want to use your head?”

“He can’t talk,” O’Mara said. “He’s afraid to talk. Why did the big redhead shoot himself when we stopped that car out on Madison Avenue just now? They killed the kid, that’s why. They— ”

“Go on,” Mike Frost said. “Go on, Nolan. Give it to him.”

Nolan looked at Donnelly.

“Where’s the boy?” Donnelly said.

Louie Rothman shook his head blindly. He whispered something. Nolan slapped him again.

“Where’s the boy?” Donnelly said.

Louie Rothman fought against the man holding him.

“Bring his head up a little,” Nolan growled. “And keep him toward me. It’s no good if you let him twist away on you. Hold him up.”

The man standing in back of Louie Rothman locked his arms together.

“We’ve got the three of you,” Donnelly said, moving back into the shadow, leaving Nolan up there. “And we’ll get the woman. Where is she? Where does she have the boy?”

“Dead!” O’Mara insisted stubbornly. “What’s the sense of all this? Don’t use your hands on him any more, Nolan. Use the billy.”

Now Calhoun was beginning to breathe a bit raggedly. Was the child dead? Was that why Louie Rothman would not —

“Who’s got one?” Nolan asked.

There was confused movement in the darkness. Louie Rothman, his face shining with hate, terror and desperation, attempted to swing away from it; but the man in back, after letting him gain a foot or two with tremendous effort, swung him around again and held him rigid.

“Where’s the boy?” Donnelly said.

“Go on,” Mike Frost said. “Give it to him. Go on!”

“Dead,” O’Mara said. “What did they need him for? Nothing. The old man would have to pay them anyway. So — ”

“Where’s the boy?” Donnelly said.

“Keep him in position,” Nolan said. “I want to catch him just right. He’ll buck on you now. Watch him.” The billy whistled around, as if being hefted, and then smacked with a dull, heavy report on Nolan’s palm. “All right,” Nolan said. “Let’s go.”

“Where’s the boy?” Donnelly said. He waited; then his voice dropped petulantly, as if he had been forced to concede something. “I’ll be outside,” he said. “I don’t want to watch this. I got a bellyful with Carl two hours ago.”

“But we’ll be covered on this one,” O’Mara said. He chuckled liquidly. “And I’ll tell you why, Inspector. He run away down one of the platforms, understand, and a train hit him. That’s our story.”

“I still don’t like it,” Donnelly said. He shook his head twice. “No. I’ll wait outside.”

Louie Rothman moved terrified dumb eyes at him. “Hold him up,” Nolan said. “That’s it. Keep him toward me.”

He came up on his toes. Donnelly moved past him. Donnelly opened the door.

“Wait a minute!” Louie Rothman whispered at all of them. “Don’t! Get the other guy back here. The kid’s all right, I tell you! We never put a finger on him. I swear that to God.”

But Donnelly was back already.

“Where?” Donnelly said. “Don’t touch him, Nolan. Not yet. Not if he talks. Where’s that child?”

Half a minute later Calhoun erupted out through Gate 12, on his way to get the police cars ready for Donnelly. That was at twenty-five minutes to nine Saturday night. That was how and when, after three slaps of the open palm, they got the apartment address out of Louie Rothman.

PART FOUR

The address which they had obtained from the second Rothman brother turned out to be the top floor of a brick apartment house off University Avenue. Precinct and headquarters detectives, who had been scouring the area ever since last night, when Calhoun's man had lost the big redhead in it, surrounded the house and blocked it off within minutes after Donnelly telephoned them; but it did very little good. The apartment, when Donnelly got there, was discovered to be smaller and shabbier than 24 Maple Avenue, only three rooms, and just as empty.

So twice that night — once in Manhattan Depot with the big redhead, and near University Avenue with the Murchison boy — they were given a chance to finish everything off; and twice, by the matter of a few minutes each time, they were not quite able to manage it.

All the information they obtained at the apartment was supplied them by the house janitor. A woman giving the name of Mae Stanton had rented the place furnished several days ago; and she had been seen leaving it, with a small boy whom the janitor had not been told about, at approximately the time when Louie Rothman had been picked up in Manhattan Depot.

There seemed to be two possible explanations for her action. One was that she had become aware of unusual police activity in the neighborhood, and had got out of it, with the child, as a simple precautionary measure. The other, which Donnelly inclined to from the beginning, was that the big redhead must have planned it in this way from the very first.

But Calhoun barely considered that angle. What mattered to him at this moment was the news about the child —that he had not been harmed yesterday, because he had been seen by the apartment janitor no more than half an hour ago. Of course, even for Calhoun, there was a first horrible disappointment in learning that they had missed little Tony

Murchison by no more than that margin; and yet, mixed in with that feeling, and eventually replacing it, was an overwhelming sense of relief from the idea of his own personal responsibility in this thing, which had weighed on him more and more heavily ever since he had permitted those two men to walk out of Manhattan Depot Friday night.

So the child was alive, with no further question of it after the janitor's story; and if he had not been harmed so far — and in particular during those first few hours that were always the jumpiest and most dangerous ones — there was no reason why he should be disposed of at this time. Everything was changed; and Calhoun, even before they left the apartment on University Avenue, began to feel a not unreasonable optimism.

It was clear what they had to do now. Pay the big fellow, Calhoun told himself; get the child back alive and well — the really important matter; and then, with everything they had on him, go after the redhead, who must still believe that the police had not even the faintest idea of his identity.

It was almost inevitable that Donnelly, working from the same facts, would come to the same conclusion; but in the police car, when they were driving back to Manhattan Depot, Donnelly avoided that subject for the moment by discussing the other angle — Big Red. Yesterday, Donnelly said, he had needed the Rothman brothers to help him with the actual kidnaping; now he did not. Now all they represented to him was two thirds of the ransom money.

"So he walked out on them," Donnelly growled, meditating on that man with grimly concealed anger and exasperation. "Louie must have been with him all day, all last night; but when he got Louie out of that automobile at eight o'clock in front of the depot he was shut of the two of them once and for all. He knows where Murchison will be waiting to pay the money tomorrow; they don't. He took good care to make that phone call himself, you'll remember. Now he'll think that they can't possibly inform on him without implicating themselves. And of course he's right; he had them both by the back of their necks. Blast his dirty soul!"

It all seemed logical enough to Calhoun — probable if not yet determined;

and at eleven-thirty, when they arrived back at Manhattan Depot, it fitted in neatly with some facts which Lieutenant Nolan had extracted by that time from the second Rothman brother.

“The last one,” Nolan told them, “is a fellow named Coniff — Vincent Coniff. I called San Francisco on him right away, and they gave us the news on him. It’s not pretty, Arthur, but here it is. They’re wiring some pictures.”

Vincent Coniff was described as thirty-seven years old, six feet even and a hundred and eighty pounds — all approximately as Calhoun remembered him. He had worked briefly as a young man in the freight division of a California railroad, had lost his job when found in the illegal possession of railroad property; and had then graduated to other and graver business. While Calhoun was examining his police record, which was long and bad, Nolan furnished them with some additional information on him. For what it was worth, Nolan said, San Francisco had passed on a rumor that his own kind were beginning to avoid him; when he worked with other people they all seemed to come out on the short end of the stick, for one reason or another. Two of them had dropped out of sight completely; another had been found floating around in San Francisco Bay, shot through the head — shot through the back of the head.

“Probably one reason why he came east with Louie Rothman,” Nolan said. ”He’s one of those hundred per cent boys — all for him. Well, the news gets around after a while.“

All of this information substantiated Donnelly’s opinion of what had happened tonight; but Donnelly did not seem to feel any too good about it.

“Lower and lower,” Donnelly said, nodding very quietly to himself. “Worse and worse. The kind that hits bottom and stays there. Well, we’ll pay him, God help us; we’ve got to, now that we know the boy is all right. That’s the one thing I never expected. I don’t know why. Just — ” He buttoned his overcoat slowly.

“Who did?” Nolan said. “Now what about the car, Arthur? We put out an alarm on it at eight o’clock, after we got the license number. Does that

stick?”

“I’ll not endanger the child,” Donnelly said, in rather a heavy and tired way for Donnelly. “Not any more. A fella like this wouldn’t go down alone, d’ye see; he’d take the boy with him. No. We’ve not the right to stir on it now. Get McCann downtown. He’ll quash the car business for you.”

“The only thing to do,” Calhoun announced, almost lighthearted about this development. “Let him pick up his money — okay. You got his name; you got his record. Then you can really go to work on him. But get the kid first. That’s good sense.”

“Pray God it is,” Donnelly said. “Well — I’d better get over and tell that poor man in the Belvidere that we’re ready to give him a free hand on this from now on. Good night to you.”

Calhoun walked down to the main concourse with him, and from the information booth watched Donnelly’s egg-shaped bulk move ponderously but steadily for the Belvidere passage. Kind of a crazy way for everything to end, Calhoun reflected; after all the excitement, all the running around, they had still to do what they might have waited for from the very beginning — pay the ransom.

There was no other procedure open to them. With the child dead, or presumed dead, the thing to do was to go after the kidnapers; with the child alive, and proven alive, the thing to do was to let them strictly alone.

It would be stupid and cruel to risk anything going wrong during the ransom negotiations with a man like Vincent Coniff. And then his anonymity had been his only protection. Now that was gone, and it could only be a matter of time before Donnelly located him.

Logical, Calhoun told himself — unargumentative. Nobody liked it, but everybody knew what they had to do. Tomorrow Vincent Coniff would do just as he had told Murchison — send an innocent messenger in here for the overnight bag. And then he would make sure, before showing himself, that the police were not anywhere around. Could he do that?

Of course; and in hundreds of ways, Calhoun decided sourly. One messenger, at a previously appointed spot, might hand the bag to a

second messenger; and Vincent Coniff could have the bag switched in that manner, through relay after relay, all over the city. The woman, whom no one was prepared to recognize but the Bronx janitor — a feeble staff, could watch the first transfer in Manhattan Depot and warn Vincent Coniff if anything appeared suspicious about it; and then he would simply not appear to claim the overnight bag at all. He would be saddled with the child — a useless child; and what would he do about it?

Calhoun knew. Calhoun had no illusions on that score, not after the news that had come in from San Francisco. Donnelly may have been wrong before about Tony Murchison, but Donnelly was right now. Call everybody off the thing; let the ransom payment go through without any kind of a hitch; and then, but only then…

Calhoun looked back of him at the information booth. Right here, though, Calhoun remembered grimly; that was going to be the difficult thing to take. Tomorrow at twelve noon Willie Calhoun would have to stand around and twiddle his thumbs while… He muttered to himself, big jaw set, big shoulders twitching restlessly. Then Frances Kennedy appeared from the direction of the Belvidere passage. It was obvious at once that she had heard the news from Donnelly, because she came quickly and eagerly at Calhoun.

“Donnelly just told us,” she said, “when I was upstairs with Mr. Murchison. He told us that everything should be all right now. Well pay the money tomorrow and… Isn’t it wonderful?”

Calhoun, putting the hands on his hips, examined her critically. Now she looked like something, Calhoun volunteered; now she looked good.

“Now I feel good,” Frances said. Her expression was radiant. “The new woman. Just to know that Tony’s all right — ”

Calhoun, who didn’t feel too badly himself, looked about and then drew her over to the information booth rather furtively.

“Don’t spread this around,” Calhoun warned her, “but I think you better start watching yourself in this place. They tell me you’ve been getting mixed up with a bunch of pretty hard characters. I want to warn you about

some of them. There's a fellow they call Tough Willie Calhoun. Now watch out for him. He'll-"

She flushed; she flushed nicely.

"That's not fair! Just because… You stop it, Calhoun."

He gave her his very small, very homely grin.

"So it's stopped," Calhoun said. He put his thumb and forefinger together, holding them up at her with a daintily exaggerated gesture. "Right there. Why don't you go home and get some sleep for yourself?"

"Because I've got to talk to someone," Frances said, taking another deep breath. "Talk or bust."

"Full of vinegar, hah?" Calhoun said. "Okay. Let's talk. Pick your subject."

"I think I've picked it," Frances said, glancing seriously down the long sweep of the main concourse. "I'll admit something, Calhoun. I'm probably like everyone else in this town; I rush in and out of this station hundreds of times, and I never really look at it — or didn't until a couple of hours ago, when you had me up on the balcony over there. It's awfully big; it's — well, enormous. Just how many people walk in and out of here in one day? I can't even begin to imagine."

"Rail passengers?" Calhoun asked, pushing the hat up, settling himself by two elbows against the information booth, and feeling comfortably that she had come to the right man for that data. "Or just all around? If it's rail passengers, we handle an average of about two hundred thousand a day, counting in the commuters; if it's the other thing, your guess is as good as mine.

"It's this way, you understand. You'd have to throw in the mobs that come in here for one of the subway stations, or to meet somebody, or to say good-by to somebody — or just to watch all the excitement and commotion. And how big is it? Well, I'd hate to figure. But you can take a look at the concourse here, and add in the lower level and the track platforms, and the railroad offices over there just on top of the track gates, and the barbershops and arcades and the stores and the restaurants and

the three hotels and the movie theater and the art gallery and the — ” He pointed up. “How high is that roof?” he demanded. “Go ahead. Take a guess.”

“I certainly will not,” Frances said, very firm about it. “You’re not going to catch me out, Willie Calhoun. You tell me.”

“Eight stories,” Calhoun announced, as triumphant about it as if he had proved that point against the most cunning and elusive kind of opposition. “That’s all. Nothing, eh? And how many people do you suppose we can squeeze in here at one time?”

“Oh — ” Frances considered. “Ten thousand? Twelve thousand?”

“Ten thousand?” Calhoun exclaimed, a little annoyed with her because any underestimation of the importance or capacity of Manhattan Depot always touched him on an extremely vulnerable point. “That’s some guess, that is. I’ve seen thirty thousand in here — that I know myself; and we were handling them, too.”

He was silent for a moment or so, turning his head to look up over toward the main ramp; and then he gave Frances a very serious nod and said that what they had in here was a city, and not such a small city, either. Every possible convenience, Calhoun assured her, could be found somewhere in the station area; they had a hospital up there on the balcony, a doctor, nurses, a small morgue, their own private police force, as she knew by this time, and just about anything else she could think of.

He began warming to the subject. He took her arm, not familiarly, but with the air of accepting her into a rather select fraternity, and indicated a shelf or niche at the extreme end of the east balcony. Last winter, Calhoun said, a hobo had lived up there for three weeks, and lived good. Everything free — light, heat, amusement, the afternoon organ concert, all the magazines he could read lying around in the waiting room, a different crowd every fifteen minutes to panhandle from, and half a dozen restaurants to pick and choose from when he had acquired himself a stake.

“And some day,” Calhoun added, pointing a sober forefinger at her, “we’re going to turn up a fellow in here who’s been living on us for years. I just

feel that. You can't keep track of a place like this — or I can't, and it's my job. It's too big. It's got too many people shoving around in it all the time. You take a fellow like that Helpful Harry. All right. He was walking around in here month after month before one of us got our hands on him. Sure we had his description, and we'd have been able to pick him up from it on the Staten Island ferry, or an East 180th Street express. But in here — no dice. It went on for months."

Then he told Frances, who had been rather intrigued by the name, about this Helpful Harry. A smooth character, Calhoun said grimly, who made up to old ladies in the waiting room — very polite, very helpful. His angle was to pretend, whatever train they were catching out of Manhattan Depot, that he could get them on it ahead of time, through a way he knew, so that they could pick out a good seat for themselves; and then, of course, he escorted them to a comparatively quiet part of the station, grabbed their pocketbooks, and gave them a shove down some stairs.

"But you got him eventually?" Frances said.

Calhoun glanced at her, and then blew, as if reminiscently, on the knuckles of his right hand.

"That we did," Calhoun said. "Yes, ma'am. That we certainly did."

"I think I know who got him," Frances said. She imitated his habitual gesture by putting a forefinger against his chest. "That Tough Willie you were just talking about. Right?"

"What are you doing?" Calhoun growled at her. "Patting the dog? Oh, I spotted him Tuesday in the waiting room making up to an old lady from South Bend, Indiana. A nice old lady. All right. You get a feeling about these characters after a while, or I do; so when he starts downstairs with the old lady I'm after them. And I'm right there when he tries to ease her out onto one of the commuters' platforms. He runs then; he runs like a goat; but I got him. That old lady had three dollars and forty-five cents to last her as eating money until she got home again; and she still had it when her train pulled out of here that afternoon. I felt kind of good about it, too. Once in a while you just — " He decided that Frances was looking at

him in rather a curious way. He squared the shoulders. “Not that it bothers me personally, you understand. You got a job to do and you do it. That’s all.”

“Well, of course,” Frances said. But something warmed her. “I don’t suppose she exactly thought of you as Tough Willie.”

“Oh, I should worry,” Calhoun said. He elevated his chin in the general direction of the waiting room. “I think you’re getting the wrong idea. You know something? I can’t stand dumbness. An old lady like that is one thing, of course; but I can’t stand the kind who come in here and lose kids, wallets, railroad tickets, luggage — anything they have that isn’t tied onto them. Stupid? You wouldn’t believe it if I told you. Half of them don’t know the difference between standard and daylight time.”

“Now that’s an exaggeration,” Frances protested. “Everybody knows daylight time is an hour earlier. It’s simple.”

“An hour later,” Calhoun said, curt with her. “And don’t begin to figure it out here. Take my word for it. I know. And that waiting room… Well, you come in here and spend an hour with me sometime. I’ll open your eyes. There’s a place where you really run into characters. All kinds; all conditions; day after day; night after night. More goes on in there in half an hour than… Look. You’re sure you want to hear about this? A lot of people — ” his tone indicated to her what sort of people he thought they were — “can’t be bothered. They look at something and don’t even see it.”

“I think that’s very true,” Frances said, doing her best to appear brightly interested in the waiting-room characters at Manhattan Depot. “I’ve often __ ”

And then she yawned tremendously, before she was prepared to cope with it, and said: “Oh, good Lord!” and gave Willie Calhoun the freest and most uninhibited smile she had ever given him.

He crooked the forefinger at her. “Out this way,” he said. He took her down the cab passage, handed her into the first taxi in line and closed the door. “Now you listen,” he said. “You go home and get some sleep for yourself. And no argument.”

“No argument,” Frances said, meek enough there. Then she put her head out at him through the cab window. “And I wasn’t patting the dog, either. Good night, Willie Calhoun.”

“Tough Willie,” Calhoun advised her. “And don’t forget. If I see you around here any more tonight, I’ll be kind of annoyed. You go home.”

She did; but she also waved back at him through the cab window. So she wasn’t patting the dog, Calhoun told himself, spinning his hat around on one finger and looking after her taxicab; what did that mean? Probably not very much, of course; just a remark that anyone might… A cab driver came up beside him.

“Who’s the head?” he wanted to know. “She ain’t bad, Willie. You doing all right for yourself there?”

Calhoun turned slowly, and Calhoun eyed him up and down slowly.

“You asking for a belt in the mouth?” Calhoun said, not dramatic at all.

“Well, no,” the cabbie said. He seemed surprised and uneasy. “I was just makin‘ a crack, Willie. Just a crack.”

“Don’t do it again,” Calhoun said — very gently, very softly. “Got it? Okay. That’s the boy now. That’s the good boy. Remember I told you.”

He went away from there, swaggering a little with that heavy-shouldered walk of his; and not too long afterward he settled himself for the night on a sofa in Captain Rousseau’s anteroom. A no-good way to live, Calhoun decided, while some illumination from the main concourse slatted in at him through Venetian blinds. Who cared what happened to Willie Calhoun? Who did he have to worry about whether he ever went home to that room of his on Second Avenue?

He stared up at the ceiling for some time. She wasn’t patting the dog; so what? You could figure that a million ways. “Ah, grow up,” Calhoun advised himself. “Look in the mirror, Bullfrog. Grow up.” He put one shoulder under a cushion, one palm under his cheek, and dug in.

But he went to sleep still thinking of Frances Kennedy, not the child. Everything seemed to be quite settled at that time. They would pay the

money tomorrow; they would recover Tony Murchison; and then they would go out after Vincent Coniff. There was practically nothing to it. It was almost done.

It was just about twenty minutes to one Sunday morning.

At five minutes to four, during the quietest and coldest part of the night, a young patrolman named Tom Hansen stopped in for a cup of coffee at an all-night cafeteria on Lexington Avenue in the mid-Eighties. He drank it, having the run of the house, in a tile and glass kitchen with Eddie, the counterman; and afterward he walked out around the kitchen partition, around the end of the service counter, just as a big fellow wearing a brown overcoat came into the cafeteria from the avenue entrance.

This man, who was carrying a six or seven-year-old boy, started back toward Tom Hansen, saw him, and with a stolidly unexcited air shifted the boy from his right shoulder over to his left. He put his right hand in his overcoat pocket and kept it there, as if fumbling for a handkerchief. The only noteworthy thing about him, to Tom Hansen, was the way he looked at you — out of, as it were, sullen and very cold depths behind unnaturally pale blue eyes.

He went on into the rest room. Tom Hansen buttoned himself up, adjusted his cap and spun the night stick into position deftly. Outside, standing against the curb, was a gray sedan whose description stirred something in his mind; but the stir did not mean very much until he glanced at the license plate over the rear bumper.

He stopped in back of the sedan. A woman, a small boy and a big redheaded man who must be apprehended with extreme caution, he remembered then. It was true, of course, that the alarm on these people had been lifted several hours ago, but that was just after Tom Hansen had come on duty. And what happened now happened because it was very

simple to flash an alarm to every precinct house in the city, and very difficult to call it back once the night rounds had begun.

Tom Hansen, who only wanted to do the right thing at the right time, now glanced quickly up and down Lexington Avenue — all shadowy and deserted at this hour, no squad car anywhere, no taxi, not even a foot passenger. First the woman, Tom Hansen thought, just a bit excited; and right now, before the big fellow came out here again from the cafeteria rest room.

He moved over to the sedan. The woman saw him. She scrambled over for the door on the other side of the car, but Tom Hansen yanked his door open and crooked his left arm around her neck. She began clawing at him without a word, face set, and the difficult thing then was that he had to get her out of the car and watch the cafeteria door at the same time. He could not quite manage it.

The big fellow appeared — but the big fellow was still carrying the boy between himself and Tom. Tom Hansen, shoving the woman down onto the front seat, fired low, for the man’s legs. He missed. The big fellow ducked back hurriedly into the cafeteria.

Tom Hansen had to take care of the woman then — had to get her inside the cafeteria, shove her at Eddie the counterman, and yell at him to hold this one. He lost a few seconds and a few yards. After that, knocking some chairs out of his way, he ran around and between white-topped tables to the side entrance.

It was not exactly the right thing to do at the right time; it was, in fact, the impetuous sort of action against which he had been warned during his first week at the police training school. The big man had not run very far. Now, from his position just to the left of the side entrance, he moved up behind Tom Hansen, shoved his automatic against the back of the blue overcoat, and fired. Tom Hansen fell to his knees, choked, rolled over, attempted to turn. The big fellow went after him, kicked him, kicked him again and then kicked his police revolver into the gutter.

All this time the gray sedan had been standing in front of the Lexington

Avenue entrance with the motor purring. The big fellow ran for it, made it and tossed the child into it. He had a seamed face and bad skin; his lips were apart savagely; the ends were curved up into sallow cheeks. The woman screamed at him from the cafeteria. He started for her. Then he saw Eddie the counterman knock her down and grab a gun out from beneath the cash register.

He hesitated. He ran to the driver's side of the car, protecting himself; he thought hurriedly. He crouched up on the running board, rested his automatic on the roof, and fired several times at Eddie the counterman, but without hitting him, and then several times at the woman, but without hitting her.

The plate-glass window cracked out at him in long, noisy shivers; he ducked. Tom Hansen came lurching around the comer and flung the night stick at him, and the big fellow snapped his automatic futilely. He still hesitated. Then he swung into the car, smashed it into gear and raced south down Lexington Avenue.

The little boy had frozen himself up in the right-hand corner of the front seat. He did not understand what had happened around the cafeteria, and the noise, the shouting, the quickness, all terrified him, as so many things had terrified him since late Friday afternoon; but what frightened him even more were the names which Vincent Coniff began whispering at him. Tony Murchison knew instinctively that they were bad names; he also knew instinctively that the man hated him.

His breathing became irregular.

They raced through quiet residential streets, not in any direct line, but heading jaggedly, by swinging left and then right at every successive corner, in the general direction of west and south. The child was swung back against the door, hurting himself; but he did not cry, because he knew the man did not want him to cry. All the time the man continued to whisper at him, savagely breathless. He had a pretty smart father, the man said. No cops. Sure. That was what he had promised, anyway. But in his head…

They roared through the 79th Street cut across Central Park, turned south again, west again, into a neighborhood of brownstone boardinghouses. And they stopped there, in the shadows midway along one block, because Vincent Coniff realized very suddenly that the car was going to be poison to him from now on.

Quite obviously it had been recognized in some way. How? Had the Rothman brothers been located? Had their car become known? There was no way for him to decide those questions. Get away from it, he warned himself. Now. He reached over for the child, slapped him, said thickly: “You little — !” and slapped him again.

The child put both his hands up to his mouth. Vincent Coniff shook him.

“Yes, sir,” the child whispered. He wanted to agree with the man; perhaps then the man would not hit him again.

But the man did.

“Yes, sir,” the man said, glancing back hurriedly through the rear window. “No, sir. Yes, sir, no, sir. You little — !”

He abandoned the car, taking the child with him, and then turning back after a few steps to possess himself of a gray overnight bag with a blue handle. But then, before he was halfway down to the avenue corner, Vincent Coniff began to appreciate his position. Four o’clock Sunday morning; no hotel to go to; no room anywhere; no apartment or house, if the Rothman brothers had been caught; even the car gone; and eight hours to wait before he could get his hands on the ransom money.

He sheltered himself and the boy in a store entrance, his mind racing under so much pressure that it seemed to coil in on itself tightly and more tightly. If the Rothman brothers had been caught, both the Bronx apartment and the house on Maple Avenue would be under observation. Not at either of those places, then. Where?

The money practically in his hands, waiting for him, everything set, Vincent Coniff thought blindly — not a worry; and then because the father had tried to outsmart himself, and because the kid had wanted to use a rest room…

Get rid of him, Vincent Coniff thought; and right now. He moved back with the child into the store entry, into the darkest part of the store entry, but then he stopped. Wait a minute, he thought. He had something while he had the kid; he had a chance at the ransom money. But without him?

He looked at the child in a very steady and fixed way, not blinking, jaws clamped together, nostrils expanded slightly. The boy, his breath catching on itself every few seconds, took refuge in a pitiful and ineffectual six-year-old dignity, and kept his head turned away into the wall.

No, Vincent Coniff thought. Now they were all sweating, and they'd all continue to sweat, so long as he had little Buster Brown with him. So keep him. But where? Not out on the streets in this weather, and with every cop in New York looking for them. Where?

Something came to him. He thought of one place in which, at four o'clock Sunday morning, he and the child would be accepted without question or scrutiny. But he was afraid of that place. No, he thought uneasily. Was he crazy to even think of it? "Shut up!" he warned the child. "Keep quiet! Do you hear what I'm telling you?" But of course the child had not said a word; he was shivering either from what he felt, or from the icy February wind that was sweeping in at them from the street in bitter gusts.

Then his first thought came back to Vincent Coniff. Why not, it urged him. Where was the last place in which the police would be looking for him? Why didn't he at least think about it?

He did. A picture of Manhattan Depot — almost the one spot in a city of millions of people where he and the child might find refuge at this hour rose up inside him, and his mind scurried around it in erratic flashes. The concourse, the arcades, the lower level, the subway passages, the balcony… He could probably get into it now without question, even with Tony Murchison; but then how could he keep the two of them out of sight there until twelve noon?

But he had studied Manhattan Depot all last week, one among thousands of other people, familiarizing himself very carefully with its assets, its limitations and its capabilities; and now he began to remember something

about the balcony just left of the escalator as one entered Manhattan Depot — something important. He remained very savagely uncertain for a moment. But why not, he thought then. Why not? Where else was possible?

He forced himself to go over the possibility step by step. He did not have the woman to help him any more, no one to be right in Manhattan Depot when the overnight bag was left by the information booth — no one to report back to him as to whether or not it looked safe to contact the messenger. But suppose he could watch the information booth himself— see what the father did, see what the police did? What then? Could that provide another way, and perhaps even a much safer way, for him to get hold of the overnight bag?

All or nothing, Vincent Coniff decided there; or all for nothing. Those were the only two choices he had now. Of course he could get rid of the child easily; but where could he leave the body so that he could be sure no one would find it before twelve noon? And if they did find it — everything gone, then. Everything!

But the other way remained open to him. Get the kid down into Manhattan Depot, hide there, watch the police and the old man, and keep the pressure on them because they wouldn't know where little Buster Brown was, or what was happening to him. Then they'd have to leave that money at the information booth; the father would insist on it. And maybe…

He made his decision; and to prepare for it he even attempted to reassure the child.

"What's the matter with little Buster Brown?" he said. "You're doing all right, Buster. You're lucky. You want to go home now? I'll take you home if you keep quiet about it. Will you?"

He waited.

"Buster," he said. "Answer me when I talk to you, Buster. Go on. Answer."

His voice had flattened out.

"I'd give you soldiers," the boy whispered at him. "And a red sled. It's new,

man.”

“I asked you something,” Vincent Coniff said. “Will you keep quiet?”

The boy nodded blindly.

“Yes, sir.”

“Yes, sir,” Vincent Coniff said. “No, sir. You’ve got manners, you have. Did you know that, Buster? You’ve got everything in the world. You’ve even got an old man who tried to outsmart himself. I think he’s going to be sorry for that, Buster. I think so. Now you’re going to keep quiet, remember. Not a peep out of you. What’s that sled like? Do you think I could ride on it?“

He walked out into the street, carrying the child and the overnight bag. And he kept talking to the child, trying to make little jokes with him; but he never looked at the child. Instead, at each cross street, he glanced around quickly with the pale blue eyes narrowed and intent. So, keeping to shabby neighborhoods, and protecting himself from passing automobiles, from belated or early rising pedestrians, in tenement doorways, he started out at about ten minutes past four that morning for Manhattan Depot.

He reached it in half an hour — a big shadowy building occupying much more than a square city block, the tremendous arched windows reflecting only a faint glow from within the concourse, the store fronts outside all dark, no one standing around in this weather and at this time, and only one couple murmuring to each other in the east arcade.

Vincent Coniff passed them — quiet there, quiet as the boy but very tense and alert, the right hand never leaving his overcoat pocket. The overhead lights were off now in the main concourse, the balcony lay dim under uneasy shadow; and from the end of the arcade, where Vincent Coniff kept well back from the balcony railing, it was possible to see one of Calhoun’s railroad patrolmen chatting idly to a clerk at the information booth. The couple behind Vincent Coniff in the arcade paid no attention to him; Calhoun’s patrolman never saw him.

And the balcony was as he remembered it. He moved around up there, not making any noise, investigating everything; and luck favored him. At fifteen minutes to five Sunday morning he found what he was looking for

— sanctuary for himself and the child, warmth, shelter, security, concealment.

At that time Calhoun was sleeping on the other side of the concourse, just across from him; the father, in Room 908 at the Belvidere, was lying back on a couch with one arm over his face, while George O'Mara read a newspaper under a lamp and eyed him covertly every so often; and on an operating table at the Lenox Hill Hospital, between coughs, and while they were preparing the anesthetic for him, Tom Hansen was whispering his information to a precinct lieutenant.

Lights woke Calhoun some time afterward. He sat up quickly on the anteroom sofa, blinking at Lieutenant Nolan, who was just taking his hand away from the switch, and then blinking at Donnelly, who was almost across the room to Captain Rousseau's office. Calhoun posed awkwardly on one elbow for a moment, mind empty, but gathering itself together; then he got up in a very hurried manner and followed Nolan.

Donnelly threw his overcoat on a chair behind him. Something up, Calhoun warned himself, when he noticed that the heavy lower part of Donnelly's face looked heavier and more impassive than usual. "What?" he asked Donnelly. Donnelly told him in about four sentences.

"So we've got them all now," Donnelly added, putting his fingertips on the desk and leaning forward on them. "All but the only one who ever mattered a curse. And everything's blown to hell. He knows we're after him. He's been warned by what happened. And he has the child."

Nolan, who had also removed his coat, sat down without making any sort of comment. Callioun, of course, had nothing intelligent to say yet. He just stared dumbly at Donnelly, at Nolan and back at Donnelly again.

"If this fellow had an apartment," Donnelly said, staring down in a fierce way at Captain Rousseau's desk blotter; "if he had a room to go to; if he

had any kind of a hole or corner left for himself now — we wouldn't have to ask ourselves what he did to the Murchison boy. We'd know. But I think we've got him out into the open this time. Otherwise he wouldn't have been driving around all last night in that car. Will either of you tell me where he could hide a body, even a child's body, at four o'clock Sunday morning? That might have stopped him. It's the only thing that would have stopped him."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," Nolan said, rubbing his jaws wearily. "He'd have places, all right. Central Park. A cellar, maybe. The Hudson River."

Donnelly glanced at him.

"I don't believe it," Donnelly said. He said it, deliberately or not, with just the right amount of conviction. "He wouldn't risk us finding the child. He can't. He's fast, Martin; he's shifty; he's thinking every minute."

"Let him," Nolan said, very grim there. "He knows he's identified now, through the woman, and that means he'll need the money to make a run for it. He's identified whether he makes a try for the money or whether he doesn't; so he'll try for it. He hasn't got anything to lose. He's done anyway. He knows it. And that means he's going to make one last stab at that overnight bag."

"One last stab!" Calhoun said, everything coming at him in one rush. "Wait a minute! I thought that was all settled. I thought we were going to pay him first. Aren't we?"

Donnelly looked at him from the corners of the black eyes without shifting position.

"God save your head," Donnelly told him. "Can't you understand a man like that? Weren't you told last night the kind of record he had? And can't you see the idea he's going to have in him now? That the father betrayed him; that all the time the father promised him we'd be taking no part in this, we were just waiting for him to make a mistake.

"Now he's made it. He ran off and left the woman on Lexington Avenue, after trying to kill her to shut her mouth. He didn't manage it, and he knows he didn't manage it. So he's just been identified through her,

Calhoun — as he thinks. That means he's done, as Nolan just told you, and that he knows he's done. Why? Because the father betrayed him. How do you suppose he's going to square things with the father, Calhoun? Go on now. Tell me. He still has the child, remember."

Coldness ran up the back of Calhoun's legs. He shook his head mutely.

"No idea at all?" Donnelly said. He seated himself. "I wouldn't try to hide it, Calhoun. That's no good. He'll kill the boy. When? That's our problem. Now, before the ransom, when it might spoil everything for him — or afterward? I'd say afterward. Afterward, or just before. He's a professional, mind you. He'll do this thing the professional way."

Nolan stirred.

"Everything's different now," Nolan said. "Everything's shifted around. Yesterday he had the woman to help him; now he doesn't. Yesterday he didn't think we had any description of him; now he knows we do. So we've got two changes right there — two very important changes. Considering them, Arthur, how can he figure on getting his hands on that money now? It's out of the question, isn't it? I agree with you that he'd like to try for it. But I can't see —"

"We can do one thing now," Donnelly said, heavy about it. "Just one. We can work with what we have. Martin — what he's given us." He got up and began to move around restlessly, and Calhoun shook his head twice in a ferocious attempt to rouse it to sharpness and wakefulness. He began to understand what Nolan meant — that yesterday, with the woman to watch the information booth for Vincent Coniff, and to warn him if the police attempted to question or follow the messenger, all the advantages were on the other side, or seemed to be. Now, however —

"The first thing," Donnelly said. He stopped about two feet in front of a wall and fixed his eyes on it. "We'll know him in here. Of course. He understands that part. But if we'd know him in here, we'd know him anyplace else, wouldn't we? Let's go back a bit. Why did he pick Manhattan Depot in the beginning? Because he figured he'd be able to cover himself in the crowd. That was perfect when we didn't know who he

was. Now it isn't, and now he can do only one of two things today.

"There's no other possibility open to him. He can send a messenger for the money, knowing we're going to stop and question the messenger, because he hasn't got anyone to watch what goes on in here and warn him about us; or he can try to pick up the overnight bag himself. Now. If he uses the messenger, he has to figure that we can find out where he intends to pick up the bag, and that we can cover the place and wait for him. He's got to show himself at one spot or another. That's determined. When he does, he knows we're going to be waiting for him. Now where will he show himself, where would he have the best chance to get away with his money? On a ball field in Central Park, back of the Yankee Stadium, in Calvary Cemetery? No. This fellow's too smart and shifty to make a mistake of that kind. He won't select a place where he'll stick out like a sore thumb. My idea —"

He turned slowly, first nodding at Nolan and Calhoun, and then past them at the concourse window.

"What about downstairs there, where everything he tried went off perfectly for him? Where else, even if we know him, and even if we're waiting for him, would he have more chance of getting hold of that overnight bag than in a spot where there's hundreds of them all around — and thousands of people? I'll tell you what he's planning to do. He's going to get hold of that bag himself, or try to. And he's going to do it right here."

"That's a pretty big assumption," Nolan said dubiously.

"What other choice does he have?" Donnelly demanded. Again he put his fingertips on the desk and leaned forward. "If he uses the messenger, hell just be walking into the thing blindly. Do you think he's the kind of man to do that? He's kept a jump ahead of us so far — in here, anyway. He'll try it again. Mark my words."

"But you just said he'd have the kid with him," Calhoun put in huskily. "How can he — "

"He'll dispose of the child," Donnelly said. "That's settled. But he won't give us five or six hours to find the body. He'll give us fifteen or twenty

minutes — no chance at all, in other words. Hell kill the child sometime about eleven-thirty. That's the logical thing to do. Then he'll come down here and take his chance."

"And we're going to sit around and wait for him?" Calhoun said. He walked around the desk, stiff-legged, at Donnelly; he would have pushed him if Donnelly were on his feet. "We're going to be too late again — is that what you mean?"

"I'll tell you," Donnelly said, the black eyes very small, bright and steady. "You go out and look for him, Calhoun; start walking the streets. Go ahead. Start ringing apartment doorbells. But I'll stay here. I'll wait for him where I know he's going to come."

Calhoun rubbed his mouth. That was something he had not considered yet. Where were they to look for Vincent Coniff and the child? What opening had they to start from?

"I was up at four-thirty," Donnelly said. "Nolan and I. That's over an hour ago. We've done what we could on it, Calhoun. We're checking the hotels and the all-night restaurants and the all-night movies; and we're trying to cover every subway train and every subway station we can manage. He's got to get off the streets. We know that. Better than you. We'll get him if he tries to ride around on the subway until noon today — or if he tries a hotel, or any of those places I just mentioned. We've put his description, and the child's description, on the radio this morning. We've got extra police out all over the city.

"But for the rest of it, I'd say we have to wait here for him, God help us — and God help that child. I can't tell you that it's possible or even likely for us to save the child any more; that's as God wills. And I'm inclined to doubt it, just between us here. What we can do, and the only thing we can do, is to put our hands on Mr. Vincent Coniff as soon as possible. I think our best chance to do that is right here. And if you don't agree with me, Calhoun, you can try whatever you want yourself. Now I've got things to do. You'll stop worrying me."

Calhoun stood motionless for a moment. Then he looked over at Nolan —

vaguely, painfully.

“I did it,” he said, declaring himself with much difficulty. “That kid was alive when I let Coniff walk out of here Friday night. So I did it. That’s what I — ”

“We’ll have no commotion,” Donnelly said, without even glancing around at him. “I don’t doubt but that we’ll all sleep on this for the rest of our lives. There’s many a thing I might have done, or Nolan, or any of us. We let the car get out of this neighborhood at eight o’clock last night, when we knew it was down here. We didn’t stop and question Carl Rothman Friday, when we might have got all the information we needed from him. But we’ll have no commotion about it now, Calhoun — not so long as we’ve got work to do. And I want you to mind that. If you can’t, get out of here and keep out of my way.”

Calhoun gave him a silent and haggard nod; then Calhoun sat down and put his head in his hands and kept it there. The telephoning began.

PART FIVE

That was at a quarter of six Sunday morning. Within an hour, various police officials had begun to crowd into Captain Rousseau's office — two or three detective lieutenants, several captains, a deputy chief inspector known to Calhoun only by reputation, and a big, solid-faced man named Enright from the New York office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Donnelly, standing before all of them with his hands stuck loosely into his hip pockets, and with a tired but unemotional look around the eyes, first sketched out everything that had been done after Calhoun discovered the boy's clothes in Locker 572 Friday night. They had, Donnelly said, done what they could on it, and the best they could; but that was past. And now their only chance at the boy, if, indeed, they had any chance at all, was through Vincent Coniff.

"His pictures came through from San Francisco a couple of hours ago," Donnelly told them. "That's one help. But we've got to remember this: a picture's one thing, and a man's another. If this fella intends to pick up the overnight bag in here himself, for the reasons I just suggested to you, he'll first probably try to get hold of another hat and coat somewhere, or a pair of eyeglasses, or maybe a scarf. Well, those things might fool some of us, I suppose, but I don't think they're likely to fool all of us. And there's one detail about the arrangements that kind of sticks in my head, for some reason. He wants a particular bag used for the ransom — the one Calhoun found in the locker Friday night. Why? I wonder if any of you see in that the thing I do?"

"I'd say it's suggestive," Enright declared, another deliberate man with a deliberate manner. "If it's a new bag, the cheap, standard kind you can pick up at any drugstore, he might figure on ringing in a duplicate on us. I think that's obvious."

Donnelly agreed with a very slow, grim nod. "

That was my idea. I might add that it still is. The perfect thing, d'ye see, would be for all of us to go chasing off somewhere after a bag filled with old newspapers, while Mr. Vincent Coniff, or that woman of his, walked out of here with the money without anyone laying a finger on them.

"That might have been the arrangement yesterday. But now the woman can't help him, so that if he's up to any funny business about the bag hell have to carry it through himself. And right there you have the most important point I'd like to suggest to you now. After Murchison leaves his bag by the information booth at twelve noon, I don't want it to get out of our sight for two seconds. It might, mind you, because this fella knows exactly what he wants to do, and just how he intends to handle the whole thing; and we're only feeling around after him, in the dark, God help us.

"How could he manage it? It could be simple enough, the way I see it. If he uses a messenger — and there's that chance still — he could have the bag checked for him, or put in one of those public lockers, or sent somewhere on a railroad ticket. We've got to cover all these possibilities; he doesn't; he just has to decide on one. That's to his advantage. Well, what are we going to do about that? What can we do about it? Just this. I don't want any of us to assume, if the bag is checked or put in a locker somewhere, that the bag we see after that is the same one, even if it comes out of the same place. I'd like all of you to watch against that very carefully; and I'd like all of you to make sure that your men watch against it very carefully."

He straightened up from the desk, clasping his hands behind him, lowering his round head, and moving the sharp black eyes from Calhoun at one end of the line of men facing him to Nolan at the other.

"Now. If we get him, if we're going to have any chance at all to get him, we'll have to be quick, sure and careful in what we do. Calhoun tells me there might be fifteen thousand people in here at noontime; so we'll have to consider, despite all of us, that he might possibly sneak in through some hole or corner. If he does, he'll be watching the bag, and sniffing around like a hungry dog. That means we've got to give him some leeway

with whatever he tries to do with the bag; otherwise, if it looks too dangerous to him, he'll sneak out of here and maybe we'll never get our hands on him. If we nab him at noontime there might be a chance — a very slim chance — that we can recover the child safely. But if we miss him we've missed out on the boy, too.

"Remember that. And don't underestimate the man, any of you. People like him develop an instinct for people like us. You all know it. You've all seen it. We might save the child yet, if everything goes well. Of course it's a poor chance, and I've admitted it to you, but it's all we have. Now, for the child's sake, and for the sake of that poor man eating his heart out over there in the Belvidere, let's do the best we can with it. Calhoun. Where's that architect's plan?"

Calhoun had listened to all this without a word, head down a bit, bulldog features impassive; but at that moment he saw ice-cold blue eyes, shallow jaws and a harsh mouth just as sharply and vividly as he had seen them Friday night, in the flesh. He knew, therefore, what would happen to Tony Murchison — or what perhaps had already happened to him — better than any of them; and that was when he began to have a tormenting and intolerable suspicion, an insane suspicion, that everybody, even Donnelly and Enright, might be outmaneuvered today in Manhattan Depot, and for the last time. A feeling which was much like the worst possible kind of physical fear, and the more intense and overpowering because it was for the child, and not for Calhoun, gathered in him, and became from then on extremely persistent and oppressive.

There was, however, very little opportunity to observe it building up and up in himself. Donnelly and Enright, after listening to suggestions and countersuggestions, organized and decided upon a master plan for Manhattan Depot at twelve noon; and Calhoun, as the one person most familiar with the terminal layout, with every foot of it from subcellar to roof, had almost innumerable things to do between eight and eleven o'clock that morning.

He had to post men in many different station areas; he had to find

uniforms for some of them; and he had to consult with Donnelly and Enright as to the best and most strategic positions available near the subway turnstiles, and on the cab platforms, and by the hotel entrances and around the incoming trains — at every place, in short, through which the usual Sunday throng of humanity gained access to one part or another of Manhattan Depot.

Some of these men, the ones who would be permitted to wear civilian clothes inside the station, were instructed to keep moving around constantly, the endless-chain idea, in order to avoid becoming noticeable at one point. Other men, who were to dress and act like depot workers, gate attendants, guards and so on, were assigned certain fixed posts at which it was assumed they could occupy themselves like ordinary station employees. All of them, in addition, had to be made familiar with the busiest arcades and passages; and at nine o’clock all of them, in an employees’ dressing room downstairs, had to be briefed thoroughly by Calhoun as to just how Vincent Coniff had dressed, walked and acted when he had been seen in the station Friday night.

So the preparations were begun well and carefully. The only idea which no one seemed to entertain for a moment, not even Calhoun, was that during these hours on Sunday morning, long before the scheduled time of the ransom payment, it was not the police, at least primarily, who were making their arrangements to receive Vincent Coniff; but Vincent Coniff, from his sanctuary right over the heart of Manhattan Depot, who was carefully and cold-bloodedly making his arrangements to elude the police.

He stood crouched in a small, dim room — an irregular cubicle, really — all during this period, observing Captain Rousseau’s office on the north balcony through a peephole which he had scratched for himself between a couple of rough boards. Between seven and eight o’clock his attention had been attracted to the police office in Manhattan Depot by the number

of men who were streaming in and out through the doorway on various errands. There was, and time after time, a stocky and tough-looking fellow — Calhoun; big, grim Nolan, who had what he was written all over him; neat and dapper Mike Frost —a typical dick, Vincent Coniff decided contemptuously; and many others whom he classified and then studied with the infallible instinct which Donnelly had claimed for him.

Little Tony Murchison slept soundlessly. He lay in one corner behind Vincent Coniff, in that tiny chamber as bare and dim as the inside of a packing case; he had the big brown overcoat around him, and he slept with his two arms, baby-fashion, up over his head. He slept deeply and tranquilly, and just now Vincent Coniff had to pay very little attention to him. Outside, however, was the cathedral hush and dimness which always brooded over Manhattan Depot at this hour on Sunday morning; and on the concourse, in addition to the men whom Vincent Coniff was classifying and memorizing very methodically, one by one, was only a scattering of early passengers on their way to visit friends and relatives in the suburbs, or in nearby New England.

All of these people displayed a scrubbed and shining Sunday expression, from small children still rosy-faced as a result of the outdoors cold to sedate elders burdened with parcels and Sunday newspapers. And the concourse itself appeared to share something of that weekly brightness and newness. The walls and floors were spotlessly clean after their night’s washing; brasswork gleamed from pools of clear shadow around the track gates; the balcony pillars had a lustrous polish to them; and the big clock over the information booth shone like buffed gold.

The physical details were all there, and sunlight was beginning to glint coldly on the arched windows high up over the east escalator, but Vincent Coniff was not concerned with matters of that sort. He was concentrating now on two things — the disposition and number of Donnelly’s men, and the problem of how to get his hands on that overnight bag.

Yesterday, as Donnelly suspected, Vincent Coniff had meant to have the woman watching the information booth in here at twelve noon. She was to

have entered the terminal about eleven, carrying the second or duplicate bag under a car blanket; and was to have checked the bag at one of the Manhattan Depot baggage rooms — the smallest one, up on the east balcony, and to the left of the arcade as one entered the station.

Vincent Coniff, meanwhile, in some street or other, miles distant, was to have stopped the perfect intermediary — a small boy perhaps on his way home from Sunday school, who would be very eager to make a dollar by doing an errand that would take him less than an hour. The boy would have been told that Vincent Coniff had forgotten a gray overnight bag with a blue handle near the information booth in Manhattan Depot; the boy would have been instructed to go down there, to pick it up, and to check it at the same checkroom which the woman had used previously.

The boy would have arrived shortly after twelve, shortly after Mr. Murchison had carried out his instructions; and by that time the woman would have been up on the east balcony, apparently looking at the model railroad exhibit, but of course in a position from which the whole concourse, and in particular that area around the information booth, was spread open in front of her.

She could watch Murchison, the first bag — and, later, the boy. If there were no signs of police activity or interference, if no one stopped the boy, questioned him or attempted to follow him, she was to allow the bag to be checked, and she was to watch then to see whether anyone at all came up to talk to the checkroom attendant.

If everything appeared to be going off perfectly, no police surveillance, no one hanging around the east balcony — and Vincent Coniff had selected that particular checkroom because, on Sunday, there was almost no pedestrian traffic in that part of the de-pot — she had been instructed to go out to the telegraph booth in the east arcade, to get hold of a messenger there and to give him the stub for the first bag, the one which she had checked earlier. In that way, and if the police were watching for a gray overnight bag with a blue handle, they would follow the messenger — or so Vincent Coniff was convinced — and no longer keep the

checkroom itself under observation.

The woman could satisfy herself then as to when it would be safe for her to act. When she was positive that no one was paying any attention to the checkroom, but not until then, she was to make herself known to the checkroom attendant. Earlier, when checking her bag, she would have passed a few remarks with him, so that he would recognize her again; and then, of course, she would be only another careless woman who had mislaid a stub for a cheap overnight bag, but who could describe it perfectly, and who would get it handed over to her after signing a paper, and writing a false name and address on it.

The whole thing would have gone off perfectly. If the police appeared to be interfering in any manner or form, the woman would have kept away from the checkroom; and if the police were not interfering, the exchange would have been made without anyone, even the checkroom attendant, being the wiser for it.

Everything perfect then; no worries about the ransom at all, Vincent Coniff thought quietly. But now, of course, he had no helper and no anonymity to bank on; and he was, furthermore, limited in action to Manhattan Depot by the imperative necessity for some form of shelter that had been imposed on him early this morning. All this, Vincent Coniff reminded himself, because the father had tried to outsmart some-body, and because the damn kid had wanted to use a rest room.

He looked around at little Tony Murchison. He had no expression on his face, certainly no outward show of anger or hatred; and yet of course he was fully determined that there was something to settle up here, with the kid, and with the father also.

He was quite calm about everything. Plenty of time for that part, Vincent Coniff decided; but now the bag first, because the bag was the important thing. Was there any way, any safe way, in which he would be able to get his hands on it? He did not know — not yet; but he thought about it. He thought about it with the intense inward concentration which another man with a more complicated and less arrogant mind could not have managed

under these conditions. He was not impatient at all. It was then only five minutes past nine Sunday morning.

At that time Donnelly and Enright had their men in position all over Manhattan Depot, and at every approach to it; and the one inevitable thing, even to Calhoun, appeared to be that the deeper Vincent Coniff penetrated toward the information booth in the main concourse at noontime — if, of course, Donnelly was right and he intended to show up here himself for the overnight bag — the more hopeless his position was bound to become.

In the immediate vicinity of the information booth, for one instance, there would be men not only in front of him, but on all sides of him, since Donnelly's was not an arrangement in which he would have to stand one inspection at the street doors, pass that one, and then achieve a certain measure of physical freedom for himself. There were lines within lines all prepared for him, Calhoun knew — in the waiting room, on the ramp, around the subway platforms, everywhere in the passages and arcades, on the balcony, and out on the floor of the concourse. At some point, therefore, it was going to take a lot more than a different overcoat, or a new hat, or a pair of eyeglasses, to pass off Vincent Coniff as a legitimate traveler in the noontime rush at Manhattan Depot.

So Calhoun assured himself; and yet, as the very slow hours between nine and eleven ticked away, the notion of his own personal responsibility to the child, and also in regard to Vincent Coniff, oppressed him more and more heavily. Willie Calhoun, who'd had one chance at the redhead Friday night, had missed him then. Would he miss him again today?

It was true, of course, that Donnelly and Enright were really running things from upstairs; but then it was neither Donnelly nor Enright who had failed a six-year-old child through their own stupidity Friday night. Now, too, it was neither Donnelly nor Enright who was the expert on Manhattan

Depot, but Willie Calhoun. So whose fault would it be if anything went wrong in here at twelve noon? Calhoun knew; and Calhoun knew also that it would be a much more serious and fatal fault this time than Friday night. The end of everything — the child dead then, for sure and certain, and nothing that anyone could do about it.

And these ideas persisted inside Calhoun, even while he attended conference after conference up in Captain Rousseau's office that morning. Say that the child had not been harmed yet, and would not be harmed until after Vincent Coniff had collected his money, or attempted to collect it; say that the redhead had some place in which to leave him for half an hour or so. Was it possible, then, that Coniff could slip in here despite all of them — but despite Willie Calhoun, particularly — get the bag, get out again and take care of the child in his own way, and at his own leisure?

No, Calhoun thought violently; impossible! What was in his head even to imagine it? How could it happen? He argued with himself in that manner, but still something very bad began happening to him, and the something showed itself in his physical posture. He moved usually through Manhattan Depot with a ready and aggressive attitude, swaggering with his chest out and shoulders back, and with his gray eyes shifting around constantly and sharply; but at eleven-thirty, when there was nothing more for Calhoun to do, no physical activity with which to occupy himself, those rugged features of his became harried and miserable, the pugnacity and readiness departed from him, and he had to use a handker-chief on his shirt collar, or around his mouth, or back of his ears, with increasing frequency.

It was eleven-thirty then, with half an hour to go; and that half an hour became as big and insurmountable to Calhoun as the Matterhorn. There was too little to do, too much to think, so that for the first time he began to understand the penetrating truth of Donnelly's observation a few hours ago. Vincent Coniff knew exactly what he intended to do at noontime — how, when, where. They did not. They could only grope around after him in the dark. Now the concourse was half filled, and people were streaming

in and out by the main ramp, by the subway passages, by the escalator on the east, by the marble stairway in back of Calhoun on the west. They were coming up from the lower level by ramp and stairs; they were forming up near the track gates; they were crowding impatiently, in their usual thick ring, around the information booth; and every minute there seemed to be more and more of them.

And so Calhoun, in position already by the information booth — because at this time he did not want to see anybody he knew, or talk to anybody — shifted around again, and wiped back of his ears again. Suppose little Tony Murchison had already, as Vincent Coniff would put it, been taken care of? Suppose all their precautions, all their men, would be too few and too late to do anything very helpful for a six-year-old child? What then? What would Willie Calhoun have to think about for the rest of his days?

A paralyzing physical anguish came over him. He began to feel convinced that they were all fools, from Donnelly down — that the child was dead, and that whatever they did here would amount to nothing. He knew that it was not helping him to think in that way, and yet, however he tried, he could not manage to get away from those thoughts.

At twenty-five minutes to twelve Frances Kennedy, the last person he wanted to see here and now, pushed around the information booth as if she were looking for him. She must have been told upstairs, by Donnelly or someone, about what had happened at four o’clock this morning on Lexington Avenue, because that nice olive complexion of hers was all wrong underneath, no warmth and vitality in it. And there was no time or opportunity for Calhoun to avoid her; when he tried, starting ahead suddenly for the main ramp, she got over in front of him somehow.

She was very tense and pale; and of course she asked the question which Calhoun had known she was going to ask. She had just been up to see Mr. Murchison, she said; and she still couldn’t believe what a detective up there had told her. When everything had been so fine only a few hours ago, she whispered painfully; when all they had to do was to pay the money, and then… But Calhoun still believed that Tony was all right, didn’t

he? Didn't he?

It was the one question which Calhoun had not been able to decide for himself, much less for her. She had to remember this, Calhoun mumbled thickly, not quite answering her; a fellow like that was interested, above everything else, in the ransom money. That meant he'd try to protect his investment, the way Donnelly saw it. So…

"I saw Mr. Murchison," she said, searching Calhoun's face desperately. "And I think — I think he believes now that Tony was killed last night. I couldn't say anything to him, Calhoun; he just kept one arm over his face without looking at me. But I knew — "

"You'd better get upstairs," Calhoun told her harshly. "I got no time for this stuff, understand. And I got to see Eddie Mather right now up in the waiting room."

But she pushed after him through all those people around the information booth and she kept whispering at him.

"You can't go," she insisted unsteadily. "Not yet, Calhoun. I've been looking all over for you; I had to see you."

It was simple truth. Ten minutes ago she had left Room 908 at the Belvidere, a very quiet room where the father had not spoken to her, not a word, had not looked at her, and had not permitted, because of that arm over his face, that she look at him. In the corridor outside she had turned her face to the wall and remained in that attitude for a minute or two, thinking of little Tony Murchison whom she had seen just once that preceding Friday afternoon — thinking of the round face, the earnest manner, the solemn six-year-old eyes.

And presently, out of all the horrible emptiness and sickness inside her, she had become aware of one thought. She was afraid for Tony, and afraid of what the big redheaded man might have done to him; but there was someone who would not be afraid of those things, and who would never give up on them. There was someone she had to see, someone from whom she had to draw strength and reassurance just as she had last night up on the west balcony, when they were waiting for Vincent Coniff.

So she had come down here looking for Calhoun, frantic to find him; but there was no strength and reassurance for her anywhere now, not even in Tough Willie Calhoun. That ugly and rugged face of his was all set in harsh lines; there were beads of perspiration around his mouth, which looked quite colorless; and he kept trying to pull away from her, and ordering her upstairs, where she would find Donnelly and all the others, and where she would know the minute anything happened around the information booth.

“Don’t lie to me,” she said. She looked distracted. “Please, Calhoun. Just tell me one thing. Is Tony all right? And do you think —”

“Get upstairs,” Calhoun said, very quiet with her now. But there was more perspiration around his mouth. “I don’t know that. Nobody does. So don’t ask me.”

She had her answer then. So it was over, she told herself — must be over. Even Willie Calhoun —

“A little boy who liked picture books,” she said, not feeling anything very much now. “We looked at them together, Calhoun. Friday — two days ago. And now there’s nothing I can do for him. Nothing anybody can do for him. We don’t know where he is. And we don’t know what —”

“Stop talking that way,” Calhoun said. He had put his front teeth together. “You’ll only —”

“It’s over,” she said, almost tranquilly.

Calhoun wanted to say something then; but the right words would not come up in him. All he did was to turn his head about two inches toward her. He muttered finally:

“You don’t know. And I want you to stop talking that way.”

She nodded at him.

“I think I do. Now, Calhoun. Now that you —”

“I think you don’t,” Calhoun said. This time he barely parted his lips. “You think a lot of things, and you get a lot of ideas. Well, get upstairs now where you belong. Do you think I’m crazy? Do you think I’m going to make

you any promises about that kid? What gives me the right? That's Donnelly's job, not mine. If he wants to do it, okay. Let him. But leave me alone! Leave me alone, I tell you!"

Frances nodded at him.

"All right. I'm very sorry, Calhoun. I didn't mean to worry you. I know —"

But now it was Calhoun who followed her back around the information booth.

"You know this," he said. "You know that. No, wait a minute! I got something to say to you. I'm going to tell you right now that nobody's going to get a chance to hurt that kid. Why?" His lips parted and stretched out at her, and he placed his right forefinger on his chest. "This is why. Willie Calhoun."

She said quietly: "I wanted you to say that, I knew you'd say it — and in just that way. But now it doesn't mean anything, for some reason. You don't have to pretend with me any more. You know it's too late, and Donnelly knows it's too late."

"Yeah?" Calhoun said. His eyes had become small, hard, bright and glittering. "So that does it, huh? But who does Donnelly think he is? Who the hell is he to give up for Willie Calhoun?"

"I'm sorry," Frances whispered. "I didn't mean to upset you."

"You didn't upset anybody," Calhoun said. But he was breathless. "Just forget it. Just get upstairs and behave yourself. Go on now. Do what I tell you."

He pushed her over toward the west stairway, and then he turned and looked up at the concourse window in Captain Rousseau's offices. So Donnelly had given up on this thing, had he? "Go to hell," Calhoun whispered at him, at all of them invisible behind that window. "Go to hell, the whole bunch of you!"

What he felt now was not anger as he had ever known it before — physically expressed, quick, hot, vociferous, sometimes profane; but still, whatever it was, it began to fill him up very solidly inside, inch by inch. The

anger had always been on the surface previously, or near the surface; but this new thing was way under the surface. And the anger had always exploded out of him; but this new thing, as it were, burst into him.

What had been the matter with him all morning, Calhoun asked himself. Had he been crazy? What had he been afraid of? Now, any minute, might not Vincent Coniff show up here for the overnight bag? And what else had Willie Calhoun wanted? What other break had he ever expected to have?

He went back to that side of the information booth nearest the Belvidere passage. He pushed his hat up, shoved his jaw out and placed his hands on his hips. He thought about Vincent Coniff, but not articulately. Yeah, was how Willie Calhoun thought of him. Yeah?

It was ten minutes before noon. And now, after he had taken just one deep breath, Willie Calhoun discovered something solid and satisfying in him; that he was all right again, after that conversation; that he had, in fact, never felt so ready for anyone or anything in his Me.

He waited for the overnight bag, and for Vincent Coniff. And from upstairs, from that undersized cubbyhole of his on the east balcony, Vincent Coniff looked down at him, and felt a little toughly amused by the posture. He did not know Calhoun very well. He was altogether unworried about him.

The child slept. Now it was eight minutes of twelve.

About fifteen feet up from the floor of the main concourse, and extending around three sides of Manhattan Depot, was the balcony. It was a wide marble balcony, with marble benches on it, and with a marble railing facing the concourse; and on the east side, to the left as one entered Manhattan Depot from the principal arcade, was a model railroad exhibit. There were toy villages up there, toy mountains, a complete landscape; but there was no stir or activity yet. Even in so minor an item as a model railroad, operations were scheduled with precision in Manhattan Depot;

and it was only from twelve noon until nine at night, seven days a week, that an attendant was up there operating a master switch.

Beyond this exhibit the east balcony of Manhattan Depot ended in a solid marble wall that shot up to it, and way over it, from the floor of the concourse. That end, therefore, was blind, with no approach to it unless one turned left from the arcade on entering, or right on coming upstairs in the escalator from the main concourse.

On the fourth side of Manhattan Depot, the south side, were the ticket windows, split in half by the magnificent curving sweep of the main ramp. The area behind these was separated from the main concourse by a marble partition, eight or ten feet high. From the blind end of the east balcony, consequently, one could look down over the ticket windows, with the model railroad exhibit on the right, and a small checkroom — the smallest in Manhattan Depot — just in back.

This checkroom was located in a station area far removed from the principal traffic arteries, at least on Sundays. Through the week it handled a fair amount of business, because a good many people passed along in front of it to enter, through a series of enormous glass doors, an adjoining office building; but when the offices upstairs were not open for business these doors were all kept closed and locked.

So it was that on Sundays this balcony checkroom had only one attendant, and almost no business; and so it was that Vincent Coniff had selected it yesterday as the ransom depository. He could not see it now from his cubbyhole, although it was no more than twenty or thirty feet away from him; but he was thinking about it, and about the two overnight bags, and about Calhoun who was down there in plain view by the information booth — and of course all the others of Donnelly’s men whom he had managed to place and identify by that time in and around the concourse — very shrewdly and logically.

He was attempting to fit all these different items and conditions — the two overnight bags, the position of Donnelly’s men, the checkroom, and his cubby-hole on the east balcony — into some kind of satisfactory pattern.

And he was succeeding, too, not perfectly, perhaps, as he would have liked, but still shaping them at last into some kind of order.

At five minutes of twelve, then, he decided for himself, as he had decided once before earlier that morning, that it was still all or nothing. He had very little to lose by making one last attempt at the ransom money, because the woman must have talked this morning after he had abandoned her, and then tried to shoot her down, in the Lexington Avenue cafeteria. So he would be known now — name, picture, record — and it was no longer a question of killing the child, and dropping out of sight before the police could find out who he was.

And he wanted that ransom money; he needed that ransom money. A good thing, he reflected stolidly, that he had kept the kid with him — since now, of course, the father would grab at the last hope by following out the ransom instructions to the letter. So the money would be downstairs waiting for him at the information booth at twelve noon. All he had to do was to get his hands on it.

And he had a chance to do that too, or so he thought — with the child still sleeping, with Donnelly's men all around the concourse, and in position near the arcade and the escalator; but none of them, not one, at the blind end of a balcony to which access must have been considered impossible with the one access itself guarded.

He had made up his mind on that part; but he had not made up his mind yet on the child. At two minutes of twelve, moving very quietly and carefully away from his peephole, he hesitated above little Tony Murchison. Now or later, Vincent Coniff asked himself. That was the only question here. It had to be done, naturally, since no one was going to be permitted to pull on him the sort of thing the old man had attempted to pull on him.

He looked down unwinkingly at round baby cheeks, at a round chin. Little Buster Brown, he thought; little —! It was very fortunate there that Tony Murchison, who had slept very poorly last night and also Friday night, breathed in a tranquil and peaceful way, the arms still up over his head,

the lips just parted. He had told the father no cops, Vincent Coniff remembered; he had warned the father. And yet —

An urgent impression of valuable time ticking away second by second began to worry him; but still he hesitated, still the child slept without a deep breath, without a sound. If Tony Murchison had stirred then, had turned over or opened his eyes, it would have been done, and done instantly. He did not.

The money first, Vincent Coniff thought; then back here for a couple of hours, while the cops ran around Manhattan Depot like chickens with their heads cut off; then sometime this afternoon or tonight, when they had given up on the thing, and when he could see that they had given up on it, a few steps over to the arcade, and another few steps down the arcade to the street entrance.

Fifty thousand dollars, Vincent Coniff reminded himself — good, hard money. That was the thing to worry about; not little Buster Brown. If he squawked in here this afternoon, if he wanted to go to the rest room, or a glass of water, or something to eat, that was the time to do something about him, that was the time when something would have to be done about him. But just now, and so long as he slept like this…

There were rough boards crisscrossed over the back of the cubicle. Vincent Coniff removed two of them, watching the child to see if he showed any signs of wakefulness; and then Vincent Coniff crawled out into a very narrow and very dim passage at the rear of the model railroad exhibit.

It was sandwiched in there between the toy mountains on his right and the marble walls of the concourse on his left. Vincent Coniff, pushing his overnight bag in front of him, made his way cautiously along that passage toward the checkroom. And at the end of the passage, under an elevated platform just in back of the toy railroad, he studied the blind end of the east balcony, and saw no one out there in position to watch him emerge from the shadows behind that miniature landscape.

A few seconds later, feeling safe enough for the moment because the toy

mountains protected him from the arcade, from Donnelly's men stationed there, and because he stood far enough in from the balcony railing so that it was impossible to make him out from the floor of the concourse, he was standing in front of the checkroom with the overnight bag. Below him, at the information booth, the hands of the big clock now stood almost exactly at twelve noon.

The attendant, taking the bag from Vincent Coniff, moved back whistling with it behind the luggage shelves; then he heard something, and turned, and saw that this big fellow with the very pale blue eyes had cornered him in the darkest part of the checkroom.

Nothing was said. The big man came in at him fast, deftly and in a very methodical manner backed the attendant against the wall and began to whip his right fist in and down at the man's side. The attendant fell, moaning. Vincent Coniff straightened him up, got him by the throat and knocked his head back into the wall. He slapped him twice across the mouth, in a back-and-forth gesture, but not too hard. Then he showed him the automatic.

All this was done in the most stolid and unhurried manner imaginable.

"Okay," Vincent Coniff said. He did not sound excited at all. "Now I think you know what it is, Jack; and now I want you to listen to me. Do you suppose you can do what you're told now? Do you?"

Twelve o'clock came.

Calhoun was still in position down there by the information booth. Four tremendous barred shafts of sunlight, entering through those arched windows high up in the south wall of the concourse, put down warm round circles on the floor near the information booth; and against these columns, all dusty golden, the remainder of the concourse looked much darker to Calhoun than it actually was. Passengers hurrying now from light to

shadow were seen by Calhoun at one moment with great distinctness, and the next very obscurely.

There was the usual amount of noise. Nolan and Enright, standing about ten feet away from Calhoun in the direction of the main ramp, appeared to be consulting a timetable. Nolan had even provided himself with a suitcase.

And now up on the east balcony, left of the escalator, a depot attendant — a genuine depot attendant — clambered up to that elevated platform behind the model exhibit, and did things to a master switch, and started a record. There was sudden commotion. Toy freight trains began to chug through and around a miniature range of mountains — six or seven feet high, some of them, all constructed of rough boards covered with cheesecloth and sprinkled with artificial snow. Lead skiers, after their first erratic starting twitch, commenced to glide smoothly down long white slopes; and around a doll-sized Swiss chalet perched on one of the highest mountains tiny lights were turned on, and tiny skaters whirled and spun over a glass pond.

At the same time various noises and sounds never heard near Manhattan Depot in actuality, not even in the days prior to electrification, became audible in the noontime excitement on the floor of the concourse. There was the effortful bellow of a freight engine dragging cars after it up long inclines; then another locomotive whistling shrilly for a crossing where lights winked on and tiny signal bars lowered themselves; and then the rapid whir and click of a fast limited racing past isolated country stations, while up on the east balcony toy uniformed agents whirled and bent, signaled with lanterns, vanished, flashed out again.

These sounds were heard up in Captain Rousseau’s office, where seven or eight men were standing around; where Donnelly sat with his eyes lowered absently, but with his lips compressed and with his fingers pointed together under his chin; and where Frances sat across from him, twisting up a handkerchief in her hands, and then untwisting it — desperately pale now, desperately quiet.

They were heard by Calhoun near the information booth; by Vincent Coniff and the attendant in the rear of that checkroom up on the east balcony; and in another place also, much smaller, much darker and much lonelier than any of these, where there was only a six-year-old child to listen to them.

The sounds woke him. He stared up quietly at the ceiling for a moment, in the way a child rouses himself. “Mommy!” he said then. He sat up quickly. “Mommyl Where are you, Mommy?” Then he remembered where he was and what the man had warned him about— not to make noise in here, not to make the least noise, not to stir. He began to be afraid that the man might be just outside, watching. He got back under the overcoat. He put his hands over his mouth and kept them there. He was breathing irregularly.

Mr. Murchison appeared on the main concourse; and Calhoun, watching him all the way over from the Belvidere passage, made a very slight chewing motion of that bulldog jaw. He knew that Enright and Nolan were standing near him, but he did not pay any attention to them, nor to anyone else; and all other details —the delicate golden shafts piercing down toward him from the concourse windows, the people hurrying past, the sound record from upstairs, the voices behind him at the information counter — were equally as unimportant.

The bag mattered to him; the bag was going to mean Vincent Coniff; so that never for one moment did Calhoun even consider taking his eyes from it. He had shut himself off completely from everything else. His jaws hurt him, as if they were clamped to-gether; but the hurt meant so little to him that he did not do anything at all to relieve it.

On the south side of the information booth, in a fairly clear space about seven or eight feet out from it, Mr. Murchison stood over a gray overnight bag with a blue handle for a few minutes. He turned presently; he went back to the Belvidere passage; he vanished.

Calhoun then, and for some altogether illogical reason, balanced himself on the balls of his feet, and very carefully. The overnight bag lay just halfway between him and Nolan.

Five minutes went by. One of those round patches of gold crept up over the bag, passed it, circled it. People moved in and out through the columns of sunlight; and people walked impatiently around the bag, and stopped near it, and conversed, and went on again.

Not one of those people looked at the bag. Not one of them made any sort of movement to touch it.

Calhoun stood there. Calhoun waited. It was six minutes past twelve, seven, eight…

The phone rang up in Captain Rousseau's office. Donnelly stirred for the first time in quite a while.

"I'll take it," Donnelly said. He sounded almost, but not quite, normal. He listened; then he nodded twice, while staring directly in front of him at the concourse window.

"Fine," he said. "Fine. Keep him over there for a couple of minutes; then send him out. I'll have someone waiting for him."

Frances was on her feet.

"I don't want commotion," Donnelly said, without looking at her. His own cheeks glistened. He depressed the telephone hook. "I want Willie Calhoun at the information booth," he said. "I want him right now."

The deputy chief inspector came in quickly from outside.

“What is it?” he asked Donnelly. “Did you —”

Donnelly paid no sort of attention to him.

“Hello,” Donnelly said, speaking, apparently with great restraint, much more slowly and precisely than usual, as if he wanted no mistake made now. “I thought he might try to use one of the bellhops around here, Calhoun; and he has. He just called the desk over at the Imperial, where Mike Frost talked to him. No, we don’t have any idea where to find him. He might be anywhere. Here’s his story. He claims that he’s a Mr. Collins in some room or another over there, and that he forgot his bag at the information booth.

“Now… What? Don’t interrupt me again. Frost knew who he was because he described the bag. We’ve little time. Listen. He wants a bellhop to check the bag for him at that parcel room behind your bal-cony exhibit. I thought you’d know which one he means, Calhoun, and how best to cover it. Get up there. And —”

But Calhoun must have already started. Frances began to cry — quietly, almost soundlessly, watching Donnelly, her mouth twisting, her hands pulling at each other. “Will you stop it?” Donnelly said. He put down the phone and ran both his hands over his cheeks. He looked very pale and anguished for Arthur Donnelly.

The thing to do now, as Calhoun knew, was to get upstairs to that checkroom without sprinting over for the escalator like a fool. He managed it. Enright and Nolan, who appeared to get in his way for a second or two, were informed while they were all trying to get by each other; and then Nolan hurried away to attend to blocking off the east balcony, and Enright dropped into stride six or eight feet in back of Calhoun.

They rode up in the escalator, on adjoining steps.

“Any way out of that checkroom from in back?” Enright said, without appearing to move his lips at all. “Any stairway? Any elevator?”

“One way in,” Calhoun said. “One way out. The balcony. You and Nolan cover this end. I’ll go down.”

He did. Neither of them believed seriously that Vincent Coniff could have got into the station at noon, so that he might be watching the checkroom now from some part of the main concourse; but they both understood that the most important thing here was not to frighten him off. They had to give him some leeway. They had to get him out into the open. Calhoun, therefore, hoping that one man might not be too noticeable at the blind end of the east balcony, where two men certainly would be, hesitated for a moment in front of the model railroad exhibit to look over at the northeast corner of the station for a bellboy in the green-and-gold uniform of the Hotel Imperial.

He was then no more than ten feet away from Tony Murchison. Up above the child, visible through a pencil-like crack in the rough ceiling, or the underside of the very highest miniature mountain, there were inch-high and identical figures whizzing past every few seconds. They were about the size of the lead soldiers which Tony Murchison had at home in North Rhinehill, and they were dressed, or painted, with red sweaters and white stocking caps.

For a time there was something very consoling about them. They were part of a six-year-old world, an intelligible part —much more intelligible than a big man with red hair and icy blue eyes. So Tony Murchison was watching them, and trying to hold a conversation with them, and trying to fix his thought on them. He had soldiers, he told them, not aloud, of course — American soldiers; and he had a fort, and two cannons which he could shoot, and lots of pic-ture books with elephants and lions in them, and a hook-and-ladder truck, and —

But the conversation hurt him rather than helped. He began to see the skiers not quite so clearly. It was very dark in here, very noisy and mysterious outside and very lonely without his mother; and then the man

might come back at any moment. Why? Tony Murchison had no idea. Soldiers, he thought chokingly, and two cannons, and —

Nothing was any good to him. He had to cry then. But he put his hands over his mouth again; and he did his best to cry under the hands, under the brown overcoat, so that the man would not come back and hit him for it.

PART SIX

There were, at the far end of the model railroad, two or three tables stacked with travel folders of different kinds, and Calhoun paused here long enough to select a few of the pamphlets. No mistakes now, and no rushing at it, Calhoun was reminding himself; wait. It was still barely possible, despite all of them, that Vincent Coniff had reached some point inside Manhattan Depot from which he was observing the balcony at this moment. If so, he must be allowed to detect no signs of police activity up there. He might be suspicious even of one man, of Calhoun; but he could not be certain of one man. So Calhoun seated himself on a marble bench in front of the checkroom; and apparently became absorbed in one of his travel folders, and everyone else did his particular job quickly and deftly. Enright, acting as a kind of safety man, had stopped in front of the model railroad, which was halfway between the checkroom and the arcade entrance; and Nolan and Mike Frost and several others were in effective blocking position around the head of the escalator.

There was only one way in or out to this blind end of the balcony — and that way led past the model railroad, past the escalator and then to the arcade entrance. Now that way was guarded, and well guarded, and everything around Calhoun appeared quite normal. The checkroom attendant, whom he recognized, was sitting at a table inside the counter with a Sunday newspaper spread out in front of him, and with his head propped over it on his fists; and Calhoun decided almost at once against questioning him directly. The idea just now was to give Vincent Coniff some loose play, and not to warn him off here, at the first step, because, as Calhoun was putting it together, the checkroom would be probably no more than the opening maneuver in a long and complicated arrangement.

Already one point or idea seemed incontestable to Calhoun: that the longer Vincent Coniff could drag out this business about the suitcase, the better chance there would be to get hold of it eventually. He could have

the bellhop leave it up here, for instance; get someone else to claim it later; and send it around in that manner for hours, through relay after relay, until he considered it safe to pick up the overnight bag in person. He might be watching the police here, or waiting for them outside at a second point, which appeared more likely, since they could not make any arrangements for that point before they knew where it was. So Calhoun took no chances. He examined the checkroom covertly, making sure that there was no one visible near the attendant and inside the counter — just the rows of dark shelves in back, with a bulb shining as usual in one corner, and luggage gleaming out of vague but undisturbed shadow; and then he settled himself with his travel folder and waited for that bellhop from the Hotel Imperial.

It was not a long wait, not in actual time; but of course Calhoun thought it endless. He sat there, the checkroom on his right, the floor of the concourse on his left, and faced the escalator; and after forty or fifty people had come up on it from below a bellhop wearing a green-and-gold uniform, and carrying Mr. Murchison’s gray overnight bag, stepped briskly off from the top step and came down toward Calhoun past Nolan and Enright. Calhoun pushed his hat up, as if absently. He discovered that his fingers were damp. So was his forehead.

In front of him, at the counter, there was a short conversation between the bellhop and the checkroom attendant. Then the attendant put the bag on the floor under his counter, went back to his desk and removed a check from one of the hooks over it. It was the usual procedure.

What followed, however, was a bit different.

The attendant, who was just starting to detach the check stub, asked a question, and after that shook his head and pointed out across the concourse to the main ramp. Then the bag was produced again from under the counter, and the bellboy took it and started back toward the escalator.

Calhoun’s jaws were again hurting him. Where now? He had no idea. He got up, trying not to move too quickly, and all prepared to follow the

bellhop along the east balcony to the escalator; but then he remembered that he had just done one of the things Donnelly had warned everyone against doing. He had permitted the overnight bag to be out of his sight under the checkroom counter for thirty or forty seconds; and now he was assuming that the bellhop still had the same bag he had carried up here from the information booth.

He also remembered how Vincent Coniff had sent them all scurrying down to the lower level last night, on a fool's errand. He hesitated. He stopped, removing his hat and wiping his right coat sleeve across the brim; and at that gesture Nolan and Enright remained in position and watched him. Mike Frost, however, went down in the escalator before the bellhop; and two men in civilian clothes went down just in back of him.

Calhoun, very savagely uneasy, realized that Vincent Coniff had managed to split them up right here in the beginning. Was that the idea? To split them up at the checkroom, and at the next point, and all along the line; until finally — But he was over at the counter by then, risking that action because it now seemed imperative to him under the prevailing conditions.

"I want you to give me the story on that overnight bag," he demanded urgently. "You know me. Willie Calhoun. What did you send it away from here for?"

The attendant did know him; and the attendant appeared to be badly frightened. He stuttered a few words about a fellow named Collins who had telephoned a few minutes ago, and who was sending a bellhop over here to check a bag for him. Now, however, he wanted the bag brought down to his wife in the waiting room; and so —

But Calhoun was not paying any attention to him. He was bent in over the counter, with his gun out and held flat against the side of his overcoat. He saw another bag still under the counter — gray, with a blue handle.

"He's in there," Calhoun said, very low. "He's in back of you, isn't he? Get out of the way."

"What?" the attendant said. He was staring down at Calhoun's automatic with fascinated sick eyes. "Who? I — "

His voice broke; everything in him broke. He saw what Calhoun intended to do, and he shoved suddenly at Calhoun in an attempt to find protection in back of him. Calhoun was just stepping across the counter at that moment with his bulldog jaw set, sure of himself once he had seen the duplicate bag, and trying to catch the first thing that moved anywhere in those luggage shelves. The attendant's shove caught him off balance. He staggered, his left leg waving around in the air. He fell.

The fall must have saved his life.

He was halfway down when Vincent Coniff fired at him, when that first bullet furrowed across his cheek and he plunged forward drunkenly and helplessly, but still trying to turn himself in the air so that he would land with his gun up and his eyes toward the back of the checkroom. He failed in that, landing beside the counter with his head smashing back into it. There was another shot, down at him this time and from the left; wood splinters dug in under his left ear; and he lay paralyzed for a moment, bracing himself instinctively to take the third and the fourth shots through his back.

The rigidity saved him there, as the fall had done a moment ago. Someone jumped over him; and someone — a big redheaded man wearing a gray suit and a gray hat — had just reached the balcony rail when Calhoun succeeded in flinging himself around after him on his knees.

There was no other way for Vincent Coniff to go then. Enright and Nolan were pounding down at him from the model railroad, and he recognized them as immediately as he had recognized Calhoun. So he vaulted over the rail without even a momentary hesitation; but he was not able to manage it before Calhoun's automatic swung up and around at him.

And then Calhoun's first shot was a little too hurried, and a little too high also; but at the second there was a sudden stiffness and then contraction in Vincent Coniff, poised up — and almost endlessly, as it seemed to Calhoun — over the rail while supporting himself with his left arm. Then he dropped swiftly away from Calhoun, away from Nolan and Enright; and Calhoun was over the checkroom counter and after him.

Down on the concourse he must have landed on one of the porters' bandwagons. There was luggage scattered around when Calhoun reached the balcony rail; a porter was on his knees, as if hurt; and Vincent Coniff was heading out with a dreadful hopping agility for the Belvidere passage.

Not one of Donnelly's men was visible in that part of the concourse now, since they had been called upstairs by Nolan a few minutes ago to block off the east balcony; but other people, part of the noontime Sunday crush in Manhattan Depot, surrounded Vincent Coniff so completely — and surrounded him even while trying hurriedly to back away from him, and get out of his way (while he staggered along very close to the irregular fringes that were continually opening and wavering before him in the crowd) — that there was no opportunity for Calhoun or anyone else to fire at him.

So Calhoun went over the balcony rail also, landing on hands and knees underneath, froglike. He was up at once and into the Belvidere passage; and just around the turn there a man in railroad uniform was leaving one of the offices behind the long row of ticket windows.

Vincent Coniff knocked him out of the way. The door in back of this employee was an exceedingly massive one with a wired-glass upper panel, and Calhoun knew much more about it than did the men who were sprinting up from their positions near the information booth and the main ramp. It was almost if not quite forceproof, and admittance could be gained through it only by signaling from a buzzer, and then waiting until someone inside recognized the signaler and released the catch. It was heavy enough to prevent any attempt at an armed holdup — its primary purpose — and when Vincent Coniff had slammed it after him, the snap lock catching at once, Calhoun raced obliquely across the Belvidere passage for the nearest ticket window.

He ascended there, one hand on the window grill, one knee pushing him up from the narrow glass shelf in front of the grill, and scrambled hurriedly over the marble partition that separated the inner side of the ticket

windows from the main concourse. Whistles had begun to shrill in back of him; Nolan was roaring down from the east balcony; and someone outside began firing into the steel door as Calhoun rumbled down on the inner side of the ticket booth.

The shot — or the several shots — jammed the lock, so that the signal catch in the office corridor refused to work for Calhoun. He was breathless; he spun around, alone then, and a girl clerk who had been standing as if petrified in the corridor came to life and began screaming at him. Also, which was quicker and more intelligible, she pointed toward a stairs at the end of the corridor.

Donnelly's men had to look out for themselves there. Calhoun reached the stairs, went down them in two jumps. He brought up, full force, against another door with a snap lock; he rebounded; he caught himself; and he put his automatic against the lock and fired into it.

He plunged through. There was a large, dim office before him, with rows of Sunday-clean desks in it, and rows of chairs; but the most important detail was a door at the end of it, hanging three quarters open. This door fooled Calhoun. It was the first thing that caught his eye, and he raced that way. Vincent Coniff, just a few seconds before, had staggered and reeled the other way.

Upstairs Donnelly's men were still trying to force their way in through the steel door, so there was no chance for them to scatter out from Calhoun now and pick up Vincent Coniff before he could gain himself any headway. In Captain Rousseau's office Donnelly was shouting into the telephone, and trying to discover what had happened on the east balcony. The deputy chief inspector was on his feet, looking out through the concourse window. Frances was white as death. She fixed her thoughts on Willie Calhoun, on the bulldog jaw, the small gray eyes, the broad shoulders; she could see him putting that forefinger on his chest again, and she could see the way he looked at her when that husky, passionate voice of his was insisting that no one would have the chance to hurt little Tony Murchison, because Willie Calhoun would never give them the

chance.

She wanted to believe that promise, she wanted to hold on to it; and so she got up and ran over to the concourse window, stopping behind the deputy chief inspector, and seeing around the Belvidere passage a solid mass of people struggling and pushing against each other. She could not make out Willie Calhoun anywhere. Oh, dear God, she prayed silently… She put her head against the side of the window and closed her eyes. She seemed to stop breathing.

Tony Murchison knew what it was; Tony Murchison knew that the man was just outside now, watching for him, waiting to fool him. He drew himself together under the brown overcoat, terrified at the shots, at all the noise outside, at unseen men running and shouting at each other. And yet the lead skiers whizzed by and the toy trains sped and wound through the toy mountains; and the sound record went on and on, distorting the other noise, making of it an ominous and incomprehensible jumble.

Mommy, little Tony Murchison thought blindly. Mommy! He put one arm over his face. But he remembered that the man would be coming back; and he was afraid to throw off the brown overcoat, to get up, to go outside where the man would be waiting to hit him.

It was now twenty-five minutes of one.

There were many offices on the lower level of Manhattan Depot — all dark on Sunday, all empty, save for the commuters' ticket booths drawn up in a thin line around the commuters' concourse. There was an auditing department, and a freight department, file rooms, and a stenographer's pool; there were dim cubicles sacred on weekdays to department heads,

and employees' dressing rooms, and supply rooms, and locker rooms, and shower rooms; and all of these were divided from one another, east and west, by a long corridor illuminated every few feet — on Sundays — by a small blue bulb.

Now Vincent Coniff was in that corridor, staggering and reeling along it, very seriously wounded through the upper part of the chest by the second shot Calhoun had got at him. He had no clear idea of where he wanted to go, but he knew that he had to move ahead, to stay on his feet, and to keep going. Pain and shock had not quite caught up with him yet, but he knew that they were inside waiting to be recognized; and they first showed themselves in an effect of physical weakness.

He fell down some stairs. He had put his left hand and arm out along the banister to steady himself; but then they seemed to melt away from under him, and he went down headfirst in a long, twisting slide, rolling diagonally across the steps. He was brought up jarringly at the bottom. He lay there for a few moments.

There seemed to be something very important which he had to do. But what? He could not remember. The pain stirred itself, tearing and grinding at him; and then there was no logical thought in him but the pain, and that idea of his to keep moving, to keep going somewhere, and to do that something important which he had to do, and would think of presently. He got up, coughing; from this time on he kept coughing almost without pause. He lurched ahead. Then he found himself in a brightly lit room, lying on the floor by an overturned wooden bench, and looking around.

He must have fallen again, Vincent Coniff realized. He breathed in painfully, pushing the automatic under his coat, and seeing that there were high and narrow black lockers against each wall of this room. Before him, on the other side of the bench, were a lunch box and a pair of dungarees, and from behind a door on his right he heard a man singing robustly to himself in a hoarse baritone.

He crawled out of the room. There were more stairs, coiling around and down, so that when he fell on them, which he did several times, he was

always able to catch and stop himself by the handrail. And below the stairs there were tracks glaring dimly at him out of tunnel blackness, with darker alcoves opening off them at every few feet.

He managed to push himself along on these tracks. Noise then, after he had reeled twenty or thirty yards — loud noise, dangerous noise; and then, when he turned to face the noise, a great blind white eye speeding at him. He just was able to reach one of the alcoves, coughing breathlessly again, when the eye rolled past him, and when window after window, coach after coach, whipped by on the turn-around track under Manhattan Depot.

Trains came in over on the north side of the station, backed up the platform after discharging the passengers, and then made a circle under the south end of the terminal to head back into a proper outgoing position. Something of this Vincent Coniff now began to recollect effortfully — that he could follow the tracks, pass under the depot concourse and come up again at the outgoing platforms. A way out there? Perhaps. He wobbled along. He reached a complicated crossover, with three or four large archways opening up around him, and with half a dozen sets of tracks curving into and out of each other. Behind him, almost totally dark and deserted at this time on Sunday afternoon, he could make out the high bulk of one of the commuters' platforms.

He considered it. There were steps at the tunnel end, and he managed those, but after he had reached the top he went down full length behind one of the pillars. He coughed to himself — quietly, persistently; and he saw that in the end it had been all for nothing. He had never so much as put a finger on the proper overnight bag. He was wounded — seriously wounded. He could never get out of here. And the child…

He lifted his head. Now he remembered what he had to do, the only way he could pay out all of them: the father who had betrayed him, the tough-looking fellow who had shot him up there on the east balcony, and the others who had come running up at the last minute. It was quite simple, really. He had to kill the child. He had to get up there somehow, to the

east balcony, and get back to that mountain before anyone found him, and take care of little Buster Brown. He began to turn over on his side slowly, still coughing, and gathering himself under himself, under that weight pressing down on him. Now he had what he needed to keep him going, a fixed idea expressing itself in three words, as a kind of obscure personal salvation. Kill the child, kill the child, kill the child… That was what he could do now, Vincent Coniff saw. That was the only way in which he could still have the best of them. He began to crawl down the platform, from pillar to pillar. And inside that railroad exhibit, two levels over him, and back on the south side of the station, Tony Murchison huddled himself under the brown overcoat. He was beginning, not too strongly just yet, to hope for something: that the man would never come back for him. He was beginning to be very thirsty also.

Calhoun, of course, was still over on the south side of the station, trying to organize things. He would shout directions to those of Donnelly's men who were now beginning to stream down from upstairs in hurried groups; and he would be out in that long corridor with the blue lights at one moment — but much further along than where Vincent Coniff had come into it — and then into office after office, all large and dim, all arranged in orderly rows of desks and filing cabinets, and all empty.

Here, down in the bowels of Manhattan Depot, Donnelly's men were just running around into each other — groping profanely for elusive light switches, scattering out past desks, opening closet doors, ramming together in doorways and passages. It was Calhoun and Eddie Mather and the other railroad policeman who knew what to do, who could orient stairways and elevators and emergency exits in some kind of comprehensive order; and so eventually it was Calhoun who had to force himself to remain still, to establish a post command in the accountants' department with Nolan and Enright, and to detail forty or fifty men to

different assignments and locations as quickly as he could decide on them.

So there was much time lost at the very beginning. Vincent Coniff had been able to plunge drunkenly ahead through the offices and passageways down here; but Calhoun had to make sure, before he did anything else, that they did not advance through this part of the terminal area and leave Vincent Coniff behind them in comparative safety. Contact was lost with upstairs because the office phones were dead in the accounting department, and the office switchboard abandoned; and all this time Lieutenant Nolan was insisting passionately that Calhoun must not have wounded Vincent Coniff on the east balcony.

Calhoun listened to him, very pale, gray eyes glittering; but Calhoun knew what he knew. From the accounting department circles of hurried and noisy search rippled out around them, and always there were more lights, more sounds of activity, coming to Calhoun from across wooden partitions and from all directions. Eddie Mather, who knew this part of the depot, had raced immediately for the far end of the corridor; and from there, but only after three or four precious minutes, word came back about the overturned bench and about a mysterious gray hat that had been found near it.

That was the first indication, and so Calhoun sprinted madly in that direction, drawing farther and farther ahead of fifty-six-year-old Martin Nolan. Instead of using the corridor, which was mobbed by Enright and all the others, he raced on through more offices, some of them dark, others blazing emptily into life before him under row after row of domelike ceiling fixtures. He made up some time there, knowing just where he was in Manhattan Depot, and just how to get around from one point to another; and he was into the locker room on the next level a few seconds before anyone else reached it.

He was not delayed there at all. Eddie Mather was trying to obtain additional information from a bewildered trackwalker who stood, towel-wrapped, outside the shower room; but Calhoun, who recognized the gray hat immediately, sent Mather upstairs in case Vincent Coniff had the idea of doubling back to the main concourse, and this time took the right

direction for himself, down again, by curving iron steps, onto the turn-around track.

And he made up more time on the run under the terminal building. But there was no way for him to know that he was making it up; and of course there were a good many uncertain and half-finished thoughts blurring around in him, and making him frantic. Had Vincent Coniff actually come this way — and if he had would Donnelly remember to cover all the outgoing trains? Would anyone else think of it? Would Calhoun, if he used his head, run back to the nearest phone, get Donnelly and warn him about this development?

He reached the point from which Vincent Coniff had turned back to the commuters' platform. He hesitated there. What way now? He could not seem to determine any logical answer for himself. He started running back toward the commuters' platform. He stopped.

On the other side of the station, when he had gone over the ticket-seller's partition after Vincent Coniff, he had been about forty or fifty seconds behind him; now that had lengthened out into better than five minutes. It lengthened some more while Calhoun hesitated blindly out on the tracks. Should he go for a phone, and for Donnelly, up ahead there in the signal tower? Should he run back to the commuters' platform? Or should he race on into the tunnel, where Vincent Coniff might be working his way north under mid-town New York on foot?

He could not decide. Upstairs in Captain Rousseau's office, Donnelly abandoned his telephone, which seemed to have become useless to him, and shambled out with the deputy chief inspector to make his own inquiries, and look after his own measures; and Frances was left alone in a room very quiet suddenly, achingly quiet. Various kinds of noise drifted up to her from the main concourse, but she was not attuned to them, and she did not hear them. She thought of the child, of the big redheaded man, of Willie Calhoun; they were all that mattered to her, and they appeared to be caught in a pattern that was aside from everything else. Now those three seemed to Frances to be isolated by themselves, and to

be drawing together, moment by moment, in some manner which she could not understand — obscure connections between them, obscure interlocking degrees of time and position and opportunity, and knowledge.

Donnelly's phone rang. She did not answer it. She was afraid to answer it. Where was the redheaded man? Where was Willie Calhoun? What was happening? She ran back again to the concourse window. The phone rang, on and on.

It was a queer thing about the pain. Now, where it was searing and burning inside at Vincent Coniff, the pain had somehow identified itself with the child; and it seemed to him that there was only one way to get rid of the pain, and be at ease, and that way was to get rid of the child first.

He had crawled slowly and laboriously down Platform 26 on the lower level, from pillar to pillar. He had seen a baggageman — a lone baggageman — transferring parcels from an electric truck to the interior of an express car; and he had come out suddenly from behind his last pillar at the baggageman, gun up, lips drawn away from his teeth, wobbling and staggering — but yet knowing quite well what he had to do, to the baggageman first, then to the child.

And the baggageman, whistling cheerfully to himself, heard nothing, and was still bent over the electric truck, his arms full, when Vincent Coniff smashed the gun at him. He went down to his knees, with the parcels spilling away; and after that the second blow, catching him dazed and hurt, drove him on into the express car.

Vincent Coniff went to his knees over him and remained in that position coughing to himself but steadily watching the man with those very pale blue eyes. He got the windbreaker off first; then the cap; and then he had transportation — the electric track — and a disguise of sorts, and a precise knowledge of where the child was now in relation to this platform.

Two stories up, Vincent Coniff reminded himself; down to the left, and then over to the extreme southeast corner of Manhattan Depot.

And everything seemed to be arranged for him, everything was just the way he would have wanted it. The electric truck floated him down without any physical effort at all to the concourse end of the platform, made a wide clumsy turn there and took him past gate after gate to the last track entrance. He went by a few depot employees on the way, but all of them had something to do, and not one glanced more than casually at an ordinary baggage truck, and at the man standing on back of it who wore the requisite cap and windbreaker.

Now up, Vincent Coniff told himself. How? He abandoned the electric truck, plunging on rapidly a few steps as if someone had laid a weight across his shoulders, then bringing up against a wall, then plunging ahead again. Someone or something was shutting off the air on him. He panted and coughed. He saw an open but dark elevator. He stared at it for perhaps thirty seconds, his legs braced out under him, the head lowered, the arms supporting him on the wall, before he realized what it meant.

It meant the way up. The button — it was an automatic elevator — he selected at random, by groping for it with one arm; and after that he closed his eyes for what he thought was no more than a moment or two, but very foolishly, because the elevator had stopped at his floor long before the understanding of it penetrated to him.

Then he was very slow getting out of the elevator, having to roll himself around the door finally, so that, when he was halfway through, the door caught him on its way back and knocked him down. He lay prone for some moments on a quiet and deserted office corridor; he would have stayed there if the pain had left him alone. But it would not, and the pain and the child were still one idea in him, and to destroy the pain he had also, and first, to destroy the child.

There were three windows at the end of the corridor. He got to them. And there under him — but much too far under him, six or seven stories at least — there were the arcade entrance and the east balcony, and the toy

mountain under which Tony Murchison should be waiting. He had come up much too high, Vincent Coniff realized; and he was still over in the northeast part of the station, while the child was far below him over there in the southeast corner.

But to his left, and so close to him now that he seemed never to have appreciated their size before, were those three enormous arched windows over the arcade entrance. They were double windows really, wide enough to have a walk between them leading from one office part of Manhattan Depot to another; and last week, from the floor of the concourse, Vincent Coniff had observed people on that walk. So again there was a direct way in front of him to the child — a way over and inevitably, on the other side, a way down.

He found stairs. He went down one flight, and then two. He reached the walk.

Still on the lower level, and still over in the northwest part of the station behind Vincent Coniff, Calhoun was now scrambling up onto Platform 26. There were so many things that Vincent Coniff might have done, so many opportunities that he might have taken to get away from Manhattan Depot, that Calhoun at last had made a choice out of desperation. If, indeed, Vincent Coniff had come this way at all, the only manner in which that could be ascertained was to , locate someone who might have seen him; and so Calhoun, who made out the lights of an express car way back toward the concourse end of the platform, took that direction.

He reached it breathlessly, dancing sideways to stop himself. He saw the baggageman lying inside. The truck, Calhoun thought savagely, sure then; where was the truck? There were two conductors near one of the passenger ramps, and one of these Calhoun sent back to attend to the baggageman. The other ran off to the nearest phone to call Captain Rousseau’s office; and then other depot employees, gathered together

frantically — trackwalkers, porters, conductors, gatemen — scattered out with Calhoun onto dark platforms, and up and under the ramps leading back into the lower concourse, away from them.

There were over twenty platforms on this level of Manhattan Depot, and covering them properly took a great deal of time — an agonizing amount of time to Calhoun. Now lights began to blaze up over the platforms, as they had blazed up in the offices on the south side of the station a few minutes ago; and some of Donnelly's men caught up with him. It was one of these, and not Calhoun, who located the electric truck at the extreme northeast corner of the platforms; but it was Calhoun who saw an elevator door closed there that should not have been closed on Sunday afternoon, and who saw also that the indicator over it had stopped at eight.

Another long wait then, a maddening, helpless ‘ and interminable wait, because after he pressed the signal button nothing had ever moved for Calhoun with the unhurrying deliberation of that red indicator. He was hatless long since, he was all dirty and soiled from the tunnel walls, there was a deep, ugly-looking red furrow on his cheek, blood-caked, where Vincent Coniff's first bullet had just creased him; but he was not aware of any of those details.

Why the eighth floor? Calhoun was demanding of himself now. What was up there? What could be up there? Why not the subway, or one of the outgoing trains, or one of the tunnels? Quite suddenly his mind jerked back to an earlier point, which there had been no time to consider properly before. How had Vincent Coniff appeared so suddenly on the east balcony? How had he managed to get past the men at the doors, and in the arcade? It had been impossible with Donnelly's precautions. And yet —

The elevator came down. The door slid open. At one moment, in one lump, Calhoun and two of Donnelly's men crushed forward into it.

Little Tony Murchison wanted that glass of water very badly now. Over him the skiers fled by at two-second intervals; around him the model machinery made a quiet and contented purr; and under him, when one of the trains coiled itself around his mountain, a floor board vibrated delicately. But it was still quite dark in there, and little Tony Murchison was afraid of the dark, and afraid of the man.

A thought came to him presently that perhaps the man had left him here for good. Or perhaps the man had gone away somewhere for a short time, and was not out there watching him, waiting to trick him, at all. So he could crawl out through that hole, Tony Murchison thought, and get his water somewhere, and crawl back before the man knew about it. But of course if the man did know about it, or found out about it —

He shivered under the brown overcoat. He turned his head into the wall, closed his eyes and thought about his mother. He began to breathe in a very irregular fashion. His throat hurt him.

Now Vincent Coniff was halfway across that walk up in back of the arcade windows. The pain was in him again, and much worse this time, so that it was something which he could not endure any more, which he had to crush out of himself with his own hands and into the child, who of course was responsible for everything that had happened to him.

And it was the pain that kept him struggling ahead foot by foot. There was light over the walk, caught in between the outside window looking down onto the flat roof of the arcade, and the inside window looking down onto the main concourse; and this light seemed to have acquired for Vincent Coniff a pearl-colored tranquillity, as if reflected over him through clear, still water.

Far below him the four columns of sunlight entering through the south windows of the depot slanted in sideways now rather than from directly

above the information booth; and these shafts shimmered slowly and lazily, like golden dust, against the interior shadow of Manhattan Depot. The big clock, sprouting knoblike from translucent gray depths, showed that it was ten minutes past one Sunday afternoon; individual lights were on over the ticket windows; and people who did not know anything about the twelve o'clock commotion in the Belvidere passage now moved briskly up or down the west stairway, or poured in from the tremendous curved spout of the main ramp, or gathered in groups and clusters around the information booth.

But all of these people, and all of this familiar Sunday activity, was shut off behind glass to Vincent Coniff — a distant sea murmuring at him. And the murmur seemed to be infinitely removed from the hushed tranquillity up here, from the pain in him, so that he listened to it without anything approaching full comprehension, still absorbed by those two ideas of his, the pain and the child, and still believing that if he could reach the child, and kill the child, he would be rid of the pain also, it would then have nothing to do with him.

He crawled flat on the walk, blind instinct warning him never to raise himself so that he could be observed from any part of the main concourse, and cut off from everything but his pain — and of course the child. He coughed again; he began pounding one of his fists against the walk; but still he reached the end of the walk, and there was a door, an unlocked door, and then stairs leading down, and somewhere below the child waiting for him — everything in order.

He rested inside the door. Little Buster Brown, he remembered; little —. He braced himself up against the banister, pressed his mouth into it with an anguished gesture, fell several steps, caught the banister again, and was on his feet suddenly. And after that the pressure of an increasing weight across his shoulders urged him downward in abrupt, lunging rushes, with almost no sense of physical effort. He was all right, Vincent Coniff was telling himself. He was almost there. In back of him, but on the other side of the depot, Willie Calhoun was still creaking up past floor after floor in the elevator.

It was during this period of compelled inactivity that a good many details at last began to come together in Calhoun's head. They started and ended with two facts which, as Calhoun viewed them, must have some sort of connection: that Vincent Coniff had first showed himself on the east balcony this morning, and that now he appeared to be heading back for it crookedly. Why? Why hadn't he just tried to get clear of Manhattan Depot? Why had he crossed all the way under the station, and then made no attempt to leave it on one of the outgoing trains? What was over there on the east balcony so important to him?

And then, of course, Calhoun asked himself the one inevitable question. What did Vincent Coniff have that was important to him, what had he ever had that was important to him, but the child? Now, therefore, was the child over there on the east balcony? Was that the thing? Could it be the thing? No one, despite all of Donnelly's precautions, had detected Vincent Coniff in Manhattan Depot this morning before noontime. Why? Was it because he had got into the station before, and not after Donnelly had started watching for him? Was it possible that he and the child could have been hiding somewhere around the checkroom all morning?

Calhoun, standing rigid in his dark elevator, whispered several words to himself. And they weren't profanity at all; they were the best kind of prayer which Calhoun was equipped to make at that moment. What was the situation now? Vincent Coniff wounded, and seriously wounded judging by the way he had staggered around on the main concourse; the police after him, and furnished with his name, record and picture; no money on which he would be able to get away; finished, and knowing he was finished; but knowing, too, that if he could only get back to the east balcony, and to the child, before anyone stopped him —

The last part of these thoughts did not come to Calhoun calmly and

through meditative inaction. He was out on the eighth floor then, before Donnelly's men, he had placed inwardly the walk which led from side to side of the arcade windows, he had decided that Vincent Coniff, after coming up several stories too high, must have gone back down to it, and he was on the stairs after Vincent Coniff without so much as a word to Donnelly's men, and then he was down two flights and out on the walk, short legs churning, overcoat ballooning up, arms spread out and flailing behind him to give him speed.

He covered that distance, from the northeast corner of Manhattan Depot to the sixth floor of the office building directly opposite, in a fraction of the time it had taken Vincent Coniff. The main concourse blurred past, way, way down, a confused impression of people crowding around, of the huge golden clock over them, of sunlight and shadow; and then he was in a narrow stairway or shaft, and there was a patch of blood on a banister, and Calhoun was vaulting that banister, and vaulting the next, crisscrossing from half flight to half flight while Donnelly's men were still up on the walk chasing him. On the last few steps he injured his ankle in some manner, went down headlong, smashed into a wall, panted there, and then got up and rolled himself bodily over the last railing. He landed flat again, facing half a dozen enormous glass doors. They were all fitted out with snap locks, clipped from inside. But the one on the right, the one nearest the checkroom and the railroad exhibit, swung half open.

Calhoun scrambled for it.

Down on Platform 26, on the lower level and on the far side of Manhattan Depot, Donnelly was beginning to catch up with everything; out on another platform on the upper level, and just opposite the information booth, Enright, with a hurriedly organized party, was covering car after car of an upstate express; and high up over the terminal, on the walk, Martin Nolan and half a dozen others were just closing in, after Calhoun, on the east balcony.

Frances was down there, sitting on a marble bench in front of the checkroom. A few minutes ago, from the window in Captain Rousseau's office, she had seen Donnelly hurrying away from this part of the depot after questioning the checkroom attendant, and after locating, by telephone, traces of Willie Calhoun on the lower level; and the urgency evident at once in the way that Donnelly had shambled off made the quietness and the emptiness in Captain Rousseau's office suddenly unbearable to her.

But when she had got around to the east balcony herself Donnelly had long since vanished, and the deputy chief inspector was still occupied with the phone. He had no time for her. He went off the moment he got a later report about that elevator on the eighth floor; but Manhattan Depot was strange ground to him, he knew nothing about the arcade walk, and so he ran back past the escalator and the street entrance, hoping to find another elevator on the north side of the station that would take him up to a place which, if anyone but Calhoun had suspected it, Vincent Coniff had passed minutes ago.

The checkroom attendant was repeating his story to Mike Frost for whatever action might seem appropriate; also, and unfortunately, he was embellishing it with some inaccurate touches. He was insisting now, not to create a deliberate untruth, but because that was the way he remembered it at this time, that he had seen Vincent Coniff walk bold as brass down the balcony to him, around the railroad exhibit; and that he had known then there was something funny about him, at first glance.

"But how did he do it?" Mike Frost demanded savagely; all along the arcade entrance had been his particular responsibility. "Will somebody tell me? How in the hell did he get in here?"

He knew what Donnelly would have to say to him about that later on; and so he began now to look for a proper goat among the men stationed out near the street entrance. There was no chance to verify the attendant's story through other witnesses. The model railroad, to Mike Frost and to

everyone else from Donnelly down, was just in their way. Not one of them paid any attention to it; and not one of them had time to give Frances even the sketchiest information.

She was left alone on that blind end of the east balcony. All over the concourse the loud-speaker system was calling out the upstate express, for the last time, as if nothing apart from the usual and familiar had happened in Manhattan Depot today. Perhaps an hour ago there had been some kind of excitement around the Belvidere passage, but the people who had witnessed that had long ago departed from the terminal on outgoing trains, via subways or on foot; and to Frances now the strange, dreadful and incredible thing was that among thousands of people so very few had any idea of what was going on in here.

She tried to insist to herself that Willie Calhoun would get the big redheaded man, and get the child. She did not know how it was going to happen; she could not imagine; but she wanted to believe that it would happen. It was twelve minutes past one — two minutes since Vincent Coniff had passed over the arcade walk — and now even the checkroom attendant was down by the escalator still talking to Mike Frost. She felt again her isolation — and the isolation of the child, the big redheaded man and Willie Calhoun — from all those persons on the main concourse; and she got up from her bench, too distracted to sit still any more.

Halfway down from her adults and children made a ragged line around the model railroad; over her the attendant worked at his switch, at his sound record; and under her the life of Manhattan Depot went on as it did Sunday after Sunday, a rich and colorful activity so apart from her that it was something whose details she could no longer remember or understand. If she could only see Willie Calhoun, she thought frantically; if she could only talk to him, or… She turned, clenching her hands together, biting on the inside of her lips, and saw something she could not quite believe.

Little Tony Murchison was standing at the end of a passage or opening just in back of the model railroad. It had taken him this long to decide on

slipping out for a glass of water; and he had risked it only after he had managed to convince himself that the man wasn't coming back for him any more.

But he was still afraid of the man, so that his heart beat very light and fast in him in that dark passage; and then he was out of the passage, and there was strong light around him, and there was a woman standing at the balcony rail with her back to him, and he saw one or two marble benches around, and a long row of glass doors in back of the benches.

One of the doors, the one nearest to him, had just opened. Tony Murchison looked at it, and then his heart jumped in him, because it had been nothing more than a trick after all. The man was here. The man had been waiting for him all the time. The man had a gun in his hand. His mouth was wide open, he looked funny, he was pushing himself along with his left arm; but he never let his eyes get away from Tony Murchison. He whispered something, his face getting all white, all shiny. And Tony knew what the words were; he had heard them often before. Little Buster Brown; little — .

And so all his excuses dried up in Tony. He wanted desperately not to cry when the man hit him; but he remained where he was, facing the man, no idea in him that he could get away from the man.

That was what Frances saw after she turned away from the railing — the child up against the model railroad, his head twisted a little from Vincent Coniff, but still watching him with an expression of silent and fixed terror. And Vincent Coniff pushing himself out from the door on his left arm and his left leg, coughing quietly, and then stretching himself out on the marble floor, putting both hands around his gun, as if it had become a tremendous weight to him, raising it at the child, steadying it.

She screamed Tony's name. She ran for him. But there were three shots, three flat sounds, before she was halfway across the balcony. She went to her knees, her arms coming up over her face. Oh, dear God, she thought blindly. Oh, Tony. Oh, Tony, Tony, Tony…

"Miss Kennedy," he whispered. "Miss Kennedy/'

He was against her. And Willie Calhoun was there too, no breath in him, nodding his head at first when he tried to talk, the big chest heaving, the hands shaking her insistently.

“Don’t let him look around here,” Willie Calhoun breathed, barely managing the words. “Don’t let him see this. Do you hear me? Get him away from here. Get him over to the office. And it’s all right.” He shook her again, his cheeks glistening. “It’s all right, I tell you. Just get hold of yourself. Can’t you understand yet? He never had a chance to use his gun.

I did.“

Donnelly said a nice thing later on in Captain Rousseau’s office, and Calhoun liked and appreciated it. He looked Calhoun up and down; he nodded; and he said as if to himself, in a very quiet and reflective manner:

“Tough Willie. Well, I should have known, I suppose. I should have known if I had a brain in my head.”

But there were a lot of excited people in there then, and the father had just appeared, and Calhoun wanted to get away from all of it. He went out the back entrance and down a corridor to the men’s washroom; and after he had scrubbed some of the tunnel dirt off him he had time in there for a quiet and leisurely cigarette, the first he had really enjoyed since Friday night.

A nice-looking little kid, Calhoun thought, sitting back against one of the sinks and folding his arms. Six years old. Nice, shy, good manners; and yet that dog had very nearly…

Calhoun nodded grimly. Perhaps there were some people, Calhoun thought, who weren’t even human beings when you came right down to it. You killed a man, you put three bullets just as fast as you could pump them into the back of his head — and you didn’t feel anything about it afterwards. You didn’t feel anything at all. Not in regard to him, anyway;

but in regard to the child you felt very good and quiet and happy.

Someone rapped at the door. It was that Kennedy girl, and her eyes shone in her face as if they had been scrubbed and polished. She looked at Calhoun first, for a long time; then she bit into her lip; then she said in a soft, not altogether steady voice that Mr. Murchison wanted to talk to him, and little Tony wanted to thank him.

But of course that was the uncomfortable part of the whole business to Calhoun. He became very gruff. There was no reason to thank anybody, Calhoun said. Or perhaps Donnelly, maybe. Donnelly was the big shot around here. Donnelly was the one who had figured it out about those bags. So —

And then she was angry with him — perfectly furious, Calhoun thought, becoming somewhat appalled at her.

“You always have to act so smart,” she said, putting her teeth together for a moment. “You always have to act so tough and untouched about everything. Well, I think it’s perfectly infantile, if anyone should happen to ask me. And I want you to stop it, Willie Calhoun. Do you hear? I want you to stop it!”

She argued with him like that right there in the doorway to the men’s washroom. And she wouldn’t let him get away from her, either.

“It’s the same thing all the time,” she said; “and I’m getting pretty darn sick of it myself. You’d just better mind your manners, Willie Calhoun.”

“Oh,” Calhoun said. He touched his lips delicately with his tongue. “Why?”

Her eyes came up to him; she didn’t say a word, however.

“Look,” Calhoun said, a bit huskily, but setting that jaw of his like so much rock. “Don’t fool around with me, understand? And don’t ask for anything. I’m warning you right now. Because I’m the kind —”

She just sniffed.

“Always pointing the forefinger at people,” she said. “Always looking them up and down as if you’re getting ready to knock their heads off. Always putting the hands on the hips. What’s it for anyway? Are you afraid of

something?”

“Now watch it,” Calhoun said ominously. “I’m warning you.”

“I suppose it’s the tough face,” Frances said, giving him an ironic smile. “And the reputation we have — Tough Willie. That’s too good to let go, isn’t it? But I want you to just listen to me for a minute.” She became heated there. “You’re not to let anyone — anyone, do you understand that? — refer to you as Tough Willie again. That’s just insufferable. And I won’t have it. I won’t stand for it.”

“Go ahead and keep asking for it,” Calhoun said, grim with her. “Just go ahead.”

“Oh, shut up,” Frances said. “You know something, Willie Calhoun? You make me mad.”

They went back to Captain Rousseau’s office together; but there Calhoun paused.

Donnelly peered around at them from the desk, over his eyeglasses. Behind him little Tony Murchison was drinking some cold milk and staring solemnly at Calhoun over the glass.

“Come in here,” Donnelly said. “I want you, Willie. There’s a few things —”

“Willie!” Frances said, very scornfully. “That’s something, isn’t it? Willie.”

“Are you gonna keep on askin‘ for it?” Calhoun demanded of her, almost desperately. “Are you? Because I don’t fool around with this stuff, understand? I don’t know how.”

“And you’re not to say ‘understand’ all the time,” Frances said. “That’s another thing. Please remember it.”

“Willie,” Donnelly said, much louder, much more impatiently.

“Oh, hold your horses,” Frances said, cross with him, too. She seemed nervous now; at least she took time to brush at Calhoun’s coat lapel. She took a very deep breath. “All right,” she said, watching Calhoun carefully. “Let’s go in, Bill. I think somebody wants you.”

“Bill?” Calhoun said. He flushed up. “Now wait a minute. I don’t know that I —”

Frances looked at him; and then Calhoun took a deep breath.

“Okay,” Calhoun said. “Let’s go in.”